

Newly-minted lawyers struggle to find jobs

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Photographer: Suat Eman (freedigitalphotos.com)

In Shakespeare's King Henry VI, a band of plotters eager to overthrow the regime notes, "The first thing we must do is kill all the lawyers."

However, these days, newly-minted lawyers are all but killing themselves in the struggle to find jobs after graduation.

Julia Nardelli graduated law school with honors, passed the bar, and is working as an administrative assistant. She wrote on her blog unemployedlawyer.com, "I am an unemployed lawyer. It's ridiculous. It's personally crushing. It's even a little comical."

It's not just the newly minted lawyers who are struggling. As Wall Street firms collapse, firms providing corporate legal services are watching demand plummet, and many are laying off associates in record numbers. Other firms are offering sabbaticals to associates who agree to take a year off with part of their salary.

Once the default option for liberal arts grads who lack the prerequisites for other professional schools, law school is no longer a pipeline to a high-paying corporate job. What's more, law school graduates, many of whom carry loan burdens as high as \$150,000 following graduation, are finding it difficult to accept low paying work.

Raquel Tortora, who just completed her first year at George Washington Law School, was pleased to find a summer position in the Maryland Public Defender's office. The low pay doesn't bother her. She notes "I chose my law school based on where I would have the least amount of debt."

Some of her classmates aren't so lucky. Tortora adds that many of her peers are interested in government and public-interest work, but given their heavy loan burden, simply can't afford to take a low-paying job after graduation.

So what's an aspiring attorney to do? Dr. Ian Pilarczyk, Associate Director of the LLM Program at The Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, notes wryly that bankruptcy law would be a good area to specialize in, as would eldercare and environmental law. He added that graduates should consider non-traditional uses of law, such as mediation rather than litigation.