

# Summer Associates Survey: Part 2

Engaging the Next Generation

September 2025

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### Background

Law360 Pulse surveyed law students earlier this year about the grueling process of landing a summer associateship. Now, we're checking back in to see how their associateships went. We asked students about how well they were able to hone their legal skills and what types of training they received. We also asked them about their own career plans after their experiences this summer. This survey builds on the data-driven insights available as part of Law360 Pulse, a news service focused on the business of law.

### Methodology

The 556 responses were collected from June 16 to Aug. 11. Respondents included 168 rising second-year law students (31% of the total), 367 third-year students (67%), and 15 (3%) part-time or evening students, all of whom worked in a summer associate position in the summer of 2025. Fifty-four percent were female, 44% were male, 1% were nonbinary or some other gender, and 2% preferred not to disclose their gender. Sixty-seven percent were white, with the next-largest racial categories being Asian (10%), Hispanic or Latino (7%), two or more races (6%), and Black or African American (5%). Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

### Introduction

#### By Jack Collens

Law360 Pulse

Summer associates reported enjoying their programs and feeling assured that they belong in a law firm. Nearly all respondents said their experiences gave them better insights into the kind of law they want to practice, while roughly nine in 10 said their work affirmed their belief that this is the right career for them.

From Beyoncé concerts to baseball games and boat cruises, firms took a number of steps to ensure their summer associates enjoyed their programs. Summers reported receiving useful feedback, using the skills they learned in law school, and having ample opportunities to network with their cohorts and supervisors. Respondents offered mixed feedback regarding the expectations that they participate in afterhours social events or keep extended work hours.

For their efforts, summers were mostly satisfied they had received fair compensation. The typical 2L summer associate — now in their third year of law school — reported being paid \$40,000 for a 10-week program.

They also gained valuable experience, with most saying they had attended courtroom proceedings and received training in software for billing and discovery. These experiences also extended to artificial intelligence, with more than three-quarters

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saying they used AI in their summer programs.

Overall, summers said they still hoped to work at a law firm, whether it be a BigLaw environment or a smaller firm. Views of BigLaw were mostly positive, though those who worked at smaller firms were more mixed in their appraisals of the most prestigious firms. Career priorities differed for small-firm summers as well, with work-life balance and interesting work ranking higher than pay, compared with the prioritization of high pay for those who worked at bigger firms.

While there were differences in the experiences of those at small and large firms, the differences were mostly minor. For instance, small-firm summers were less likely to be involved in pro bono work, but were more likely to attend courtroom proceedings. They were less inclined to want to work in a firm environment long term, but worked more weeks and had slightly more negative views of the fairness of their pay.

### 1. Where Summers Want to Work

Summers generally reported positive experiences at their firms for the summer of 2025. Majorities said their firms offered fun programming, ample opportunities for personalized mentorship, left them feeling prepared for their future careers, and offered competitive pay.

Based on the mean responses by firm, an overall rating was calculated for each of the firms with at least five respondents. Five firms had overall ratings greater than 4.75 — Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP, Gunster, Eversheds Sutherland, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP and Finnegan Henderson Farabow Garrett & Dunner LLP. The top three scored perfect fives on mentorship and pay fairness.

RANK	FIRM	FUN	MENTORSHIP	CAREER CONFIDENCE	PAY FAIRNESS	OVERALL RATING
1	Cahill Gordon	4.86	5	4.86	5	4.93
2	Gunster	4.86	5	4.71	5	4.89
3	Eversheds Sutherland	4.7	5	4.7	5	4.85
4	Sheppard Mullin	4.75	4.78	4.78	4.82	4.78
5	Finnegan	4.6	4.8	4.7	5	4.78
6	Norton Rose	4.4	5	4.6	4.9	4.73
7	Weil	4.69	4.75	4.31	5	4.69
8	King & Spalding	4.68	4.62	4.49	4.88	4.67
9	Morgan Lewis	4.46	4.88	4.54	4.67	4.64
10	Mayer Brown	4.4	4.8	4.2	4.8	4.55
11	Kirkland	4.23	4.77	4.23	4.92	4.54
12	Dentons	4.35	4.76	4.24	4.71	4.51
13	Beveridge & Diamond	4	4.8	4.8	4.4	4.5
13	White & Case	4.31	4.63	4.25	4.81	4.5
15	Holland & Knight	4	4.56	4.51	4.88	4.49
16	FordHarrison	4.4	4.4	4.8	3.8	4.35
17	Gibson Dunn	3.96	4.5	4.13	4.75	4.33
18	Ogletree	3.82	4.13	4.36	4.39	4.18
19	Sidley	3.86	3.86	3.86	4.71	4.07

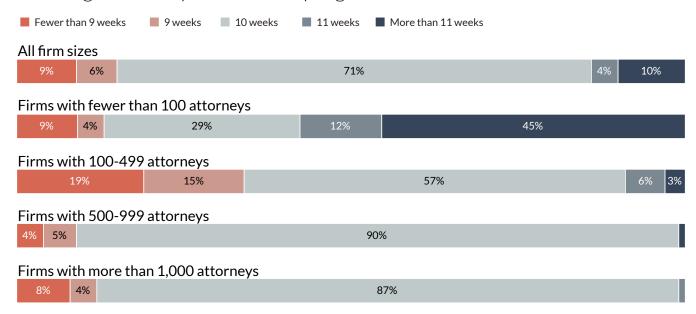
Responses to these questions were scaled from one to five, with five indicating more positive positions.

Other perfect scores include Norton Rose Fulbright — for mentorship — and Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP — for compensation. Overall, compensation and mentorship were the highest-rated, with fun programming and fair pay slightly behind.

### 2. Summer Experiences

Most summers -85% — reported their programs were at least 10 weeks long, though small firms were considerably more likely than larger firms to have longer programs, with 45% saying their programs ran for more than 11 weeks. Program duration was more standardized at larger firms, as roughly 90% of those working at firms with more than 500 lawyers in the U.S. said their programs were 10 weeks long.

