

Leadership SBOT Interview Questions



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Texas Wesleyan School of Law
Director of Alumni Relations & External Affairs
Age: 31

1. What are your job responsibilities?

- Ensure law school will realize its annual cash fundraising goals through consistent and strategic solicitations;
- Formulate and implement annual fund for the law school, developing annual goals and timetables for both activity and income;
- Develop external relations/community activities;
- Oversee annual foundation, corporate and firm solicitations;
- Collaborate with all other departments in the law school to further advancement;
- Steward the identification, recruitment and involvement of internal and external constituents in the development process, including students, alumni, faculty, and community members;
- Develop and maintain an annual calendar of alumni special events, such as after-hour socials, dinners, annual meetings and awards dinners;
- Staff regularly scheduled alumni association board meetings, law review alumni association board meetings and attend all alumni events;

- Plan and facilitate, with the board of directors, the alumni association objectives;
- Plan and administer budget for department of advancement and alumni relations;
- Facilitate and manage communication to alumni and friends of the law school through website, newsletters, and other forms of media;
- Remain involved in community outreach as appropriate to further fundraising prospects and alumni relations goals; and
- Encourage faculty and student awareness of and participation in alumni association events and activities.

2. *Please describe your organizational structure (e.g., what department are you in, who do you report to, etc.).*

I am the Director of the Alumni & Advancement office at Texas Wesleyan School of Law. We have two separate alumni & advancement offices at Texas Wesleyan University, one specific to and located at the law school in downtown Fort Worth, and one specific to and located at the main campus just east of downtown. I report directly to the law school dean, Frederic White.

3. *What do you find most challenging in your position?*

That's an easy one – fundraising in this economy!

4. *It is sometimes said that many attorneys who make the transition away from a law firm may struggle when they are required to manage people because firms do not train lawyers to be good managers. Do you agree with this? Do you have any advice for improving management skill development or improvement?*

I think that there are many skills that overlap, *i.e.*, many skills that make great lawyers, make great managers as well. For example, skills such as organization, time management, effective communication skills, problem solving, and ability to see the big picture are universal to success for both lawyers and managers. However, I think the true difference lies in the actual environment of academia versus law firms. These are very different entities, so people have to work differently in those environments and I think that can be a difficult task for people making the move from one to the other. Billable hours, associate/partner structure, caseloads, and the adversarial nature of the work that you find in firm life make the working environment vastly different than what you find in academia which offers a more flexible schedule, project timelines, tenure track, working with multiple departments and constituents for a common purpose, etc.

5. ***Do you enjoy managing people?***

Yes, I especially enjoy team settings where each person can utilize their skills and talents to contribute to the success of an organization. It takes all kinds, as they say, but it's finding what people are good at and bringing that out which makes an institution (department, firm and/or entity) thrive. In working with our alumni association, I manage about 6 working committees. Each committee works at a different speed and has a unique dynamic which makes it more interesting! It's often difficult to manage the different personalities, especially amongst attorneys, but, at the end of the day, I find it rewarding to see the end result come to fruition.

6. ***What do you most enjoy about your position?***

I sincerely enjoy so many things about the work that I do, so I'll try to narrow it down to a few. I like that every day is different – I meet new people, plan different projects, oversee new volunteer opportunities, learn more about our alumni and our donors and work with students whom I would not have met otherwise. I feel a special connection to the institution as it is my alma mater and it's wonderful to share that passion for the law school with others. It's a place that has brought me much joy, a place I want to see flourish so it's easy to come to work every day with that spirit driving you. We are a young alumni association, so I enjoy devising new strategies to engage members and engaging our group in meaningful ways to promote the institution.

7. ***What do you wish you had known earlier in your career?***

I wish I would have realized the broad scope of my job responsibilities, handling two major constituent groups – alumni and friends, and the lack of advancement within the organization itself. Along those same lines, I wish I would have done more research, at the beginning, to learn more about the salary compensation and [the limited](#) pay scale for attorneys in non-legal jobs in a university/not for profit setting.

8. ***Is there anything in particular you think a young attorney should consider before taking a job in the academic world?***

Yes, consider the financial impact of your decision (*i.e.*, what do you want/need to make annually to meet your personal and professional goals), consider the work/life balance you wish to maintain, and, finally, consider where you want to be long term (*i.e.*, have you always wanted to be a partner at a firm, where do you want to be at the peak of your career). The academic world affords one so many wonderful opportunities, but you can't deny some of the differences between mainstream legal work and non-legal work – pay, long term growth, and flexibility.

9. *Can you describe some non-legal job opportunities within law schools that young lawyers might consider or pursue?*

I think recruiting (working in an admissions office) is a great way for a young lawyer to get their foot in the door, especially since recent graduates are some of the best representatives of the law school and can speak, firsthand, about their experiences, the classes and the professors. Remember, you can look at recruiting jobs at firms too! Many of the larger firms have legal recruiters. Your alumni office is also a great place to gain employment as a young lawyer because it is a field that a graduate can immediately step in to and make an impact.

10. *Can you compare working in academia to working within a firm?*

Unfortunately, I can't offer much insight on this. I have been with the law school since I graduated, starting as the Associate Director of Admissions and working in to the position I currently hold, Director of Alumni Relations & External Affairs. While attending Texas Wesleyan School of Law, I was very involved with events and activities on campus and that passion turned into full time employment. I feel fortunate to wake up each day loving what I do and who I work with. Upon graduation, I was actually looking at both non-legal and legal positions. I finally narrowed it down to two non-legal jobs – one with the admissions office at South Texas and the other here at Wesleyan. And, as they say, the rest is history.

