

Schools Best for Big Law

What Law Schools Are Best For Big Law?

According to experts, becoming a first-year associate at a big law firm is challenging. The competition for [entry-level legal jobs](#) at large law firms is fierce as these positions generally pay six-figure salaries.

The odds of getting a job at a major law firm are generally better for [aspiring lawyers](#) who attend highly ranked law schools than those who attend lower-ranked schools.

Here Are the Top 10:

Columbia Law: 65 percent

Northwestern Law: 59 percent

Cornell Law: 56 percent

Penn Law: 55 percent

NYU Law: 53 percent (253 graduates)

Duke Law: 53 percent (113 graduates)

University of Chicago Law: 53 percent (107 graduates)

UVA Law: 52 percent

UC Berkeley Law: 45 percent

Harvard Law: 44 percent

What GPA Do You Need For Big Law?

Employers care about grades, let's face it. Most top firms care only about 1L grades in the present [recruiting system](#).

[Summer associate students typically fill most positions at major law firms during their 2L year after participating in their summer associate program.](#) However, recruiting for these positions typically occurs during the second year of law school, leaving 1L grades the sole measure of academic achievement.

In fact, many prestigious law firms have "hard" GPA cutoffs for hiring law students during the summer: the most elite firms are looking for candidates with 3.7 GPAs and higher; firms right behind them are looking for candidates with 3.5 GPAs or higher.

Which Law School Produces The Best Lawyers?

The following are the top 10 law schools that produced the best lawyers in the country:

Yale University.

Stanford University.

Harvard University.

Columbia University.

The University of Chicago.

New York University.

University of Pennsylvania (Carey)

The University of Virginia.

University of California--Berkeley

Duke University

University of Michigan--Ann Arbor

Is Big Law Harder Than Law School?

It is more challenging to practice as a litigation lawyer.

It isn't easy to [study law in law school](#), but it is an intellectual exercise for the most part. As a first-year law student, you are faced with an entirely new vocabulary and a different and more critical way of thinking.

However, it is still just intellectual. Despite the similarity between [litigation practice](#), mock trial, and moot court, these courses are conducted in an academic setting. No matter how much the participants try to make it real, it is still just playing.

The result is not crucial to anyone's livelihood or life. Nobody's paycheck depends on it. You are not responsible for a client. A negligent person in preparation or execution will not hurt anyone, except perhaps themselves in their grade. No one has a malpractice insurance company to answer to.

Law school is quite demanding and quite arduous. Every faculty member and student there take it very seriously. During mock trials and [moot courts](#), students can feel like everything is real. It is not real, and one is left with a little kernel of realization. A minnow circles, not a shark. Despite their continuing biting, they do not attack the thigh but merely nibble on the toe.

Litigation, in contrast, is overwhelmingly serious, with real sharks. Ultimately, one needs to prove one's innocence and convince a jury. No matter where one goes, one is always 'on trial.' In addition to clients and rent, one must support employees' livelihoods and guide and govern other lawyers.

It has all the power but also all the dependency and vulnerability at the same time. In a courtroom, lay witnesses can be wrangled, and expert witnesses can be coraled, tamed, and bent to an individual's will. Opposing counsel, however, is the most challenging. One's defenses are constantly probed for, and he checks one's advances for weaknesses.

Neither side feels collegial with the other. Hostility is all he has to offer. His professionalism usually transforms into malevolence when the enmity turns personal. This means attacking oneself as well as one's position purposefully. It is intended to rattle one, sometimes to taunt and belittle. When he does it, it throws one for a loop, and even if it is not natural to do so, one still must return it tit for tat. Protected law students cannot deal with the pressure.

Lastly, there is the judge. In court, gaining control of the proceedings from both the opposing counsel and the judge is a constant battle. A judge decides if one is absolutely the best. Even though it may seem obvious, judges are not always in control. Effective litigation can occasionally be achieved by a skilled lawyer.

There is no preparation for that in law school; there are no comparisons.

The Best Law Schools For BigLaw Jobs Paying \$180,000 Or More: The Top 10 Law Schools

Summary: *Law school can cost five to six figures along with three brutal years of your life. So what assures you that you'll be picked up by a Big Law firm.*

Many prospective lawyers dream of working within a Big Law firm.

However, those jobs are far and few between.

While the debate rages on what Big Law firms look to in hiring recent law school graduates, rest assured that not everything, even salary, depends on where a law student went to school.

[With law schools costing five to six figures, it is no wonder that so many students want the brass ring](#)--a high-paying Big Law job with a starting salary of \$180,000. But how many law graduates actually end up in those jobs? And what law schools did they graduate from?

In the legal world, reputation matters. Vault reported that the best law schools to get [Big Law jobs](#) were Columbia, New York University, Harvard, Georgetown, University of Virginia, University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan--Ann Arbor, Fordham, George Washington, and Northwestern.

