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Weighing the options: practising law or the 'alternatives'

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Published Monday 9/19/2011 2:54:00 PM
Last updated Wednesday 9/26/2012 2:17:41 PM



There are many alternatives to practising law, but law students should think very carefully before deciding to abandon a legal career altogether.

At some point in law school, many students question whether they're cut out for the practice of law and start to examine their options. Out of those who do graduate with LLBs, some decide to opt out of articling after law school.

Alternative law-related careers encompass a wide variety of choices, including academia, public interest work, legal recruitment, legal publishing, dispute resolution and advocacy work, to name just a few.

legal careers, says Sarah Kirby, Assistant Dean, Student Services at Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University in Halifax. "I know people who have started real estate careers and they use not only their knowledge of the law but also their negotiation skills to serve their clients."

Critical thinking, presentation skills, problem-solving, analysis, oral and written communication skills and logical reasoning are some of the valuable skills acquired during law school that can be applied to virtually any career.

She tells students that before they decide to leave law altogether, they should investigate all different types of practice, that there may be something that's just right for them. She also wholeheartedly recommends that students article before deciding to leave law altogether.

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apply and improve skills.

"It's important to be really self-aware about your work style, your interests, your strengths and weaknesses, your values, your priorities so you can properly evaluate what sort of job you feel you would be suited to," says Kirby.

Recruitment Consultant Michaela Krell advises students to think long and hard before opting out of law. "Make sure that it's really law that you don't want and not the gruelling hours or the lifestyle or whatever goes along with any professional first couple of years," says Krell, who works Life After Law, a recruiting firm that finds jobs for lawyers who have decided to leave the traditional practice of law. "There isn't much you can do just having a law degree. It doesn't open any doors," she adds.

At the very least get admitted to the Bar, Krell advises. "Compared to how onerous law school is, it's really a small hurdle to get over." She says that employers she talks to are usually looking for those who have significant experience as practising lawyers — between three and five years.

Krell adds that employers typically consider an LLB to be equivalent to having a bachelor's degree. Despite being able to analyze and critically think, "if you're not trained in what the employer wants, having a law degree or three admittances to various Bars just doesn't help. It doesn't get you any further than somebody else who has zero experience in the field."

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