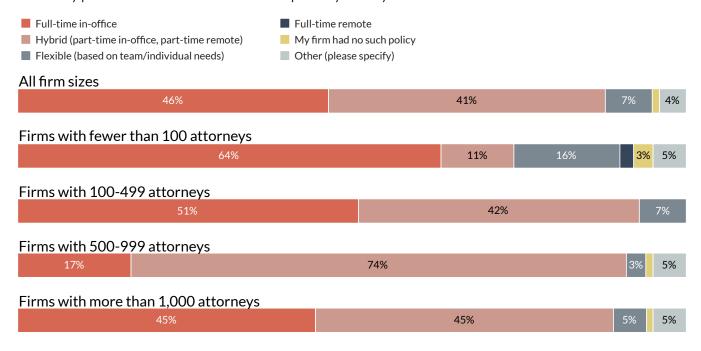
#### How long is or was your summer program?





Nearly 90% of respondents said their firms' office attendance policies were either full-time in-office -46% — or hybrid -41%. Smaller firms were more likely than larger firms to require in-office attendance, with a majority of respondents in these firms saying they were full-time in-person.

#### What type of office attendance policy did your firm have?



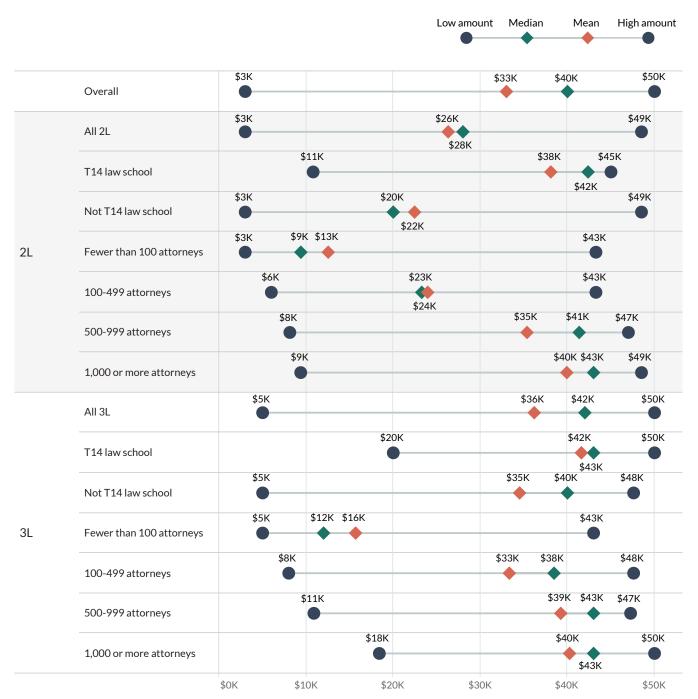
Students completing their associate programs after their second year of law school earned roughly \$14,000 more than those in programs following their 1L years, according to the median reported program pay.

While summers at small firms earned around \$10,000, those at larger firms earned a median 10-week compensation package that matches the prorated amount earned by first-year associates on the pay scale set at BigLaw firms, such as Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP. Over 10 weeks, that total is roughly \$43,000.

While there was little difference in compensation for rising 3L students between those from top 14 law school programs and others, there was a difference for rising 2L students, as those from top 14 programs reported earning more than twice the median summer program pay of those from other programs.

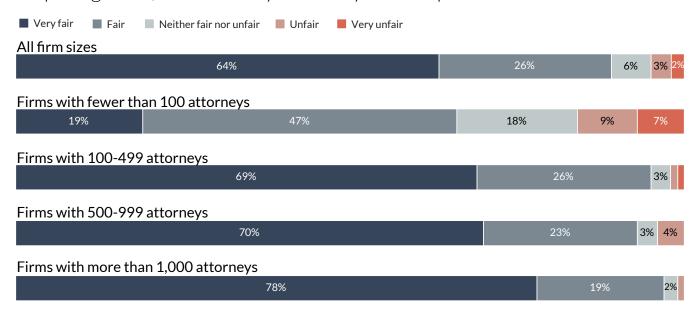
This is likely due to the overrepresentation of students from top law schools in BigLaw summer programs after the first year of law school. While more than 60% of students from top 14 schools reported working at firms with at least 1,000 attorneys in the U.S. following their first year of law school, less than a quarter of those from lower-ranked law schools said the same. As most firms have smaller cohorts of 1L recruits, the resulting selectivity has clearly advantaged prestigious law schools over others.

In total, how much are you being paid for your summer associateship?



Summers at larger firms reported greater satisfaction with the higher pay they received. While 90% of all respondents said their summer associate compensation was fair or very fair, small-firm summers were considerably less likely to say so than those working at larger firms. Roughly two-thirds of respondents from the smallest firms said their pay was fair or very fair, compared with more than 90% of those working at firms in the U.S. with at least 500 attorneys.

Relative to law school debt and what you know of market conditions and competing firms, how fair do you think your compensation was?