According to Vault, 15,673 Big Law associates participated in their 2016 survey. The respondents' answers determined the top 10 feeder schools into law firms with 150 attorneys or more.

Vault stated that they composed two lists. One was based purely on the number of graduates who joined Big Law firms, and the second compared the size of the school compared to how many of its graduates worked in large law firms. Their analysis discovered that [Columbia University in New York](#) sent the most graduates to Big Law Firms, a large portion of the number related, 1165.

"Let's factor in the size of the law school class see if some lower-ranked schools are punching above their weight," Vault wrote. "The matriculation data comes from the ABA's 2016 law school data and represents full-time students only. We used the matriculation numbers to calculate the expected number of BigLaw associates by school size only. We then compared that to the actual number of BigLaw associates to find out by how much each school was over-or under-represented in BigLaw."

"It turns out that Columbia is still the tops at sending its students into BigLaw jobs, though after that, the schools change a bit," Vault continued. "Giant schools Georgetown and George Washington drop out of the top 10, replaced by relatively-small Northwestern and Stanford. Perhaps the most interesting school on both these lists is Fordham. The NYC law school is ranked only 37th by U.S. News & World Report but is one of the biggest feeders into BigLaw, no matter how you slice the data. And looking beyond the top ten, there are some surprising schools. Catholic University is ranked 103rd by U.S. News but is the 26th best school for BigLaw jobs. Brooklyn Law performs similarly well, ranking 97th by U.S. News but 32nd in our list."

Vault's data shows that elite schools are not the only option when it comes to landing a high-paying job. So for potential students, what law schools are the best choices to get Big Law jobs? On a similar note, what law schools do graduates end up with the highest salaries in?

How Much Does the Law School You Went to Matter?

In the long term, a law degree is what you make of it. Whether your success depends on various factors, including your location, clientele, practice, and reputation. However, where you go to law school *can* affect your job prospects immediately after graduation.

"The law school you went to matters - but it does not matter forever," Harrison Barnes of [BCG Attorney Search](#), a leading legal recruitment firm, said. "The law school is simply a way to distinguish you from the tens of thousands of people graduating from law school each year. After that, no one cares for the most part."

Barnes said that law firms look at what school you went to as an indicator of your level when applying for your first job. For instance, if you're a Harvard grad, you're more likely to have top grades and stellar LSAT scores than someone from a low-tier university.

Big Law firms also tend to look at schools where they have relationships to find first-year associates. Schools located in metropolitan areas with a high concentration of law firms such as Washington, D.C. or New York tend to serve as Big Law feeders.

After a few years in the workforce, though, Barnes said where you go to school matters less.

"I talk to attorneys daily that expect law firms to open up to them because they attended [Yale](#), [Stanford](#), or

some other great law school. NO ONE CARES!" Barnes wrote. "Just because you went to a good law school does not mean you are going to fit into the law firm, do the work, stay around, contribute more than you take and be fun to work with. Work ethic, commitment, and other factors are far more important than other factors that you may think are important."

What Are Law Firms Looking For When Hiring First-Year Associates?

Law firms want to hire associates with strong work ethics, good attitudes, and practical skills. They look at grades and schools as an indicator of work ethic with the logic that if one thrived in school, they most likely work hard and get along with their peers and professors.

[Big law firms tend to hire](#) mostly from top-tier schools because they can afford to pick the best of the best, and in their minds, the elite schools have already weeded out the students with the best grades and LSAT scores. For people who did not go to an elite school, however, all hope is not lost.

In 2013, University of Dayton School of Law researchers published results from a survey that found law firms value "softer skills" such as collegiality and a sense of individual responsibility when looking for first-year associates. Thus, if an ambitious graduate from a lower-ranked school wanted to break into Big Law, they could still have a chance. Some ways to break in include attending networking events or meeting with attorneys you admire for an informational session.

What Law Schools Feed the Most Students Into Big Law Firms?

[There are numerous Best Of Law School rankings out on the market, but if you're seeking a Big Law position, then those lists may not give you the full picture.](#) For instance, Yale Law has often been named the best law school in the country, but its graduates notoriously do not pursue big law careers. Instead, many end up in academia or high-profile clerkships.

Another example is Fordham University. The New York City-based school was listed as the 61st best law school in the country by *U.S. News*, but it's one of the top ten places where Big Law firms recruit [first-year associates](#).

Brad Karp, chairman of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, said that his firm sought Fordham graduates because of previous alumni excelling.

"We have found that Fordham Law graduates have performed at the highest level, in terms of their talent, their commitment, and their client service ethic, and we look forward to continuing to attract the best and brightest from Fordham in the coming years," said Karp.

For students who seek the brass ring of Big Law, Vault has listed the following law schools as the best feeders for [Big Law firms](#).

