

Big Chicago Law Firms Recruiting Fewer Young Lawyers

2009-09-01 11:57:42

I know that people keep repeating that ‘the recession is ending,’ but simply repeating it over and over, and sounding serious about it, doesn’t seem to be helping.

From what I hear from my highly paced secret sources in some of the more elite firms out there, it’s going to get worse.

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Big firms cut back on law school recruiting

By Ameet Sachdev

The recession has made big law firms in Chicago even pickier when it comes to recruiting at law schools.

Firms have slashed the number of on-campus visits this year, as recruiting and hiring budgets have been cut. Seyfarth Shaw canceled its 2010 summer program. Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom, which has a large Chicago presence, has said it expects to hire nationally about 100 interns — also known as summer associates — next year, down from 225 in this year’s summer class. Other law firms also have downsized their summer programs but are not publicly talking about their plans. Mayer Brown and Winston & Strawn declined to comment Monday and Jenner & Block did not return a request for comment.

Law schools of every ilk are feeling the effects, from elite private institutions such as Northwestern to state schools such as the University of Illinois.

“Many law firms still are finalizing their overall hiring needs,” Don Rebstock, Northwestern’s associate dean of enrollment, career strategy, and marketing, said in an e-mail response. “Because of this, we may offer a second on-campus interviewing program sometime in the spring.”

Northwestern students have somewhat brighter job prospects than their peers at lower-ranked schools because big law firms remain prestige-conscious.

“We’ve had large national firms tell us they can only go to three or four law schools,” said Tony Waller, assistant dean for career planning and professional development at the University of Illinois College of Law. “For Chicago firms, that means [University of] Chicago, Northwestern and Michigan.”