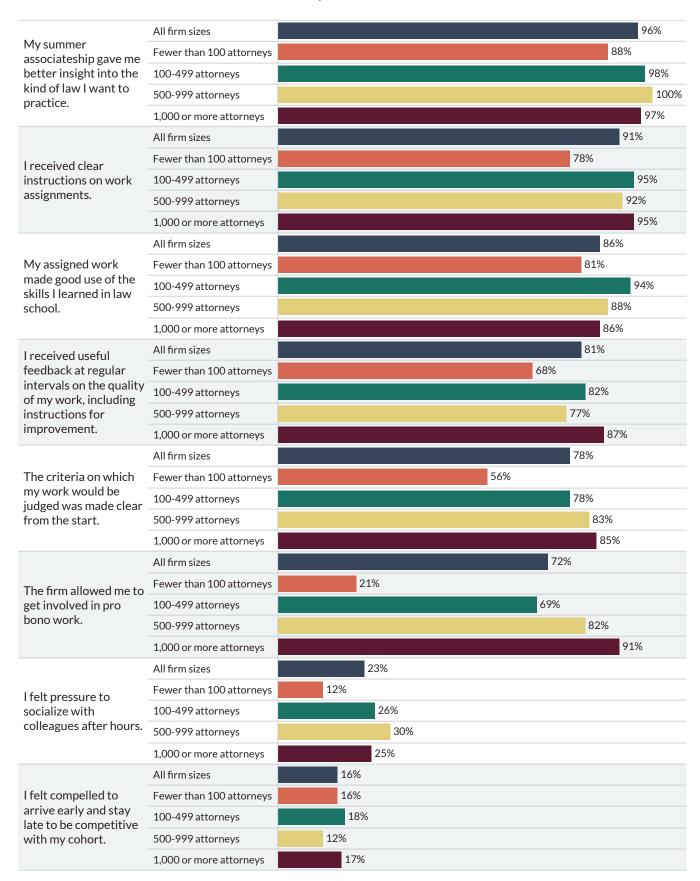


Across many metrics, summers at larger firms were more likely than those at small firms to take positive views of their experiences. Nearly all summers — more than 95%, though somewhat lower for those at small firms at 88% — agreed or strongly agreed that their programs gave them better insight into the kind of law they wanted to practice.

More than 90% of those at midsize and large firms also agreed or strongly agreed that they received clear instructions on work assignments, though this figure was barely over three-quarters -78% – for those at small firms.

Performance evaluation was an area where small-firm summers had different experiences than their peers at larger firms. While more than two-thirds of those at small firms agreed or strongly agreed that they received useful feedback at regular intervals, 87% of those at large firms said the same. Similarly, 85% of those at large firms agreed or strongly agreed that the criteria on which they would be judged were made clear, compared with only 56% of small-firm summers. It may be that the larger bureaucracy and established systems present at large firms routinized these processes, while small firms relied instead on less formal methods.

Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the following statements about their summer experiences:

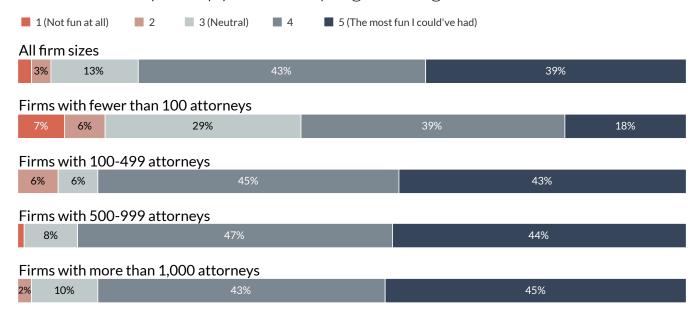


The discrepancy between large- and small-firm summers was most pronounced in the area of pro bono work — while more than 90% of those at larger firms agreed or strongly agreed they were allowed to get involved with pro bono work, only 21% of those at the smallest firms said the same. There was also a cohort divide on this question, as 54% of rising 2L students said they were allowed to get involved in pro bono work, compared with 81% of rising 3L students.

Additionally, respondents were asked about some of the negative stereotypes about summer programs — long hours and pressure to be available at all times and to attend social events. While 12% of those at firms with fewer than 100 attorneys agreed or strongly agreed that they felt pressure to socialize with colleagues after hours, more than a quarter of those at larger firms said the same. Only 16% of all respondents said they felt compelled to arrive early and stay late to be competitive, with little variation by firm size.

Lastly, the survey asked how fun summers thought their firms' programming was. Some firms regularly treat their summers to baseball games, concerts, travel for work, and more. Overall, summers found their firms' programming to be quite fun, with 82% giving a score of at least four out of five. However, reviews from smaller firms were more mixed, as 29% took a more neutral stance, assigning their firms a three out of five for fun programming.





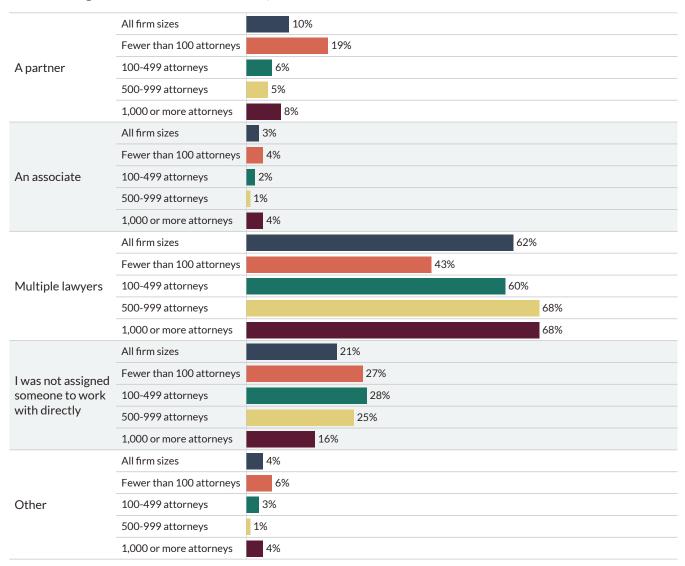
As in prior years, a number of summers pointed to concerts, with 20 specifically mentioning going to a Beyoncé concert with their cohort and several others mentioning seeing The Weeknd. Another 48-13% of those who listed their favorite activities — said they were taken to a baseball game. Summers also reported traveling for work both within the U.S. and abroad, sitting in on big cases, going on boat cruises, and even taking trips to Disneyland.

