

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Hot Website: Building A Better Legal Profession

New Legal Website Focuses on Large Private Law Firms

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Building A Better Legal Profession (www.betterlegalprofession.org), founded in January 2007 by Stanford Law School students, promises to be a welcome addition to the universe of information available to the vast majority of upper-echelon law students entering large private law firms. In line with the anxiety many law students on this campus feel about entering the formal and bureaucratic world of large law firms, Craig Segall '07, Andrew Bruck SLS '07, and Andrew Canter '08, the website's principal founders, formed a working group to address what they term the "de-personalization of America's top law firms."

At first focusing solely on the negative effects of increased billable hours, and later adding other quality-of-life criteria, the primarily currently law students at Building A Better Legal Profession used publicly available data from the National Association of Law Placement (NALP) to evaluate the largest law firms in six major geographic markets (New York City, Washington D.C., Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco).

The result of their analysis is a set of rankings for each of the six markets on three factors: billable hour requirements, demographic diversity, and pro bono participation. Some of these reports (most notably the NYC market reports), which were released on October 10th at a press conference, are available on Building A Better Legal Profession's website.

Although there are other websites that law students can turn to for information about law firms, such as NALP, Building A Better Legal Profession provides law students more than just raw data. As many law students know, there is a difference between the billable hours expectations and average hours worked that firms disclose and what new associates and associates on the partnership track actually work. As Building A Better Legal Profession says in its founding statement, "Firms should regularly disclose the actual median hours worked by associates on the partnership track. Greater transparency will help both law students and law firms meet each others' expectations."

Building A Better Legal Profession's reports attempt to synthesize NALP data to help law students choose their firms with minimal confusion. Of note, the reports graphically compare firms, making it easier for students to rank firms on the basis of billable hours, pro bono participation, and "transparency," an evaluation criterion unique to Building A Better Legal Profession.

Katherine Reilly, Building A Better Legal Profession board member and a 2L at HLS, commented: "Building A Better Legal Profession gives law students the power to make informed decisions about where they want to work and puts law firms on notice that these issues matter to us. Law students have so much power to shape the market place, and Building A Better Legal Profession, which is driven by students and their needs and concerns, is one step towards helping us do that."

Once all of its reports are available online, Building A Better Legal Profession has the potential to become a very useful resource for law students facing important career decisions.

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