

Types of Law

Bankruptcy Law

Bankruptcy law provides for the development of a plan that allows a debtor—who is unable to pay his or her creditors—to resolve his debts by dividing his assets among his creditors. This supervised division allows the interests of all creditors to be treated with some measure of equality. A bankruptcy lawyer may represent a creditor or a debtor undergoing a bankruptcy plan. Because of the economic downturn, more people are filing for bankruptcy, thus demand for bankruptcy lawyers has increased.

Constitutional Law

The majority of constitutional law deals with Bill of Rights issues, particularly the 1st Amendment and protection of other civil rights. Lawyers practicing constitutional law may work in the public interest sector or for large law firms. In law firms the demand for constitutional lawyers is relatively low and interest in the field from job candidates is very high, making it a very competitive job market. There are more opportunities to practice constitutional law in the public interest sector where the salaries are relatively low.

Corporate Law

Corporate law governs the representation of corporations and other business entities in a variety of areas. Corporate lawyers advise businesses on their legal rights, responsibilities, and obligations, as well as resolve contract disputes. Corporate lawyers counsel publicly held companies and privately held businesses; work with start-ups and joint ventures; aid in mergers, acquisitions, and divestitures; and act as in-house counsel for large corporations.

Environmental Law

Environmental law is anything that is directly or indirectly related to the environment. Environmental law covers obtaining permits for industrial property, waste management, real estate transactions, and a variety of other areas. Environmental lawyers often work for the Department of the Interior Park Services, Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Management, and Forest Services in the Department of Agriculture. They can also work for the government at the state and local level or for corporations as in-house counsel and in firms.

Health Care Law

Health care law governs a wide range of legal issues, including malpractice suits, representation of doctors, hospitals, and HMOs, legal-medical ethics, and disability compensation. Many health care lawyers work for large or mid-size law firms with departments specializing in health care law. Some attorneys work at firms that specialize in disability and Social Security compensation. Others work for hospitals and other medical corporations, pharmaceutical companies, or companies that develop and manufacture medical equipment. Health care lawyers work with issues like corporate reorganization, capital financing, employee benefits, taxes, and antitrust issues, including health care law.

Intellectual Property Law

Intellectual Property (“IP”) Law provides legal protection for inventors within the sciences and the arts. Artwork, compositions, inventions of hardware and software, trademarks, and logos are all defined as intellectual property. Areas of intellectual property law include patents, copyrights, trademarks, unfair competition, and trade secrets. This sector of law often pulls from many other areas such as computer law, international law, and corporate law. The United States Patent and Trademark Office requires that to be licensed and work with the USPTO the lawyer must have an undergraduate degree or specific background in the hard sciences or engineering.

International Law

There are two types of international law: public and private. Public international law governs the relationship between states and international organizations. It includes treaty law, law of the sea, international criminal law, and international humanitarian law. Private international law governs the relationship between companies and different foreign states. Private international lawyers typically work with lawyers in foreign countries to satisfy the business goals of its international client. As the economy becomes more and more global there are more lawyers needed to negotiate internationally. However, there are also significantly fewer jobs in this market than in most other fields, making it extremely competitive.

Military Judge Advocate Law

Military judge advocates, also known as “JAG” (Judge Advocate General) officers, work in all branches of the armed forces. They work in both civil and military courts and their clients include the government, military institutions, and members of the armed forces and their families. JAG officers represent their clients in all kinds of law including criminal law, tort litigation, legal assistance, environmental law, civil law, labor law, operational law, and contract law. JAG officers, once commissioned, are required to serve for their respective three years’ service, except in the Air Force where they are required to serve for four years.

Public Interest Law

Public interest law includes legal aid for the underprivileged, Court Appointed Special Advocates (Guardian ad Litem), Legal Reform, Humanitarian Law, Consumer Interest Law, Public Health, Non-Profit Organizations, and Environmental Protection Agencies. Many issues arise in public interest law, including working with civil rights, women’s issues, children’s rights, prisoner’s rights, disability, mental health, education issues, gay and lesbian issues, elder rights, homelessness, and poverty. Public interest lawyers often work with those who can’t afford an attorney or private law firm.

Tax Law

Tax law deals with federal, international, state, and local multi-tier taxes. It covers the statutory taxes and provisions for how individuals, businesses, and other entities are taxed. Tax law includes tax planning for businesses, tax-exempt organizations, and some individuals; tax litigation; employee benefits; and estate planning. Tax lawyers spend the majority of their time researching the Tax Code as applied to their clients’ questions, drafting documents, strategically planning tax benefits for clients and working with clients in meetings or through phone interviews.

Trusts and Estates Law

The law of estates and trusts governs the use of certain types of instruments—such as wills, living trusts, or charitable trusts—to provide for an orderly distribution of the assets and payment of any debts or liabilities of the estate. Many lawyers specializing in this area work in law firms. They may work in small firms that specialize in estate planning or in estate planning departments of mid-size and large law firms. As part of their practice, general practitioners may also draft wills and advise clients concerning estate planning issues. Some lawyers specializing in trusts work in the trust departments of financial institutions.