# 3. Training and Mentorship

The summer associateship is more than just a job — it is an opportunity for law students to see and gain actual legal work experience, guided by bar-admitted attorneys. Three quarters of respondents were assigned to work directly with one or more firm attorneys — 62% were assigned to multiple lawyers, 10% to a partner, and 3% to an associate, with 4% saying they were assigned to work directly with someone else, typically a rotation of firm lawyers. Only 21% of all respondents said they were not assigned to work directly with anyone in particular.

Summers at the smallest firms were most likely to say they were assigned directly to a partner, at 19% compared with fewer than 10% of those at larger firms.

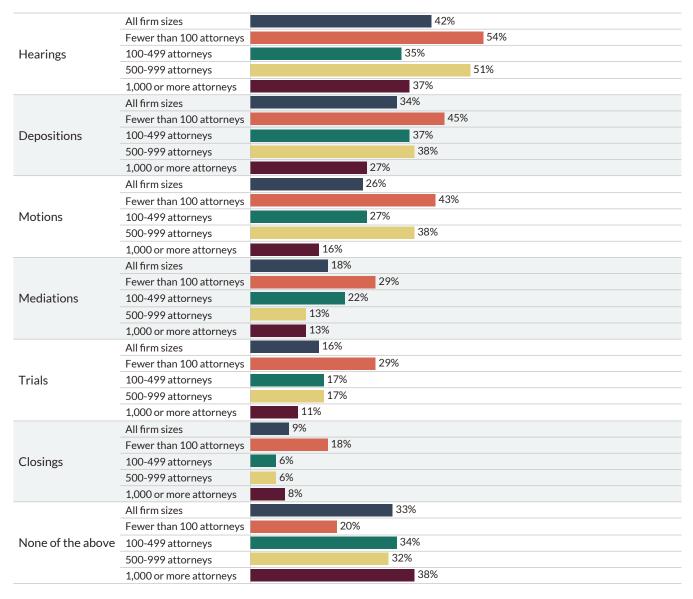
I was assigned to work directly with:



Two-thirds of respondents also said they were able to gain courtroom experience by accompanying firm attorneys to proceedings, including hearings, depositions, and more. Most commonly, 42% said they had attended hearings, 34% attended depositions, and 26% attended motions. Fewer than 20% of respondents said they had attended mediations, at 18%; trials, at 16%; and closings, at 9%.

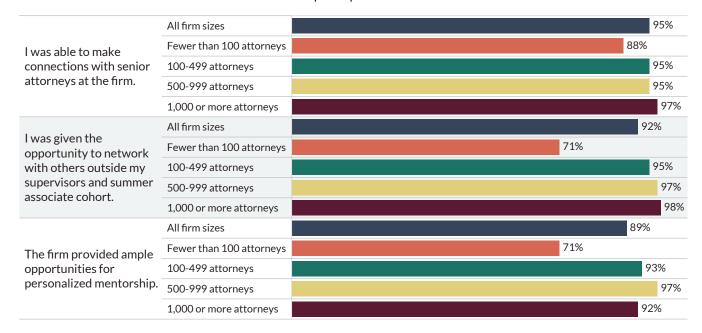
Summers at small firms were more likely to report attending courtroom proceedings of all types than those at larger firms, with a majority -54% — saying they sat in on hearings, compared with only 37% of those at the largest firms. The greatest disparity was for motions, which 43% of small-firm summers reported attending, compared with only 16% of those at the largest firms. In short, then, small firms provided more courtroom experiences of all kinds for their summers than did larger firms.

Were you able to gain courtroom experience by accompanying firm attorneys to any of the following?



Summers gave high marks to their programs for networking opportunities — including with more senior attorneys — and for personalized mentorship, with roughly nine in 10 of all respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had access to these. Small-firm summers reported slightly lower access to networking opportunities outside their supervisors and cohorts, as well as fewer opportunities for mentorship than did their peers at larger firms.

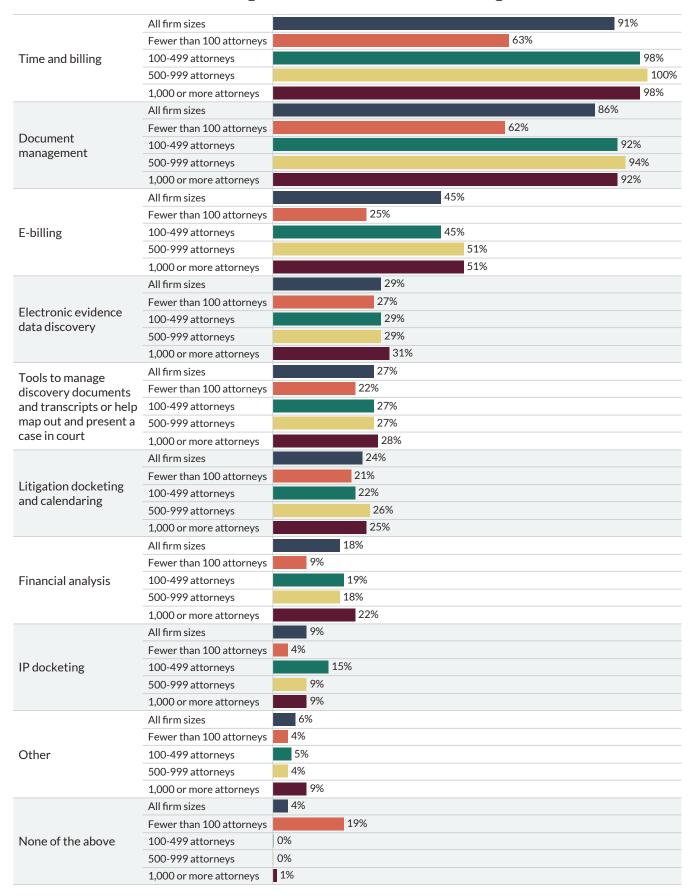
Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the following statements about their mentorship experiences:



Finally, working at a modern law firm requires learning a number of specialized software programs. Nearly all -96% — said their firms offered training on one or more types of software. Given the continued prominence of the billable-hour model, it is no surprise that more than 98% of those at larger firms were trained on time and billing software, while 63% of small-firm summers received similar training. Another popular software type was for document management, with more than 90% of large-firm respondents trained on such programs, compared with 62% of small-firm summers.

