

## *Biglaw Firm: What Is It and Is It Worth It?*

What is Biglaw Firm like? The most successful and largest law firms have workspaces, cultures, and salary scales that define their careers.

In the legal industry, the term **BIGLAW** refers to the country's largest and most successful law firms, which are typically located in U.S. big cities such as New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Los Angeles. As an associate or an early career lawyer, you need to grab hold of the job market quickly and [secure a well-paying Biglaw job](#) as soon as possible.

As an attorney, Biglaw firms are desirable since their starting salaries are usually around \$205,000 and they offer long, demanding hours billed. Since Biglaw presents both [opportunities and challenges](#), there are many conflicting viewpoints.

### **Definition of Biglaw**

Biglaw law firms are the largest and most successful firms in the legal industry, and their attorneys are often referred to as Biglaw attorneys. The largest of these law firms have over a thousand partners and are located around the world.

Many boutique firms are counted as Biglaw firms due to their competitiveness, equity partners, or revenue, but not all Biglaw firms operate at such a high level. However, Biglaw firms usually employ more than 100 lawyers and pay the best legal wages.

[In many law schools around the United States, law students compete for a summer associate position as they strive to eventually become a partner.](#) The experience a summer associate gains with the firm may lead to a full-time, paid position as a new associate.

Biglaw firms typically offer comprehensive legal services in corporate law, rather than specializing in a specific area, such as personal injury or criminal law. Clients are typically large corporations, investment vehicles, family offices, or wealthy individuals. Major firms provide them with clout and a one-stop shopping experience.

It comes as no surprise that these firms espouse higher salaries since they place a great deal of responsibility and pressure on their associates. With great responsibility, however, comes a great deal of personal responsibility.

### **Biglaw Associate Salaries and Bonuses**

[A licensed attorney who is still in the early stages of their career is an associate attorney.](#) Although they tend to lack hands-on experience, they tend to come from the most desirable educational backgrounds. Some in-house counsel criticizes the inexperience of a typical first-year associate, but they also perform tasks as grinders, which is another term for attorneys who do the research, writing, and other support work associated with the [legal practice](#). Overall, they are well-positioned for success and prosperity in the legal field.

Biglaw associates earn an average salary of \$205,000 plus bonuses, as stated previously in this article. Biglaw firms use this strategy to attract top legal talent from across the nation, regardless of whether it sounds encouraging or shocking.

[Salaries of graduates of Biglaw firms are determined by their law school class year.](#) Due to the intensive competition for the brightest and best students in the industry, new associate pay at Biglaw tends to be nearly

identical.

Approximately thirty percent of first-year associates earn a starting salary of \$205,000 and move up based on the year they graduated. Second-year associates, for example, can earn \$215,000 per year.

## Expected Workload of a Biglaw Associate

The above salaries indeed sound lucrative, but it does not come without a price to the Biglaw associate, and high turnover is well known in the legal profession. Partners task associates at all levels of Biglaw with meeting a [minimum billable hour requirement](#) of typically two thousand hours or more every year through long hours.

On average, they spend thirty-eight hours each week working on client accounts, not counting vacation or other work commitments. [Young lawyers should spend at least sixty hours a week at their jobs.](#)

Large firms issue or purchase a mobile phone for their junior and senior associates so that they can always contact them regularly. Therefore, they must be available during vacations, family dinners, and even routine grocery store trips.

[Associate's lives can never really disconnect from the firm without prior arrangement. Despite this, you will never know when a Biglaw partner will contact you.](#)

As a result of this demand, Biglaw firms make a promise to deliver above-and-beyond excellence to their clients and never compromise on their integrity to deliver legal services in a timely and lawful manner.

See Also: [Unemployed Former BigLaw Attorney Seeking to Re-Enter Legal Market in California](#)  
**Four Examples of Biglaw Firms**

The ranking is a list of the most prestigious law firms in the United States. The list is one of the most respected measures of Biglaw firms based on revenue, employee size, and peer reviews.

Here are the top 4 Biglaw firms and a little more information about how they operate:

**Cravath, Swaine, & Moore LLP:** Headquartered in New York City, Cravath has two offices. In addition to their NYC location, they also have an office located in London. They have more than 500 attorneys on their roster and focus their primary practice areas on industry-specific corporate law.

**Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz:** Headquartered in New York City, Wachtell, they are the only firm on this list that has a single office. They focus on general corporate practice matters and employ more than 250 lawyers. Their website also boasts that they have a low associate-to-partner ratio.

**Sullivan & Cromwell LLP:** Headquartered in New York City, Sullivan & Cromwell, LLP has four U.S.-based offices, four European offices, three in Asia, and two in Australia. They have more than 875 attorneys, who work in corporate business matters and complex transactions.

**Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, and Affiliates:** A Biglaw firm headquartered in New York City, Skadden has ten offices in North and South America, six offices in Asia, and six located in Europe. They employ more than 1,700 attorneys across fifty practice areas, including corporate and international business matters.

## Typical Culture of a Biglaw Firm

The culture of Biglaw firms differs from that of a [small- or medium-sized law firm](#). Shortly put, attorneys tend to work long hours and bring their work home with them more than the average person.

Biglaw firms, like the ones listed above, are focused on providing a [balance between work and home](#). However, the environment is so competitive that not all of them adhere to this policy.

The reality is that the type of cases and transactions they are involved in is largely out of their control. New associates are often the ones who handle the paperwork and perform the manual labor involved in managing and litigating cases. Lower-level players often feel overburdened by communication because it tends to feel inefficient.

Biglaw culture does sound stressful, and there is something to that assertion. Because of this, [work-life balance-friendly firms](#) make it easier for the employees to achieve work-life balance.

Expenses such as relocation and annual bonuses might be paid by them. Childcare and gyms are sometimes provided on-site. Those who work long hours sometimes receive meal allowances.

## Why Law Firms Care Where You Go to Law School

Thomas J. Simeone, a managing partner at Simeone & Miller in the District of Columbia who spent many years working at large law firms, says these firms typically prefer to hire alumni of elite law schools that are ranked in the top fifteen in national law school rankings. Simeone says that some particularly elite big law firms hire students from the top five or best 10 J.D programs, and in general, more ranked J.D programs offer better chances of getting hired by big law firms.

Attorneys who graduate from lower-ranked law schools often need to earn extraordinary grades or gain several years of impressive legal experience before they can get hired by big firms. According to experts, graduates of top law schools are often hired by top Biglaw firms before they have even graduated from law school.

Despite that, someone who cannot gain admission to or afford to attend an elite law school should know that it is possible to work for a big law firm even if they are not hired as associates immediately after getting their J.D. Going to law school is important for the first job, but what you do afterward will determine the rest of your career.

[A few years after law school talented business attorneys without prestigious J.D degrees often gain corporate litigation experience](#), which makes them more marketable for jobs at big law firms. In addition, big law firms that strongly prefer to hire graduates from selective law schools for entry-level associate positions will sometimes make exceptions for recent law graduates from less selective institutions who graduated at the top of their class year.

If you are not planning on attending a prestigious law school, but [want to establish a significant legal career, you should focus on developing your trial advocacy skills](#). Candidates with substantial litigation experience are highly valued by big law firms.

See Also: [21 Reasons You Will Never Get a Job with a Major Law Firm Now \(or Ever Again\)](#)

## Which Top Law Schools Matter to Biglaw Firms

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 10 [Top Law Schools](#):

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)  
 U. Chicago Law: 53 percent (107 graduates)  
 UVA Law: 52 percent  
 UC Berkeley Law: 45 percent  
 Harvard Law: 44 percent

## Conclusion

It is a crowning achievement for a new and experienced lawyer to receive an offer to work at a Biglaw firm. Recruiters work hard to attract the best law students to certain firms due to the allure of financial wealth, popularity, and recognition.

There is also the need to pay off massive student loans, earn relevant experience, and build a sense of integrity and prestige. Big law firms tend to employ long-term attorneys who work long hours. However, they also have the opportunity to control the nature of the work they do, which directly affects their schedule.

Working in this field requires stress management, setting expectations, and self-care. Failure to do so may result in cognitive burnout. Those who are prone to chronic stress may not find it attractive.

The good news is that there are Biglaw firms that have a work-life balance policy and who offer support to those who are brave enough to work in this type of law practice. Likewise, pursuing Biglaw as a student is a serious commitment.

The most effective way to ensure that one is making the best choice for his or her legal career is to make an informed decision in conjunction with a thorough vetting process.