Law Schools With the Most Big Law Associates

Columbia University - 5.68%
 New York University - 5.65%
 Harvard University - 5.65%
 Georgetown University - 5.09%
 University of Virginia - 3.20%
 University of Pennsylvania - 3.06%
 The University of Michigan--Ann Arbor - 3.06%
 Fordham University - 3.05%
 George Washington University - 2.87%
 Northwestern University (Pritzker) - 2.79%

The ranking above reflects the number of graduates in Big Law positions, and Vault acknowledged that the numbers could be skewed in favor of schools with larger classes. Because of this, Vault also looked at the number of matriculated students and the number of those who ended up in Big Law.

From there, they came up with the following ranking, which differed slightly from the list above:

Law Schools That Outperformed Their Representation in Biglaw

Columbia University
Northwestern University (Pritzker)
University of Pennsylvania
New York University
University of Chicago
University of Virginia
University of Michigan--Ann Arbor
Harvard University
Fordham University
Stanford University

What Law Schools Lead to the Highest Pay Long-Term?

Now that we've discussed what law schools lead to Big Law jobs right away, what law schools lead to the most pay overtime?Sofi, a debt consolidation company, released a report in 2017 based on data from student loan refinancing applicants, and they ranked which schools led to the most money on average.

"We analyzed more than 60,000 student loan refinancing applications submitted to us from January 2014 to December 2016 to formulate SoFi's Return on Education (ROED) Law School Rankings," Sofi stated. "After taking a long, hard look at the average salary and student debt load of law school graduates three years out of school, we compiled objective data that can't be found anywhere else--verified income and debt, not just reported figures. The result: Rankings of how the top (and bottom) JD programs stack up when it comes to how your financial future will fare."

Sofi's list had many schools on Vault's list of Big Law feeders, such as Columbia, New York University, the University of Chicago, and Harvard. Their findings correlated with Vault's report that location is one major factor when it comes to salary.

"Graduates of the top three schools on our Highest Salaries list--Columbia University, Cornell University, and New York University--can earn starting salaries above \$175K,just one or two raises awayfrom theBureau of Labor Statistics' best-paid lawyer salary of \$187,200. Those top schools all have New York state addresses, reinforcing the notion that location matters when it comes to earning potential," Sofi wrote.

Sofi's Top 20 Law Schools With Highest Average Salaries

Cornell University-\$183,377
Columbia University-\$177,962
New York University-\$177,203
The University of Chicago -\$174,238
Harvard University -\$172,578
Georgetown University -\$173,464
Northwestern University -\$173,204
Yale University -\$171,779
University of Pennsylvania -\$170,954
Duke University -\$ 169,096
University of Virginia -\$166,396

The University of Michigan--Ann Arbor -\$164,713

University of California -Berkeley -\$163,940

University of Southern California -\$161,823

Fordham University -\$160,590

Stanford University -\$158,088

George Washington University -\$153,302

University of California--Los Angeles -\$152,469

Vanderbilt University -\$149,475

University of Texas--Austin -\$147,444

It is worth noting that high salaries may also come with high [student loan debt](#). Because of this, Sofi has also released a list of schools with the best salary-to-debt ratios.

This list has schools such as Brigham Young University, where graduates may have [an average salary less than the twenty schools](#) listed above but whose students also graduate with a smaller financial burden.

Sofi's Top 10 Law Programs With the Best Salary-to-Debt Ratios

Brigham Young University - Avg salary: \$108,916, Avg debt: \$64,873

University of Texas--Austin - Avg salary: \$147,444, Avg debt: \$105,254

Yale University - Avg salary: \$171,779, Avg debt: \$123,793

University of Houston - Avg salary: \$136,370, Avg debt: \$100,160

University of Georgia- Avg salary: \$117,268, Avg debt: \$87,204

Harvard University - Avg salary: \$173,578, Avg debt: \$134,374

Stanford University - Avg salary: \$158,088, Avg debt: \$122,964

University of Illinois at Urbana--Champaign - Avg salary: \$133,025, Avg debt: \$103,748

University of Connecticut - Avg salary: \$116,349, Avg debt: \$92,227

University of North Carolina -Chapel Hill - Avg salary: \$123,873, Avg debt: \$100,211

Conclusion

Law firms typically hire associates from a select few law schools, so if you are interested in pursuing that route, you should look into what schools the law firm you're interested in typically recruits from. If you are already a student and do not go to one of those schools, you can always try networking to get your foot in the door.

When it comes to being hired by a [Big Law firm](#), remember. Your school's location is just as important as its ranking. However, with time, it doesn't matter what school you attended when it comes to the financial success of your career. That will depend on your work ethic and the reputation you build in the industry.

See also:

[Why the Best Executives Are So Highly Paid](#)

[Benefits of Working with BCG Attorney Search](#)

[BCG Attorney Search Law Firm News](#)

[What is Bar Reciprocity and Which States Allow You to Waive Into the Bar?](#)