Majorities of those at the largest firms said they were trained on e-billing software, though only a quarter of those at small firms said the same. Roughly a quarter to a third of respondents also said they were trained on e-discovery tools, other discovery or case-mapping software, and litigation docketing tools, with little variation by firm size.

#### The firm offered me training in software in the following areas:

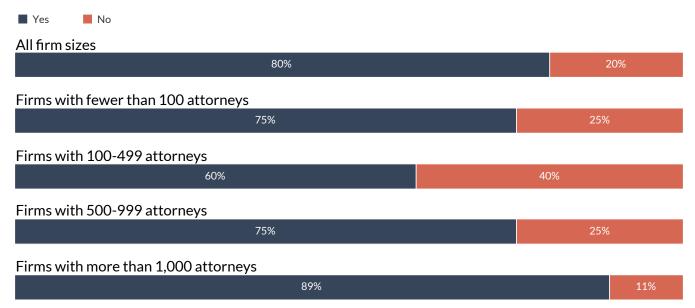




### 4. Al

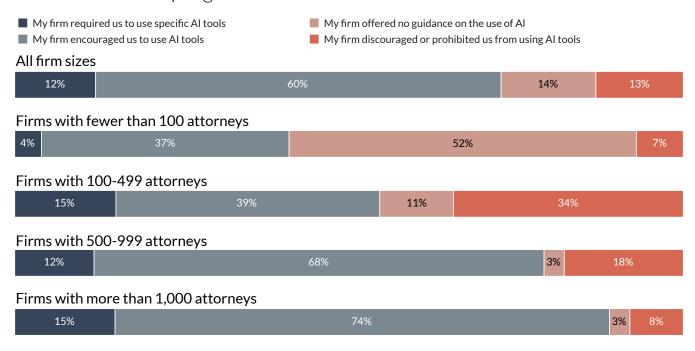
The survey also explored the use of artificial intelligence tools during summers' programs. Eighty percent said they had used AI tools during their programs, with little variation across firm sizes, though large-firm summers were most likely to say they had used them, at 89%.

Did you use any AI tools during your summer associateship?



Overall, 86% said their firms had some kind of policy related to the use of AI, though 52% of small-firm respondents said their firms offered no such guidance. Most commonly, firms merely encouraged the use of AI, with 60% saying their firms had done so. This was especially pronounced at larger firms, as more than two-thirds of those at firms in the U.S. with at least 500 attorneys said they were encouraged to use AI. Fewer than 40% of those at smaller firms said the same.

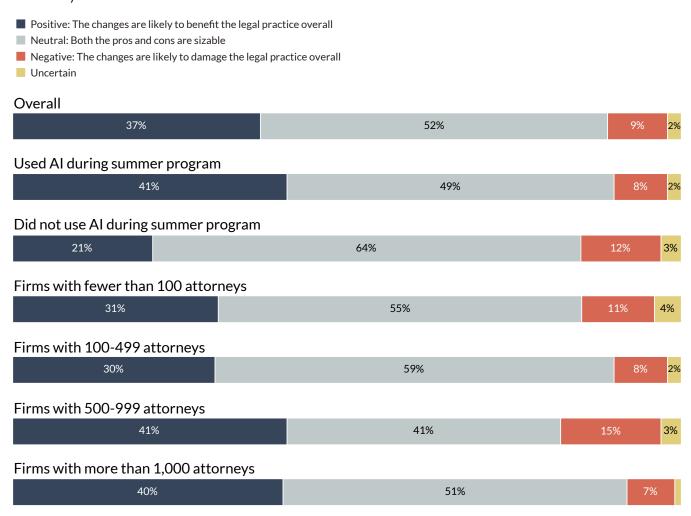
What was your firm's policy regarding the use of AI tools during your summer associate program?



Attitudes toward Al's place in the legal industry were largely ambivalent, with 52% saying there were sizable pros and cons to its use. Another 37% said they took a positive view of Al, with only 9% taking the negative view.

Familiarity with AI tools is associated with more positive attitudes, as those who reported using AI in their summer programs were nearly twice as likely to express a positive sentiment than those who did not use it in their programs. One respondent said of her experience using AI during her program, "It has become incredibly helpful with saving time. It allows me to research cases and draft motions/pleadings quicker. It gives us a stepping stone to build off of." Another saw both sides in the argument, noting, "I think my specific firm has a very good approach to AI usage. The tool they developed is very accurate, and we received training on how to use it. In general, I am worried about the bias and ethics of quickly developing AI systems, but my firm is doing what they can."

As someone just starting out in their career, which of the following best captures your sentiment toward the adoption of generative AI in the legal industry?

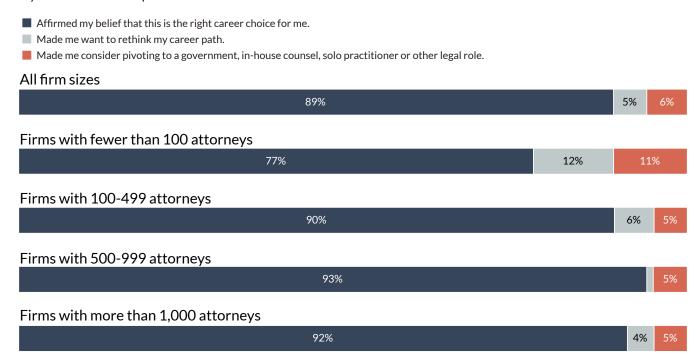


There were also some differences by firm size, with a roughly 10 percentage point increase in positive sentiment for those at larger firms relative to those at smaller firms.

