

COVID Forced Summer Associate Recruiting to Go Remote; Firms May Never Return to Campus

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(Excerpts from this piece were originally published in Law.com)

The on-campus law firm interviewing process—known as OCI—has been turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly all law schools pushed back the summer associate recruiting process from late July or August, to January or early February. And screening interviews and callbacks took place virtually instead of in-person. With the first pandemic-era OCI now in the books, law schools and law firms alike say the recruiting process worked better than expected considering the format and timing was untested.

Will Virtual Interviews Stick?

The upcoming August OCI will again be virtual, and that format seems likely to remain even after the pandemic has abated, say firms and career services deans.

Perhaps the most obvious benefit for firms is that they needn't dispatch partners and associates to law campuses far and wide—a cost savings and a convenience. That elimination of travel can also help firms cast a wider net and recruit at law schools they wouldn't have the bandwidth to visit in person. Selendy & Gay—an elite boutique that spun off from Quinn Emanuel in 2018 and competes with Big Law for summer associates—doubled the number of law schools where it interviewed this year, said managing partner Jennifer Selendy.

“It definitely made it easier on the partners, in terms of missing time at work and traveling,” she said of the virtual interviews. “I think it would have happened anyway, but it's easing us into it because we did it remotely this year. We knew we wanted to widen and increase the number of people we saw.”

Selendy said she thought law students were generally more comfortable in this year's virtual interviews than they would have been meeting with partners in a formal, in-person interview. The virtual format may actually yield summer associate classes that are more diverse and inclusive, she said.

"I was a first-generation college student, and I felt so overwhelmed talking corporate and business talk with law firm people in hotel rooms," Selendy said. "I understand what it's like for people who aren't steeped in the profession to try to break into this world. And I feel that on-campus, in-person interviews really favor the people who have the confidence and experience moving in these circles."

It remains to be seen what OCI will look like in five years, but law firm recruiters and career services officials say they would not be surprised if it becomes a bifurcated process in which initial interviews are conducted virtually, and callbacks are done in person at firm offices. That approach would give law firms the cost savings and convenience of not sending attorneys to campus for screening interviews, while also providing the opportunity to meet candidates in person and allow students to get a sense of the firm during callbacks. Alternatively, some firms may decide to return to in-person initial interviews, while other opt to remain virtual.

Read the full story at [Law.com](https://www.law.com).

Attorney

- Jennifer Selendy