

Best cities for young attorneys

Boston, Dallas and even Palo Alto, Calif., make better homes for young attorneys than longtime legal hubs such as New York and Los Angeles. Higher salaries, better buying power and robust legal communities are just a few reasons why.

BY LAIRA MARTIN

Jonathan Tabacoff could have lived anywhere. But like a lot of people who grew up watching “Schoolhouse Rock!,” the 2014 graduate of Catholic University of America, Columbus School of Law, chose Washington, D.C.

“This is where everything is; everyone has a headquarters here,” the 26-year-old said. “It is very intellectual here. Even the kids on the bus are discussing the election.”

A New York City native, he moved to the nation’s capital to attend law school without ever having visited the city. He knew his dream of working for the federal government meant he would one day call D.C. home.

“I drive by the monuments every day. Still, four years later, I feel like a kid when I see them,” he said.

Now, he is in his second and final year of the Presidential Management Fellows Program of the Social Security Administration, which will lead to a full-time job.

Tabacoff is not alone in his affinity for our nation’s capital. Attorneys make up 8 percent of Washington, D.C.’s population, according to the American Bar Association. That means that about one out of every 12 people walking by practices law.

Pair that with a rich history and culture, an average salary of \$149,977 at law firms – the third highest in the nation for entry-level attorneys – and a high percentage of young people – 20.7 percent of D.C. residents are



PHOTO BY PETER CALVIN

JANET LANDRY, a 2015 graduate of Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law, came to Dallas for the low cost of living, but she stayed for the biking trails, concerts and restaurants.

between the ages of 24 and 34 – and it is no wonder Washington, D.C., is such a great destination for budding lawyers.

Indeed, it finished first in The National Jurist’s ranking of best major cities in the U.S. for young attorneys. We looked at three primary areas, each with two data points, to determine the best cities for young attorneys.

First, we looked at standard of living,

using mean salary data for law firms and cost of living adjustment. These two factors totaled 30 percent of the study.

Then, we looked at the size of the legal community. The percentage of the population with legal occupations, according to U.S. Census data, counted for 15 percent, while the number of law firms in each metropolitan area counted for 20 percent.

Finally, we assessed the social scene using

two data points. The percentage of young people ages 24 to 34 (according to the U.S. Census) counted for 15 percent of the overall ranking. The cities' arts and cultural environments, based on rankings by Sperling's Best Places, counted for 20 percent of the total score.

Following Washington, D.C. in The National Jurist rankings were Dallas, Boston, Seattle and Denver.

Dallas placed second, largely based on strong entry-level salaries and a low cost of living. Janet Landry, an associate at Carter Scholer Arnett Hamada & Mockler, chose Dallas over other cities in Texas for that exact reason.

"My fiancé and I tell people that one of the things that drew us to Dallas was the low cost of living," said Landry, a 2015 graduate of Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law in Dallas. "Lower cost of living does not just mean you can save money as a young lawyer, it also means you can live closer to your office, the courthouses downtown and all the great events Dallas has to offer."

The National Jurist used law firm mean salary data from the National Association for Law Placement's report on the Class of 2014. It then adjusted the salaries using cost-of-living data from the Council for Community and Economic Research.

When adjusted for cost of living, Dallas has the third highest salaries in the nation, following Houston and Palo Alto, Calif.

Palo Alto, which places 12th on the list, is also experiencing growth. Home to hundreds of start-ups and even more investors, the city has experienced a rampant tech boom, along with the rest of Silicon Valley, during the past decade.

After graduating from University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, Hailey You landed an associate position at the Palo Alto office of Perkins Coie, where she represented mostly start-ups and venture capitalists. She has since joined Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati in Palo Alto as a lateral associate.

The 29-year-old said her life as a start-up lawyer isn't far different from the lives portrayed on the HBO television series, "Silicon Valley."

"I found practicing corporate law for emerging companies and venture capital groups can be both fun and taxing," You said. "For me, the single largest draw of representing start-ups in Palo Alto is that as a

young attorney, you get to learn many areas of law, including securities law, employment law, intellectual property law, as well as tax law."

Palo Alto faired well in the study for a number of reasons. It has a high concentration of lawyers, with 3.5 percent of the population in legal occupations, and a culture score of 8. With a reported mean salary of \$155,921, it is the second highest in the nation, trailing only its neighbor, Mountain View, Calif. But with high salaries, also comes high rents, You said.

"From housing to food, living costs in Palo Alto are comparable, if not more, to that in New York," You said. "Rent is high here, and as ironic as it sounds, the steep rent price drove my husband and I to purchase our first home this year. We couldn't justify paying that much in rent each month."

Other cities offer more in the way of arts and culture. Sperling's Best Places gives top scores of 10 to New York City, Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif. Boston and seven other cities each earned a 9.5.

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The Best

	City	Reported Mean Salary	% of young people (25-34)	% of population with legal occupations	Number of firms	Culture
1	Washington, DC	149,877	20.7	8.1	2966	9
2	Dallas, TX	122,265	18.4	2	3,894	8
3	Boston, MA	138,297	20.7	2.4	3,577	9.5
4	Seattle, WA	100,262	20.8	2.7	1815	9.5
5	Denver, CO	93,264	20.5	2.4	2,122	9
6	Minneapolis, MN	95,688	21	2.4	1266	9
7	Atlanta, GA	102,276	19.8	3	3,765	7.5
8	Salt Lake City, UT	88,510	16.3	2.5	771	7.5
9	San Francisco, CA	127,246	20.9	3.4	2960	9.5
10	Houston, TX	127,902	17.8	1.6	4741	8.5
11	Chicago, IL	112,858	19.1	2.3	6,692	9.5
12	Palo Alto, CA	155,921	11.9	3.5	417	8
13	Alexandria, VA	81,900	24.4	5.5	542	9
14	Los Angeles, CA	128,805	16.8	1.7	4637	10
15	New York, NY	145,830	17	1.7	8906	10
16	Mountain View, CA	156,389	21.1	2.3	171	8
17	St. Louis, MO	86,373	13.4	1.6	1706	8.5
18	Austin, TX	106,355	20.7	2.1	1,354	3
19	Baltimore, MD	90,622	16.7	1.4	1,796	9.5
20	Orlando, FL	75,464	20.6	3.2	1082	3.5

“With a concentration of excellent law schools and very active local bar associations, Boston offers a wide range of professional development, training and networking opportunities for young lawyers that supports career growth and satisfaction,” said Gerald Slater, associate dean for professional & career development at Suffolk University Law School. “These factors, together with great cultural offerings and youthful culture, make it a great place to live and work.”

For sports fans, Boston is a mecca. The Red Sox, Patriots, Celtics and Bruins help create a sense of city pride that is second to none. It is one of the many reasons attorneys stay in Beantown after passing the bar.

“Boston is a university city with a huge number of students who stay here to live and work after graduation,” Slater said. “The combination of professional opportunities and a world-class city, on a more livable scale than the world’s megacities like New York, London and Hong Kong, make it many people’s first choice.”

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