### 5. Future Plans and Priorities

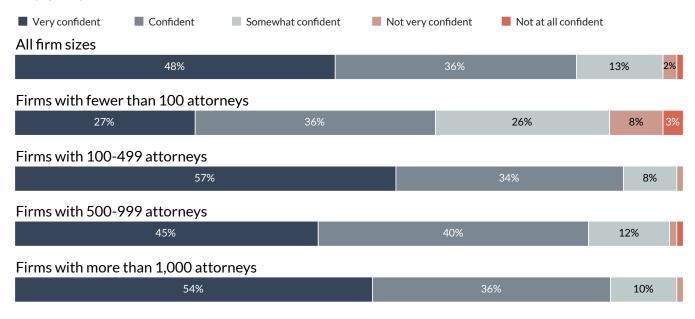
Overall, summers reported their experiences helped crystallize their career goals: 89% said their programs affirmed that a legal career is the right choice for them. More than 90% of those at firms with at least 100 lawyers said so, though just over three-quarters of small-firm summers agreed. Twenty three percent of small-firm summers said they are rethinking their career choices entirely or considering a pivot to legal work outside of the traditional firm environment.

#### My summer experience:



Most summers -84% - also said they were confident or very confident that their experiences prepared them for a law firm career, though small-firm lawyers were less likely to say so, at 64%.

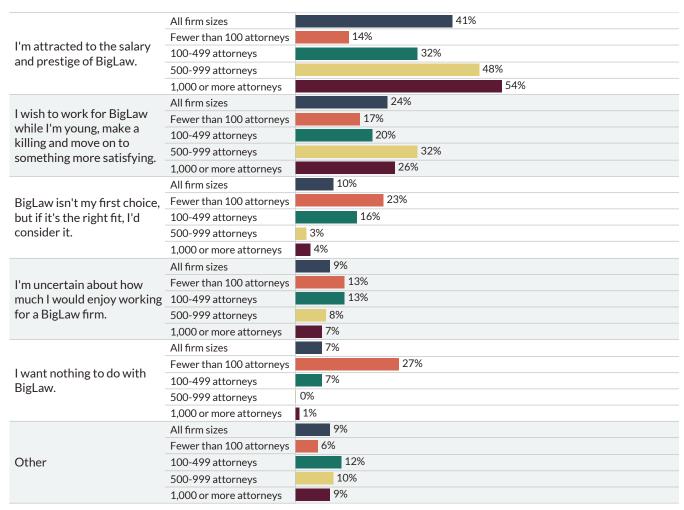
How confident are you that your summer associate experience has left you fully prepared to embark on a career at a law firm?



Most summers' career goals still include working for prestigious firms: 41% said they were attracted to the salary and prestige of BigLaw, while another 24% said the lucrative salaries offered could help them "make a killing" early in their careers before moving on to more meaningful work.

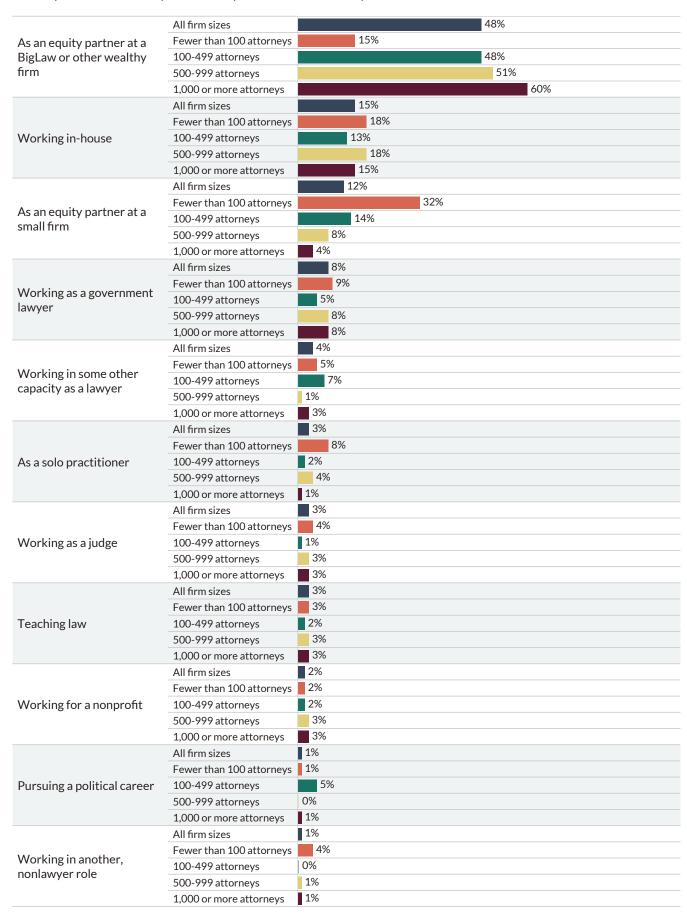
As expected, views of BigLaw differed by the size of the firms where summers worked. While 79% of those at firms with more than 500 lawyers said BigLaw factored into their long-term or early-career plans, only 52% of those at firms with between 100 and 500 lawyers and 31% of those at the smallest firms agreed. In fact, more than a quarter -27% — of those who summered at small firms said they want nothing to do with BigLaw.





