



CAREER DEVELOPMENT OFFICE JOB GUIDE

ESTATE PLANNING

Description

Estate planning lawyers advise individuals and families about the transfer and distribution of their personal wealth. The work involves drafting wills, establishing trust arrangements, advising about retirement plans and charitable contributions, and handling probate proceedings after a client's death.

Qualifications

An estate law attorney needs a thorough understanding of property laws, state and federal tax laws, and laws relating to wills, trusts and probate. It also helps to understand life insurance and annuities, as well as financial investments. This practice involves a substantial transactional component, and it can also encompass litigation if an estate probate is challenged. A lawyer in this practice needs good drafting skills, and a background in accounting or finance can be helpful.

Types of Employers

Law Firms:

Most job opportunities for estate planning lawyers will be with law firms. Many small and mid-sized general practice firms offer estate planning services. In addition, many large firms have estate or wealth planning practices housed within their tax departments. Estate planning clients often constitute an important constituency for a solo practitioner.

Nonprofits:

Estate planning is not widely handled by nonprofit legal service providers. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) provides related services to its

members, and there may be local organizations (such as Catholic Charities in some cities) that provide educational or other resources related to the topic. Also, charitable foundations may hire lawyers with estate planning and tax backgrounds.

Government Agencies:

Typically government agencies do not provide estate planning services. However, the federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and state departments of revenue may have lawyers on staff who specialize in laws relating to taxation of gifts, trusts and estates. The IRS tends to hire from the top ranks of the class, while state revenue departments are usually more concerned with experience and commitment to the practice.

Probate Courts:

Probate courts in most places have exclusive jurisdiction over the probate of wills and the administration of estates. They also typically handle appointments of guardians, involuntary hospitalizations of incapacitated adults and other individuals, and issuance of marriage licenses. Probate court judges may hire entry-level law clerks, and they will sometimes allow students to work as unpaid interns. In Georgia, there is a probate court for each county, and contacts can be found at gaprobate.org.

Financial Advisers:

Financial advisers that provide wealth planning advice for clients will often hire estate planning lawyers to assist with this service. There may not be large numbers of entry-level positions in these organizations, but they do occasionally seek to bring in new graduates. These positions do not typically involve the actual practice of law, so they may be categorized as JD advantage jobs.

Job Search Strategy

As you plan your path to an estate planning law career, consider the following advice:

- Credential yourself in the field. Take the relevant law school courses, and choose a relevant topic for your law review or journal note or advanced writing requirement.
- For your 1L and 2L summers, do your best to secure a position for at least part of the summer that will give you relevant experience. Most law firms offer estate planning services. Look for one of those firms, and then try to get a firm that is a good fit for you in size, geography and other characteristics.
- Many smaller firms do not have the resources to recruit on-campus, so you may need to make more outreach to the firms through unsolicited letters and networking. Your CDO Counselor can help you search for good targets of opportunity and draft appropriate cover letters.
- If you find it difficult to get a law firm job, which can be especially true for the 1L summer, look for options like probate court clerkships. A court likely will not pay you for the internship, but you may be able to get course credit. Check with [Professor Alex Scherr](#), but do so as soon as possible and definitely before you start the job.
- Look for summer internship positions in Symplicity or at external job posting sites listed below. You should also talk with 2Ls and 3Ls who had such internships in the past. You can get lists of summer positions held by our students during the most recent summer from your CDO Counselor.
- You might consider an internship or post-graduate fellowship with the IRS or a state department of revenue. This experience is viewed very positively by law firms.
- Participate in extracurricular activities and professional organizations. You can network with helpful people at meetings, and it helps to have these affiliations on your resume.

Experiential Learning Opportunities

Georgia Law offers several experiential learning opportunities that may help you prepare for a career in estate planning law:

[Civil Externship Program](#) (placement with the IRS)

[D.C. Semester in Practice Program](#)

Relevant Courses

The following video provides helpful guidance from Georgia Law Professor Lisa Milot. Also, check the Law School's Course Offerings webpage for a list of [courses recommended](#) for an estate planning practice and the applicable semester class schedule.

Estate Planning
with Professor [Lisa Milot](#)



Relevant Law School Activities

[Family Law Society](#)

[Tax Law Society](#)

Bar and Professional Organizations

[Georgia Bar Association, Fiduciary Law Section](#)

[American Bar Association, Section of Real Property, Trust and Estate Law](#)

[American Academy of Estate Planning Lawyers](#)

[American College of Trust and Estate Counsel](#)

External Job Posting Sites

[American Association of Retired Persons](#)

[FindLaw](#) (directory of estate planning lawyers by location)

[Internal Revenue Service](#) (Honors Program for post-graduate positions, Summer Intern Program, and Legal Externship Program)

[Georgia Department of Revenue](#)

[Indeed.com](#)

[Lawjobs.com](#)

Recent Jobs

Probate court judges often hire our students as summer or academic year interns. You can find all the probate courts in Georgia (with links to websites in most instances) at the website gaprobate.org. If you want to work at a particular court, CDO Counselors will be happy to help you develop a strategy for contacting them. In just the past three years, we have had students intern at the following:

Court	Location
Athens-Clarke County Probate Court	Athens, GA
Clayton County Probate Court	Jonesboro, GA
Gwinnett County Probate Court	Lawrenceville, GA
Hall County Probate Court	Gainesville, GA
Muscogee County Probate Court	Columbus, GA

It is difficult for CDO to track our students and graduates who are doing estate planning work within law firms. We may know an alum has gone to a particular firm, but we will not often know the precise kind of practice that the alum may have. If you are looking for a small firm that specializes in this practice, the best approach might be to search for those firms at a site like FindLaw.com. You can search by city and state. Then check with a CDO Counselor to get help in identifying contacts at the firms.

Other Resources

[Elder Law Lib Guide](#), UGA King Library

[Taxation Lib Guide](#), UGA King Library