11. *In general, what can an attorney expect compensation-wise in an entry-level position with a law school? Is the compensation comparable to the compensation with a large firm?*

I think using the term “expect” is an interesting choice of words for this question, especially in this economy. Noting that a person's experience and knowledge of a particular job are key aspects to compensation and that I am no expert on compensation, I'd say a range of \$40-55K would be fair compensation for a person with a law degree in an entry-level position where a JD is preferred or required. This compensation does not compare to that of a law graduate in a first year associate position in a big firm, in my opinion. First year associates at large law firms get larger salaries than those working at entry level positions at law schools. But, you have to take in to consideration your personal and professional goals and the amount of flexibility you want to have in your job. First year associates at big firms are often at the mercy of the firm goals rather than their own schedules, among various other key differences which greatly affect a person's salary and job preference.

12. *What opportunities does a young attorney have for career development or advancement with-in your organization?*

That's another thing I enjoy about my job – the countless opportunities [that I have had](#) and connections I have made in this position. A key component to my job is networking – meeting people and connecting people. So, this has opened doors

for me that I never would have imagined prior to taking this job. For example, I have taken leadership positions on committees and boards in the community (both [the](#) community at large and [the](#) legal community) that I never thought I would have the time for. Currently, I am ~~Vice~~ Chair for the Tarrant County Bar Association's Women Attorney Section, Vice Chair of the Fort Worth Commission for Women, Board Member of the Funding Information Center and Co-Chair for Done in a Day Projects for Junior League. So, I think it's safe to say, given this background, that Texas Wesleyan School of Law has given me countless opportunities to grow personally and professionally in our community. The institution, my boss, Dean White, and many of my colleagues have been instrumental in helping me develop personally and professionally and have supported and encouraged local non-profits wholeheartedly by giving our faculty and staff members the flexibility to explore these endeavors.

Whatever the field you choose, there will be professional organizations, join them to meet people and gain valuable resources! For example, I attend AFP (Association of Fundraising Professionals) and Funding Information Center luncheons and events, when possible, to keep updated locally on advancement services and fundraising opportunities. It gives me an opportunity to meet colleagues and devise new strategies for the law school annual giving campaigns. There are also national organizations that I would suggest participating in such as CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) and NALP (The Association for Legal Career Professionals); depending on the career path you are interested in.

13. *Sometimes lawyers within firms express a desire to go into academia because of the perception of better work-life balance. How is your work-life balance?*

I think this environment supports a healthy work-life balance, but I think that really comes from an individual's personal decision to make that a priority. I say that because whatever job you take, whichever path you choose, is going to have its pros and cons, its pluses and minuses, but where the difference lies is within you. It's your choice how you manage your life – at home and at work. You can be an accomplished lawyer in a firm and maintain a healthy work-life balance, just as you can be an accomplished law school professional and have an equally healthy work-life balance. It's not a case of you have to be in X environment to have Y, you should set your priorities and make plans accordingly so that you can ensure a balance that works best for you. You have to know what makes you tick, what gets you going, what motivates you and then follow it. Get to know yourself well enough to know what works best for you. If you know that you can work nonstop to prepare for a trial and work an endless amount of hours knowing that you have a two week beach vacation coming up...then go for it. If, however, you know that you'd prefer to work a set amount of hours and have more control over your schedule, then realize your limits and find an environment that best suits that work-life balance. Know the sacrifices that you are willing to make for the rewards you wish to have.

14. *Has the change in the economy affected your job? And if so how?*

I think the economy has affected everyone in some way. Raises have decreased and bonuses are nonexistent at this time. But, I feel fortunate to be in a job that I enjoy and in an environment that encourages personal and professional growth. The economy has made fundraising more challenging as well. Donors are more selective with the non profits they support and many have to make choices as to their giving priorities. Institutions of higher education experience a decline in donations when compared to other worthy causes because people think of higher education as elective and consider loan availability and future opportunities for students as reasons not to give.

15. *What advice would you give young attorneys about seeking out a position with a law school, either in a legal or non-legal position?*

If you are interested in this kind of work, start researching while you are a student. I got my first law school job while I was a law student. I was a recruiter for the admissions office. I continued in this capacity while awaiting bar results, and when I passed the bar, they offered me a full time position. You NEVER know where the road ahead will take you or who that person will be who will give you your first break and/or be your mentor. You need a team surrounding you, so always put your best foot forward and show people what you are capable of. It may just result in an opportunity of a lifetime. In the fundraising world, we say “people give to people” meaning you are more likely to make a financial contribution to someone you know or a project you are associated with rather than some random letter you get in the mail. The same principle holds true for people/institutions/firms that are hiring. People are more likely to hire you if they know you, know your work ethic and can count on you. So, work hard at whatever job you are doing because you never know who is watching you and what opportunities will come your way.

16. *Do you have any suggestions that might help young attorneys, especially new law school graduates, who are struggling in today’s job market?*

Never give up! Keep networking, keep putting your resume out there and keep attending events where the potential to meet employers exists. You never know when you will meet the person who will change your path. Keep yourself current and marketable, whether you have a job right now or are looking for a job. Realize your potential, know your value, but remain humble, level headed and appreciative for every opportunity that comes your way.