

After The *JD*:

First Results of a National Study of Legal Careers

The After the *JD* project will track the professional lives of more than 5,000 lawyers during their first ten years after law school. While most of the project will unfold in coming years, the data presented here provide a first snapshot of the stratified random national sample, based on questionnaires administered two to three years into the new lawyers' careers. The findings presented here will be elaborated and augmented through face-to-face interviews with a sub-sample of roughly 10% of the survey respondents. Building on this first wave, the future work of *AJD* will employ follow-up questionnaires and personal interviews six and ten years into the respondents' careers. When completed, it will be the first national study of the factors -personal and professional - that account for the wide spectrum of legal careers and experiences.

Many law schools and other institutions involved with the profession have been deeply engaged over the past generation in efforts to expand access to, and diversity within, the legal profession. Various types of gender, racial, ethnic, or religious exclusion characterized much of the legal profession during the 20th century; more recent research suggests that while many barriers have fallen, lawyers are still highly stratified in many ways. A key goal of *AJD* is to better understand how legal careers are launched, what sorts of environments and skills most help young attorneys to reach their goals, and how the experiences and opportunities of these new lawyers may vary according to a variety of characteristics - especially race, ethnicity, and gender.

History Of the Project

After the *JD* came about because of strong interest from three different constituencies - practicing attorneys, institutions involved with legal education, and academics studying the profession. They were interested in exploring the consequences of the changing demographics of American society and of law school applicants, escalating student loan debt, dramatic fluctuations in the economy and corporate world, and widening gaps between private, public sector, and public interest salaries. The *AJD* project will map these changes and trace their effects through the study of a cohort of new lawyers - those entering practice in the year 2000.

The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) has long been active in gathering data on the career choices of new lawyers, and, as early as 1983, NALP leaders identified the need for a systematic, national study of careers in the law. In the mid - 1990s, NALP commissioned the development of a proposal for a comprehensive longitudinal study focused on the first ten years of law graduates' careers. As a means of providing long-term oversight and funding for such a massive undertaking, NALP authorized the incorporation of a 501c (3) organization, The NALP Foundation for Law Career Research and Education, to serve as the sponsor of the study. The NALP

Foundation secured seed funding from the Open Society Institute (OSI) of the Soros Foundation and, in September 1998, The NALP Foundation, with the support of the OSI funding, brought some thirty leading research specialists to the American Bar Foundation (ABF) to explore the idea of a longitudinal study. From this meeting, the Executive Coordinating Committee (ECC) a group of premier social scientists charged to implement *After the JD*, was established. Under the auspices of The NALP Foundation and the American Bar Foundation, the ECC formulated detailed research plans, obtained additional funding, recruited staff, and retained a national survey organization to assist with locating and contacting a national sample of new lawyers. The AJD project has been based at The ABF office in Chicago.

The ECC selected a sample that is representative of the national population of lawyers first admitted to the bar in 2000. It sampled lawyers from eighteen geographic areas across the country, including the four largest legal markets (New York, Washington DC, Chicago, and Los Angeles), and fourteen other areas ranging from small metropolitan areas to entire states. New attorneys in the sample from these areas collectively mirror the national population of new attorneys. Roughly 70% of those located by the AJD study responded to either mail, phone, or web versions of the survey. In order to better explore issues of race and ethnicity, the sample was augmented with a minority oversample, which resulted in an additional 600 black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents.