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# NALP Foundation Alumni Study: **Insights for Recruiters and Those Working with Law Students**

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The NALP Foundation and NALP's recently released *Law School Alumni Employment & Satisfaction Study* for the Class of 2021 provides critical new insights for those both working with law students and seeking to recruit them. The study has historically explored employment levels, career satisfaction, and assessment of legal education's efficacy, and this year it adds important new information on graduates' career aspirations and geographic dispersion while continuing to highlight the ongoing high levels of mobility for young lawyers at the three-year mark after graduation.

### Career Aspirations: How Do These Emerge and Shift During Law School?

For many years, the perceived wisdom has been that many, if not most, law students

change their career goals during law school, particularly turning away from public service. However, there was no broad data set to support or refute this. This year's study for the first time asked recent grads whether their career goals had, in fact, shifted during law school; if so, when this shift occurred; and critically, what drivers led to these shifts.

Intriguingly, less than half — 42% — reported their career aspirations changed during law school, and there were no significant differences by gender or race/ethnicity.

### When and Why Shifts Occurred?

By far, the most frequently cited reason for this shift — by 62% of alumni — was that their interests changed. Financial considerations also influenced these decisions, with

compensation cited by 38% and educational debt cited by 20%. For over one quarter (27%), however, these shifts were driven by limited job opportunities in their desired career setting, closely followed by 22% who identified opportunities for professional development as the reason their interests changed. Fewer — only 17% — reported that employers' prestige was a driving factor for shifting their career goal.

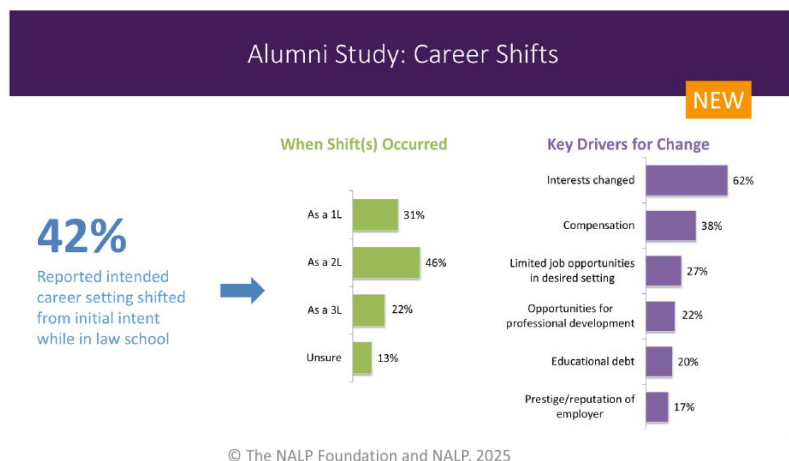
So, when did these shifts occur? For nearly one half of alumni (46%), it took place when they were 2Ls, with just under one third (31%) noting as 1Ls, and just under one quarter locating this shift in their 3L year. Second year, with its opportunity to explore personal areas of interest after the set curriculum of 1L year, along with the inception of recruiting processes for many post-graduate positions, is the clear fulcrum for much of this mobility.

However, even once the graduates have defined their areas of interest, and started working after graduation, there is a remarkable level of professional swirl, as demonstrated by the high professional mobility they report — 65% say they have already held two or more sequential positions three years out. And one quarter report having held three or more positions in the same period — an astonishing

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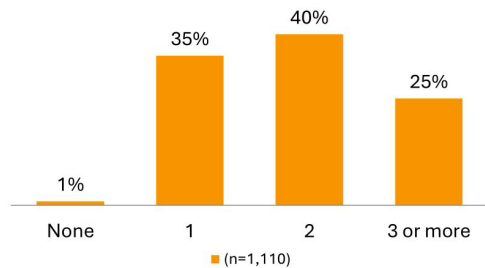
level of movement. Indeed, only slightly over one third (35%) report having held just one consistent position since graduating.