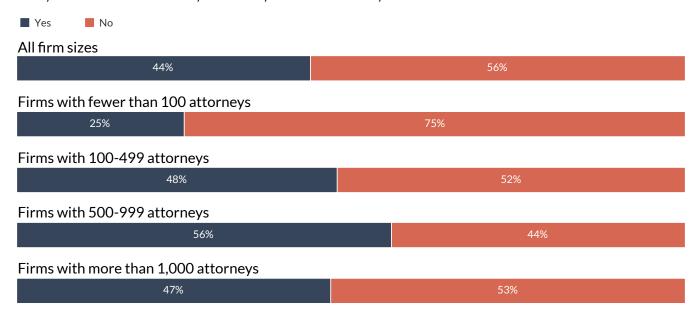
Focusing more on long-term career goals, 60% said they hoped to be an equity partner at a private firm — either in BigLaw or at another large prestigious firm, at 48%, or at a smaller firm, at 12%. Small-firm summers were least likely to aspire to an equity partnership, at only 47%, but their aspirations were more diverse, as they were no more likely than their peers at larger firms to select any other career path. No other career goal was selected by more than 20%, though 15% of all respondents selected working in-house.

#### Ideally, where do you see yourself in 10 years?



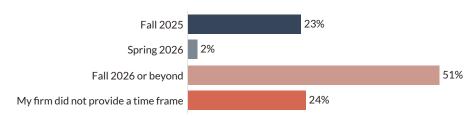
In the short term, 44% of respondents said their firms assured them they would be hired. As this survey collected its first responses in June, the true figure is likely to be higher, as many firms would have made such assurances only at the end of the summer program or after it ended. Unsurprisingly, small firms were least likely to confirm hiring plans, as there are simply fewer open positions.

Did your firm assure you they would hire you?



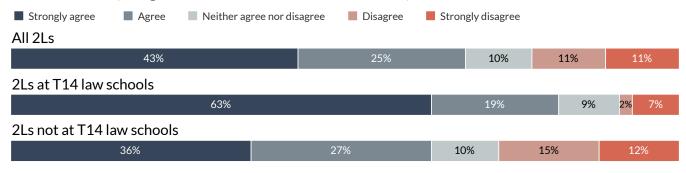
Among those who did receive a hiring assurance, 51% reported their firms said they would hire them in the fall of 2026 or later. Fewer than a quarter said their firms would extend an offer in the fall of 2025.

Did your firm assure you they would hire you?



Rising 2L students face another short-term concern: securing a summer position for 2026. As detailed in Part 1 of the 2025 Law360 Pulse Summer Associates Survey, the applications and hiring timeline for 2L summer programs have moved up in recent years, extending into the prior summer or even into the end of the 1L law school year. As a result, the survey asked rising 2L students whether this process has interfered with either their 1L final exams or their 1L summer associate program. Sixty-eight percent agreed or strongly agreed that it did, including 81% of those at top law school programs. Given the timeline is even more accelerated and competitive at top law schools, students at such programs were likely more impacted by the process.

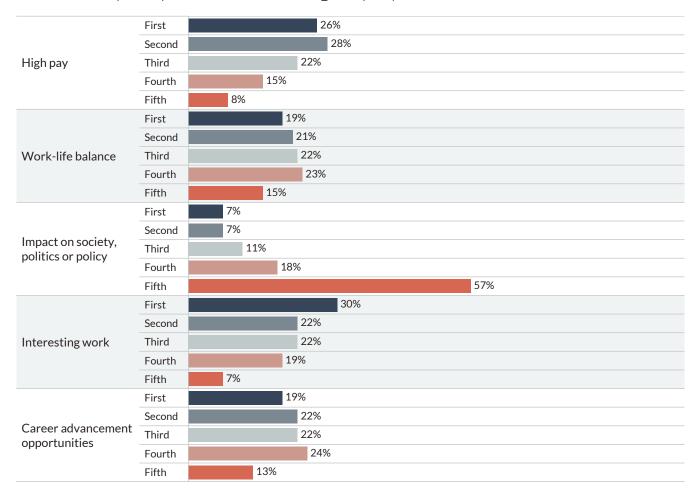
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The 2L summer associate application process has interfered with my experience during my 1L associate program, or did interfere with my 1L final exams.



Finally, the survey assessed the considerations summers use in choosing a career path. Respondents were asked to rank five of these: high pay, work-life balance, societal impact, interesting work, and career advancement opportunities. While there was no clear first preference, 57% of respondents ranked societal impact last on their list. High pay and interesting work were the clear winners, as more than half of respondents ranked those as their top two.



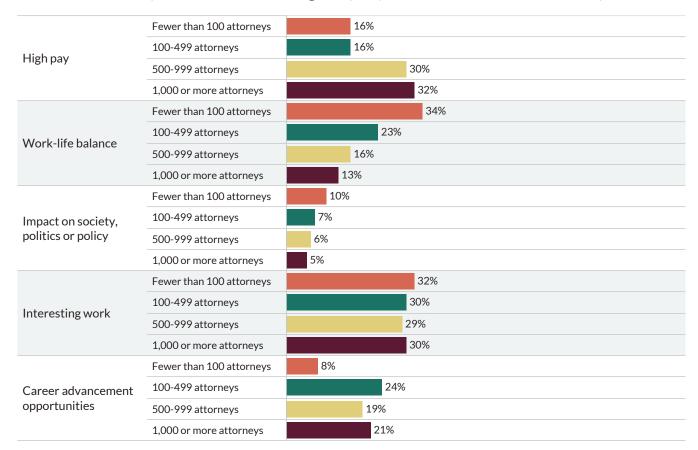
#### Please rank your priorities in finding employment after law school.





There were some differences by firm size, however. While nearly a third of those at firms with at least 500 attorneys in the U.S. ranked high pay as their top priority, only 16% of those at smaller firms did so. Large-firm summers appeared to be the ones who ranked high pay and interesting work as the two most important factors in choosing a career path. In contrast, small-firm attorneys were more likely to prioritize work-life balance, with more than a third of those at the smallest firms ranking that as their top concern, more even than those who ranked interesting work first.

