

Around the water cooler: An area in demand

By Josh Wolff
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While the job market for recent law school graduates remains bleak, a particular group of graduates from The John Marshall Law School still remain in high demand.

Students who graduate from the school with both a JD and LLM in employee benefits not only have the opportunity to work in law firms, but also in accounting and consulting firms, as well as government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Labor, and Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

John Marshall graduates' ability to work for many different companies allows them more opportunities upon graduation than the typical law school graduate.

Kathryn J. Kennedy, associate dean for advanced studies and research, and director of the school's Center for Tax Law and Employee Benefits, said the narrowly-focused education is one of the keys to the law school's success.

"You are just studying in a specialized area and when you graduate, you can hit the ground running and be a productive attorney right away," said Kennedy, who has practiced at McDermott Will & Emery.

Created in 1998, the LLM program was the first, and still is the only, graduate degree program in employee benefits in the nation, according to John Marshall. Kennedy is surprised that no other law schools followed John Marshall's trend.

"Frankly, I don't know... I really thought there would be other LLMs popping up," she said. "The real problem is that there are very few full-time employee benefits professors who are willing to put in the time and effort."

Kennedy recently received the 2009 Educator's Award from The American Society of Pension Professionals & Actuaries, given to an ASPPA member who has made significant contributions to pension education.

She was also named to the IRS's advisory committee on tax exempt and government entities (ACT), making her the only one of the 21-member panel to be associated with a law school. Her appointment to ACT not only affirms her expertise, but also helps place her students in government jobs, whether for internships or full-time employment.

Not only is Kennedy an educator, but also a creator, having designed 21 courses in employee benefits for The John Marshall Law School and even co-authoring a textbook on employee bene-



Kathryn J. Kennedy

The John Marshall Law School

fits. Her curriculum encompasses issues of health insurance, fringe benefits, and retirement plans, among others.

However, the advantages of the employee benefits program are not exclusive to attorneys or JD graduates. The law school's master of science in employee benefits can help current accounting or consulting professionals by giving them a better understanding of the legal issues of employee benefits. As a result, these graduates can better educate their employers, becoming more valuable resources for their clients.

"The field is so complex and ever-changing, so for employers to have someone who has that level of expertise, they're going to chose our graduates hands down," Kennedy said. ■