What does this mean for law schools and employers? For law schools, it raises the specter of large-scale mismatches between graduates and their initial jobs (the less appealing interpretation, which ever-earlier recruiting may only exacerbate). However, it may also provide comfort for graduates grappling with options as commencement looms (as well as those working with them) as this first



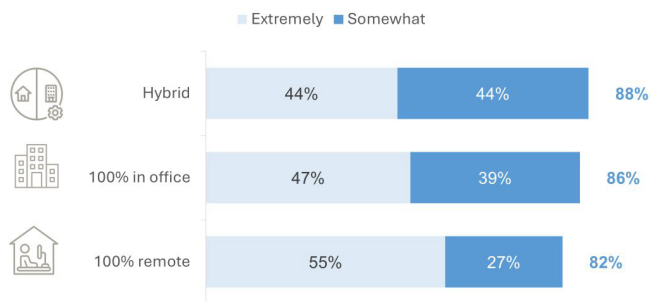
## Mobility: Number of Jobs Class of 2021

Total Number of Jobs Held Since Graduation



All percentages have been rounded.  
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## Work Location as a Factor in Job Satisfaction Class of 2021



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job is statistically quite unlikely to be the one they will be in only three short years later. For employers, the data situates departures by their relatively junior lawyers within the context of this high overall mobility.

### Key Drivers

Just as important as the high mobility levels these early-stage career lawyers are the reasons they elect to switch roles: better compensation was cited by 60%, with “not a good fit with organization’s culture” and “better support for work-life balance” both noted by 40% of respondents. This data provides employers with areas they can focus on for their newest employees — both in the transparency with which they present their organization’s culture and the reality of work-life balance during the recruiting process, and how they attend to these after new lawyers join them.

### Professional Satisfaction

The good news for both law schools and employers: the vast majority of recent graduates — 86% — report that they are either extremely or somewhat satisfied with their current position. Nor were there significant differences in graduates’ satisfaction levels based on work platforms (i.e., hybrid, fully in office, or fully remote), with high levels across all platforms, an intriguing non-distinction as organizations grapple with the right rhythm for

them. However, by far the largest proportion of graduates reported they were working a hybrid schedule.

### Professional Identity Formation

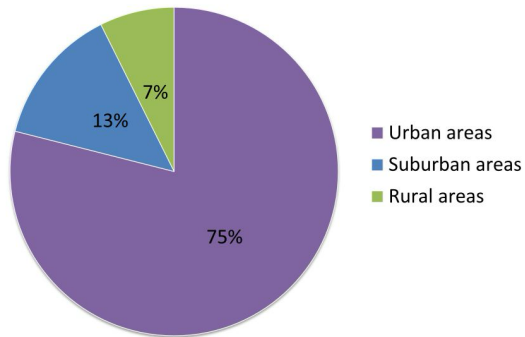
As law schools continue to refine their Professional Identity Formation (PIF) efforts, the study also provides important insights into these. By far, clinical/experiential courses





## Alumni Study: Work Location Class of 2021

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and faculty were the two most frequently cited law school resources for graduates' PIF during law school (by 62% and 60% respectively). Following graduation, colleagues and peers take the leading position (63%), with employer and bar association programs relatively close behind at 53% and 49%. Particularly since graduates rather resolutely rejected typical post-graduate engagement mechanisms including fundraising and service in alumni associations, ongoing PIF offerings offer a fertile opportunity for law school engagement with these recent alums, who identify networking and mentoring programs as their favorite post-graduation engagement mechanisms.

surprising that alumni continue to cluster in the high-income urban areas several years after graduating.

For additional details on this information, the full report is available at [nalpfoundation.org](https://nalpfoundation.org).+

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### Work Location

Finally, for the first time, the study probed where graduates are electing to work, providing important data as access to justice and justice deserts receive broad attention. A mere 7% reported they currently work in rural areas, in contrast to the three quarters of graduates who said they are in urban areas (an additional 18% were in suburban areas). Not surprisingly, compensation differs vastly between the three area categories, with urban graduates reporting the highest incomes, while rural salaries were much lower. Given the high educational debt many graduates still retain three years after graduation, and the financial opportunities available in urban areas, it is not

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