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Top National Security Lawyers Say Jobs Await Grads Who Are Patient, Flexible



Five attorneys with experience advising at the highest levels of government gave law students career advice during a panel hosted by the Center for National Security Law and the Mortimer Caplin Public Service Center.

Despite the nation's decreasing emphasis on war, jobs for lawyers in national security will continue to exist in significant numbers and graduates who are patient and flexible with their careers can get the jobs, top advisers told University of Virginia School of Law students during a Feb. 17 career panel.

The five attorneys who gave advice, all of whom are current or former high-ranking legal officials, included three Virginia Law graduates and a fourth panelist who received her undergraduate degree from the University.

"The role of lawyers in working for national security issues has grown, and I don't think that's going to reverse, said Mary DeRosa, a 1981 graduate of the University of Virginia who, from 2009-11, served the Obama Administration as deputy assistant and deputy counsel to the president, and as National Security Council legal adviser. DeRosa is currently a distinguished visitor from practice at the Georgetown University Law Center.

William Monahan '93, counsel to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, said the large number of jobs created by the war on terrorism may be contracting in the short term, but the field is not declining.

"We had several years where there was this massive expansion effort ... into the national security area," Monahan said. "And at some point that pendulum now is swinging back." But, he added, "Terrorism is definitely not going away."

Nor, he said, is the need for legislators to be advised.

"From a hill perspective I would say the upside is you'll always have 100 senators in the Senate, and

they will always have staff," Monahan said. "The downside is it's a really unfair market in that they have the jobs, and there are thousands of people wanting those jobs. So they are able to hire overqualified people at entry level."

DeRosa said even though there are fewer opportunities for students right out of law school, initially working at a law firm as a litigator or as part of a firm's national security practice, or in any setting where the focus is on privacy and technology, will help.

"Keep your toe in the international security world," DeRosa said. The goal, she said, is to "meet people who know people who know people."



Brig. Gen. Richard Gross '93, legal counsel to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and one of three brigadier generals on active duty in the U.S. Army JAG Corps who are UVA Law graduates, said becoming a judge advocate is another advisable approach to starting a national security law career.

"That's a good way to work your way up and end up where I am," Gross said.

Marion "Spike" Bowman, former deputy national counterintelligence executive and senior counsel to the FBI, agreed. He said it was his preference to hire judge advocates because they tend to have a strong work ethic and fitness reports that detail their service.

"I knew what I was getting," said Bowman, who currently serves as fellow at the Center for National Security Law at UVA.

Alice Beauheim Borene '09, privacy adviser to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said students should also look at trends to determine what the national security issues will be in the next decade.

"I'm not saying that terrorism is going away, but look beyond that—think about emerging issues," Borene said. "There's a lot of technological issues that are going to play into national security."

But panelists said that not all careers can be perfectly planned.

"You can set off on one path, but you may find that down the road you will need to have the skill to be flexible," said Monahan, explaining that the career moves he has made—from his beginnings working on nuclear nonproliferation agreements to his current position at the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee—have largely been dictated by changes in presidential administrations and policy.

DeRosa, who began her career as a lawyer in product liability litigation and "hadn't given any particular thought to national security or foreign affairs," said she capitalized on a number of opportune moments, including a one-year appointment on a Department of Defense advisory board. It was there that she made the contacts that helped launch her national security law career, she said.

"What you can take out of my experience is that you can fall into [a career] backwards," she said.

The panelists were unanimous in urging patience and perseverance on the part of would-be national security lawyers.

“You’re not going to walk into my job on the Armed Services Committee,” Monahan said. “If you’re willing to stick it out, though, you can work your way up.”

UVA Law professor [John Norton Moore](#) moderated the panel discussion, which was sponsored by the Center for National Security Law, which Moore directs, and the [Mortimer Caplin Public Service Center](#).