

# American Lawyer 2004 Summer Associate Survey Results

In this year's annual survey of summer associates by the *American Lawyer Student Edition*, Lord, Bissell & Brook LLP's summer program was ranked #1 in Chicago, with an overall ranking of 4.846 out of 5. The firm ranked #3 out of 159 firms nationwide, up four slots from 2003. Positive feedback from summer associates included high marks for the firm's type of work, level of associate responsibility, firm culture, efforts toward diversity, enjoyable personalities of the attorneys and opportunities for mentoring. David Agnew, Chair of the Hiring Committee, shares his thoughts on the survey results and the program as a whole.

**Q:** What do you think of the survey results for this year? Were they what you expected?

**A:** I was very pleased with the results. We received both formal and informal feedback from mentors and summer associates that was very positive, so we expected good ratings.

We had a wonderful class this past summer, of which 40 percent were diverse. They were very enthusiastic about the work, had high levels of participation in the professional and social events, asked a lot of questions and were not afraid to address issues.

**Q:** How do you plan to improve your national score and maintain the firm's #1 status in Chicago for next year's program?

**A:** As we do every year, we will continue to devote a great deal of advance planning to the program and do whatever work is necessary to make sure plans are well-executed and any unforeseen issues that come up during the summer are promptly addressed.

**Q:** Due to the nature of the survey, these results cover the program in Chicago only. How did programs in the other offices perform?

**A:** Neil Dickson in Atlanta, Chuck Adamek in Los Angeles and Don DeCarlo in New York all managed successful summer programs in their respective offices as well. Four out of four summer associates in Atlanta accepted positions, three out of three

accepted in Los Angeles and the summer associate for New York accepted a position with the firm as well.

**Q:** Students gave Lord, Bissell & Brook high ratings for how much "real work" was assigned. Why do you think this is and what was meant by "real work?"

**A:** Real work is simply working on real issues facing real clients. We strongly encourage all the firm's partners and associates to assign real work to summer associates. Summer associates at Lord, Bissell & Brook were given many opportunities to

participate in arbitrations, transactions, and litigation representing actual firm clients. For many of the summer associates, this was their first *legal* job. More than one summer associate mentioned to me how exciting it was

to write a brief and see it argued. This was possible because many of the projects students worked on were completed before the program was over.

**A major theme of the Summer Program is "communication"—the firm strongly encourages summer associates to ask questions of everyone.**

**Q:** It seems like there is a lot of interest from the summer associates in participating in pro bono activities. Do you foresee more of this work going to this group in the future?

**A:** We really encourage the summer associates to participate in these activities because there are even more opportunities for direct client contact and due to the nature of these projects—guardianships, etc.—they are able to see many of the projects through from beginning to end before the end of the summer. Sometimes, they are even able to present witnesses or argue a motion in court under supervision of a Lord, Bissell & Brook attorney.

This year, Arthur McColgan, Sarah Weil and Ann Walsh coordinated the pro bono work for our summer associates and did an excellent job ensuring that the associates received a lot of interesting assignments.

**Q:** What kind of process do you have in place for choosing summer associates for permanent positions within the firm? How do you decide how many to hire?

**A:** The goal every fall is to create a summer class of superior quality students who fit the firm's projected growth and increase the firm's diversity. We want to be in a position to make an offer to every summer associate who has demonstrated that he/she can do the superior work we expect and that none are automatically eliminated because we've overhired. In Chicago, we typically receive around 1200 resumes for summer associate positions each year. This year, we interviewed around 450 candidates either in our offices or on-campus and invited about 20 percent back to our offices for a second round of interviews. We expect to have a class of 18 summer associates in 2005.

**Q:** What does Lord, Bissell & Brook look for in the summer associates it hires for the program?

**A:** The Chicago office of Lord, Bissell & Brook hires law students as summer associates after they have completed their second year of law school, and at times, first year law students. In addition to expecting superior academic achievement in both undergraduate and law school, we also take into consideration the various experiences and professional and personal backgrounds of the candidates. For example, summer associates in next year's class have worked for a range of employers including the White House, U.S. Senate, ACLU, Teach For America, WGN News, Harvard Medical School and NASA Kennedy Space Center. They are fluent in eight different languages and have lived or were born in 16 foreign countries. In addition, they represent 19 different undergraduate schools and 11 different law schools.

**Q:** What is one of the themes that you try to stress with the summer associates each year?

**A:** "Ask your questions" is a big theme that we emphasize in the program. Communication is a two-way street. Although we have been doing this program for more than 25 years, we cannot possibly anticipate every question the summer associates may have. New issues arise each year, as in any industry, and we are eager to learn what their questions are.

**Q:** You have been involved with the program now for 18 of the 25 years you have been with the firm. Do you feel the survey is a good indicator of the program's success?

**A:** The *American Lawyer* survey is only one of several ways in which we measure the success of the summer program. Other ways in which we do so include gauging the reception we get on campuses the following fall. Is there a "buzz" about Lord, Bissell & Brook on campus? Have we built momentum? Do highly successful students seek us out? Are our prior summer associates "talking up" Lord, Bissell & Brook?

**Q:** In what other ways does the firm measure the summer program's success?

**A:** Another way we measure our success is by the number of students who accept our callback invitations. For example, this year we had the highest percentage ever of students accept callbacks for interviews. Also, we gauge our success from formal exit interviews of the summer associates in August. If we have extended offers to students, we interview them again regarding their feelings toward the program and how we can improve it. At this point, they may be more comfortable and willing to share more information with us.

Overall, we measure the firm's program's performance based on the quality, strength and promptness of the feedback we receive, both formally and informally, from participants and mentors in the program.

**Q:** Out of all the categories in which Lord, Bissell & Brook was ranked by the associates, the one that received the lowest ranking was that of availability of/comfort asking about financial information. Do you have a plan to try to improve this ranking for next year?

**A:** Addressing the issue of sharing financial information is one of our top goals for next year. Some of the information is proprietary or personal and cannot be shared, but a lot of it is public already, such as net income of the firm. We are striving to make sure the associates realize this information is readily available and to encourage them to ask questions about financials and anything else that they are curious about—as I said before, open communication is key.

**Q:** Lord, Bissell & Brook scored second nationally in the category ranking firms with the most opportunities for mentoring. Can you explain how the attorneys at Lord, Bissell & Brook provide this service to the summer associates?

**A:** Each summer associate is formally assigned to a mentor—a member of the Hiring Committee—who reviews all of the summer associate's work and meets with him or her regularly throughout the summer—to provide guidance and feedback. The mentors take their responsibility very seriously and I think they do a wonderful job. In addition, each student has an experienced associate assigned to them (a "sibling"), who provides the summer associate with practical information and advice in an informal way. The siblings are also very involved in all aspects of the summer program.

**Q:** How do the summer associates receive their work and how are they evaluated?

**A:** Summer associates perform essentially the same type of work

#### WHAT SURPRISED THE SUMMER ASSOCIATES THE MOST

- ◆ Level of independence and autonomy
- ◆ Very open and friendly atmosphere
- ◆ How much the firm's attorneys knew about them even though they were not working with them on a project

## Office Locations

ATLANTA

CHICAGO

LONDON

LOS ANGELES

NEW YORK

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as our first-year associates. They interact with the partners and associates in practice areas of the students' choice and discover what it is like to practice law at a large firm. Assigning attorneys send proposed assignments to Kerry Jahnsen (Legal Recruitment Coordinator) or me for approval. After being approved, assignments are then listed in the summer associate workbook on the firm's extranet. Assignments are given on a first come, first serve basis, and after taking an assignment, the summer associate meets with the assigning attorney to "flesh out" the assignment and they take it from there. The firm's attorneys did a particularly good job this past summer submitting assignments which were both interesting and challenging. In addition, the assigning attorneys did a great job evaluating the final work product and sharing their evaluations with the summer associates.

As far as the review process is concerned, the assigning attorney fills out an evaluation form at the completion of each project. The evaluation form is a five-part form that the assigning attorney fills out and goes over with the summer associate. Throughout the summer, each summer associate may complete anywhere from 10 to 15 assignments. The mentors conduct a formal mid-summer review in which they go over all the evaluation forms completed to that point, and at the end of the summer, the mentors complete another formal review for each summer associate. I also do a brief exit interview with each summer associate.

**Q:** Who at the firm is involved in implementing the program?

**A:** A lot of work goes into planning the summer program. For the summer of 2004, the summer program coordinators, Anne Garr and John Kloecker, and Kerry Jahnsen and I started working in January to develop the overall themes of the program and get all of the program details in place by April in order to address any possible issues promptly in preparation for the summer associates' arrival in mid-May. Anne, John and Kerry did

a wonderful job designing and executing a very full and organized program.

Kerry, Sarah Orsi and Tammi Marszalik also did a great job planning and implementing social events, various workshops and "Meet the Departments" events.

**The most memorable experience was writing a portion of a trial brief and hearing it argued.**

**Q:** What kinds of activities go on at the different meetings the summer associates have?

**A:** At the "Meet the Department" gatherings, six or seven partners and associates from the different departments talk to the summer associates about the firm, their departments, what kind of work they do and what kind of work the associates themselves might be participating in. It is a great way for the summer associates to meet the attorneys with whom they ultimately will be working.

The summer associates also meet every Friday and hear from different speakers from within the firm who discuss issues including how associates are evaluated and how the firm is managed. Attorneys from different practice areas also discuss particular cases or hot issues within their respective fields including September 11, Sarbanes-Oxley, reinsurance-related issues and financial issues, among others.

**Q:** What are your plans for the 2005 summer program?

**A:** Well, as I noted earlier, no doubt in part due to our summer in 2004, we have recruited another outstanding class of summer associates for the summer of 2005 in all four of our offices. I'm really looking forward to working with them.