Ranked first for priorities in finding employment after law school, by firm size:





### Meet the Team

#### **Jack Collens**

Senior Data Analyst

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Senior Data Editor

#### **Philip Shea**

Senior Editor

#### **Orlando Lorenzo**

Editor at Large

#### **Chris Yates**

**Art Director** 

#### Jacqueline Bell

Director of Series, Surveys & Data



### Questionnaire

#### What firm do you work for?

#### What law school do you go to?

#### What year of law school will you be in during the 2025-26 academic year?

- 2L
- 3L
- 4L (part-time)
- Evening student

#### How long is or was your summer program?

- Fewer than 9 weeks
- 9 weeks
- 10 weeks
- 11 weeks
- More than 11 weeks

#### In total, how much are you being paid for your summer associateship?

#### Did your firm offer you a signing bonus?

- Yes
- No

#### What type of office attendance policy did your firm have?

- Full-time in-office
- Hybrid (part-time in-office, part-time remote)
- Full-time remote
- Flexible (based on team/individual needs)
- Other (please specify)
- My firm had no such policy

#### How much do you agree with each of the following statements?

(Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree)

- My assigned work made good use of the skills I learned in law school.
- I received clear instructions on work assignments.
- The criteria on which my work would be judged was made clear from the start.
- I received useful feedback at regular intervals on the quality of my work, including instructions for improvement.
- The firm allowed me to get involved in pro bono work.
- I felt compelled to arrive early and stay late to be competitive with my cohort.
- I was able to make connections with senior attorneys at the firm.
- The firm provided ample opportunities for personalized mentorship.
- I was given the opportunity to network with others outside my supervisors and summer associate cohort.
- I felt pressure to socialize with colleagues after hours.
- My summer associateship gave me better insight into the kind of law I want to practice.

### When were you asked to identify your preferred practice area/practice group for the summer associate program?

- In my application
- During my interview or offer acceptance phase
- Sometime between when I accepted the offer and the start of my summer program
- During my summer program
- I was not asked to specify a preferred practice area or group
- Not applicable

# Do you believe you were given adequate opportunity to explore alternative practice area options?

- Yes
- No

#### What was the most valuable lesson you learned during your summer associateship?

#### I was assigned to work directly with:

- A partner
- An associate
- Multiple lawyers
- I was not assigned someone to work with directly
- Other (please specify)

### Were you able to gain courtroom experience by accompanying firm attorneys to any of the following? Select all that apply.

- Depositions
- Hearings
- Motions
- Trials
- Mediations
- Closings
- None of the above

#### The firm offered me training in software in the following areas: Select all that apply.

- Document management
- Time and billing
- E-billing
- Financial analysis
- Electronic evidence data discovery
- Tools to manage discovery documents and transcripts or help map out and present a case in court
- Litigation docketing and calendaring
- IP docketing
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

#### What would you have liked your firm to do differently during your summer program?

Please describe how the firm culture matched or differed from what was portrayed during the hiring process.

#### How fun would you say your firm's programming for summer associates was?

- 1 Not at all fun
- 2
- 3 Neutral
- 4
- 5 The most fun I could've had

#### What was your favorite experience of your summer associate program?

#### Which of the following comes closest to your views of BigLaw?

- I'm attracted to the salary and prestige of BigLaw.
- I wish to work for BigLaw while I'm young, make a killing and move on to something more satisfying.
- I'm uncertain about how much I would enjoy working for a BigLaw firm.
- BigLaw isn't my first choice, but if it's the right fit, I'd consider it.
- I want nothing to do with BigLaw.
- Other (please specify)

#### Ideally, where do you see yourself in 10 years?

- As an equity partner at a BigLaw or other wealthy firm
- As an equity partner at a small firm
- As a solo practitioner
- · Working in-house
- Working as a government lawyer
- Pursuing a political career
- Teaching law
- Working as a judge
- Working for a nonprofit
- Working in some other capacity as a lawyer (please specify)
- Working in another, nonlawyer role (please specify)

#### Please rank your priorities in finding employment after law school.

- High pay
- Work-life balance
- Impact on society, politics, or policy
- Interesting work
- Career advancement opportunities

#### Did your firm assure you they would hire you?

- Yes
- No

#### What time frame did they provide for that hiring?

- Fall 2025
- Spring 2026
- Fall 2026 or beyond
- My firm did not provide a time frame.

#### My summer experience:

- Affirmed my belief that this is the right career choice for me.
- Made me want to rethink my career path.
- Made me consider pivoting to a government position, in-house counsel, solo practitioner or other legal role.

# Relative to law school debt and what you know of market conditions and competing firms, how fair do you think your compensation was?

- Very fair
- Fair
- Neither fair nor unfair
- Unfair
- Very unfair

#### Did you use any AI tools during your summer associateship?

- Yes
- No

### What was your firm's policy regarding the use of AI tools during your summer associate program?

- My firm required us to use specific AI tools
- My firm encouraged us to use AI tools
- My firm discouraged or prohibited us from using AI tools
- My firm offered no guidance on the use of Al

### As someone just starting out in their career, which of the following best captures your sentiment toward the adoption of generative AI in the legal industry?

- Positive: The changes are likely to benefit legal practice overall
- Neutral: Both the pros and cons are sizable
- Negative: The changes are likely to damage legal practice overall
- Uncertain

## You answered that you were [positive / negative / neutral / uncertain] about the future of AI in the legal workplace. Why is that?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The 2L summer associate application process has interfered with my experience during my 1L associate program, or did interfere with my 1L final exams.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

### How confident are you that your summer associate experience has left you fully prepared to embark on a career at a law firm?

- Very confident
- Confident
- Somewhat confident
- Not very confident
- Not at all confident

#### What is your age?

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80-89
- 90+

#### What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Nonbinary/third gender
- Prefer not to disclose

#### Which best describes your race or ethnicity?

- White (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Black or African American (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Two or More Races
- Prefer not to identify

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