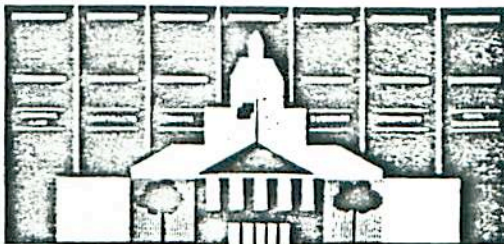


LAW SCHOOLS



BY EDWARD A. ADAMS

Firms Defend Current Practice Of Autumn Recruitment Drives

IT WAS NOT the most endearing way to introduce oneself to potential employers.

The letter landed in early January on the desks of hiring partners at 30 of New York's largest firms. Its message was blunt: The way they recruit summer associates "is flawed." The correspondent was second-year Cornell Law School student Carolyn Elefant.

Her critique of legal recruiting is part of a larger debate about the influence of firms on the process of legal education. It is a discussion taken seriously by members of legal academia — a debate that many in New York's law firms refuse to join.

Ms. Elefant's letter focused on two problems. First, she claimed that the numerous on-campus interviews and callbacks students routinely attend take time that ought to be spent on learning the law.

Second, she wrote that interviews during the fall of the second year (for jobs the following summer) discriminate against students whose grades improve during the second year at law school.

"You'll be sitting in class, thinking about callbacks you have later in the week," said Ms. Elefant in a recent telephone interview. In three months, she sat through 50 on-campus interviews and 12 callbacks, which required trips to Washington, D.C., and the New York City area.

"The worry of finding a job hangs over your head, and you're forced to make trade-offs," she said.

But Ms. Elefant's critique of summer-associate recruiting goes deeper than just procedural matters. "Firms are looking for students with that 'corporate image.' A lot of [students] are forced to redefine themselves, de-emphasizing parts of their personalities, to get jobs," she said.

Ms. Elefant, who will be working with Roseland, N.J.'s 40-attorney Kimmelman, Wolff & Samson, P.A. this summer, was one of those students. "When I was asked what sort of firm I was looking for, I said in my first interviews that I wanted a firm where people weren't competitive and where I could do some pro bono work," she recalled.

"By the end of the interview season, I was saying I wanted a firm where I could feel comfortable embarking on a professional career — a place where the people worked hard."

Only two firms responded to her letter and both rejected her suggestion that interviews be held during the spring semester.

"I do not think major changes in the current system would be helpful either to students or law firms," wrote partner Richard E. Carlton of New York's Sullivan & Cromwell.

In his response to Ms. Elefant, partner Harvey Kurzweil of New York's Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer & Wood wrote: "In the absence of a consolidated effort by a number of firms to move to a January schedule, I suspect we shall continue" to adhere to the fall schedule.

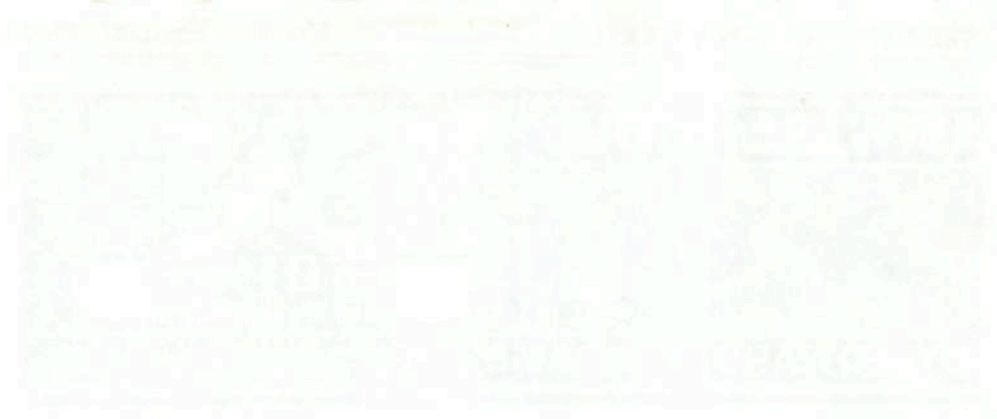
In an interview with *The National Law Journal*, Mr. Kurzweil said that moving the recruiting season to spring semester might cause travel plans by students to be disrupted by bad weather. Furthermore, "we need more time to plan for the summer group," he said.

There is understanding for Ms. Elefant's concerns, but little support, from Marilyn B. Norton, Cornell Law School's assistant director of placement. "No one at the school is happy with fall semester recruitment," she said.

To reduce the number of days on-campus interviews conflict with classes, Cornell has scheduled most of next fall's interviews during six weekends in September and October. On-campus interviews and classes will overlap only six days next fall, according to Ms. Norton.

But schools are discouraged from moving the recruiting season to the spring because "firms would subvert the process, skimming off the cream of the crop in the fall," she said.

As for Ms. Elefant's claim that the stiff competition for jobs forces students to lie, Ms. Norton said: "It's very sweet and childlike, the notion that the white lie is a hypocrisy. But we all know you don't lay your cards on the table when you're interviewing."



THE HISTORY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
BY
JOSEPH NEALE, ESQ.
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