



The OCIs and Beyond:
Tales, Tips, and Truths.

LexisNexis Canada and the Law Student Society of Ontario gathered advice and experiences from a range of individuals in the legal community to provide current law students guidance for the OCIs and beyond the large firm recruit process.



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Law Students' Society of Ontario
Société des étudiants et étudiantes
en droit de l'Ontario



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THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

Click on any name below to skip directly to their comments if you're interested in advice from a particular firm type or position.

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DID YOU GO THROUGH THE OCI PROCESS? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

I went through the OCI process. I applied narrowly to large and mid-size corporate full-service firms only. I received two OCIs and one in firm. I made it to day three with my in-firm before being told shortly before the blackout period that they would not be in a position to offer me a job.

HOW DID YOU APPLY FOR ARTICLING PLACEMENTS? HOW DID YOU END UP FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

I summered at the Ontario Ministry of Finance, which hired outside of the OCI process. I received an articling offer from the Ministry, which I chose to hold so that I could participate in the articling recruit. In the articling recruit, I applied only to two full service firms and interviewed at one firm where I was ultimately hired.

DID YOU END UP ARTICLING AT THE TYPE OF PLACEMENT YOU WERE INITIALLY SEEKING?

I ended up articling exactly where I had hoped to be throughout the 2L recruit; a full service, Bay-Street firm.

DESCRIBE THE ROLE NETWORKING PLAYED IN FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

Networking played a surprisingly small role in my articling placement. Before OCI's I had dedicated a considerable amount of time and effort into networking, only to receive 2 OCIs. Instead, I really focused on updating my materials (I had a strong upward trend on my transcripts compared to my first term of 1L). Once I had an articling interview, I reached out to three lawyers at the firm to express my interest and get an idea about the firm.

DID INTERVIEWS LOOK DIFFERENT THROUGH THE FORMAL RECRUIT VS. OFF THE BEATEN PATH?

One very large difference with interviews was that my OCIs were in person and my 2L summer and articling interviews were on the phone and virtual, respectively. My 2L summer job had only one interview with a panel of four lawyers over the phone, with substantive questions, and lasted 45 minutes. My articling interviews followed the same format at virtual in-firms, skipping the 17-minute OCI portion altogether.

ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

Not getting a job in the formal process stings. It is a blow to the confidence, and it means that your path to getting a job (and the stress which accompanies the job hunt) is now a bit longer. Not getting a job in 2L does NOT mean that you have to completely pivot from your goals of having an interesting, fulfilling legal career in the field you wish to practice. Your destination does not have to change just because it took longer to get where you always wanted to go.



Shira K.

Place of employment: Boutique firm, Toronto/large city, Kalfa Law

Current Position: Partner

DID YOU GO THROUGH THE OCI PROCESS? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Yes. Terrible experience. Very anxiety provoking! I had excellent grades and so I had 22 OCI interviews, if I remember correctly. I also remember it being extremely nerve-wracking experience. Ultimately, I retained a position through the OCI process however.

HOW DID YOU APPLY FOR ARTICLING PLACEMENTS? HOW DID YOU END UP FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

Yes. I received an articling offer from the firm where I summered but turned it down as it was not in the area of law I wished to practice in. I applied to firms directly and secured my own articling position within a corporate-commercial department.

DID INTERVIEWS LOOK DIFFERENT THROUGH THE FORMAL RECRUIT VS. OFF THE BEATEN PATH?

Yes, Bay street interviews are brutal. Multiple interviewers and rounds. Cocktail parties and receptions. It's quite nerve-wracking. Alternative positions have a less cumbersome process of course.

ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

The OCI process is overwhelming. Care should be taken to let students know that bay street is not the end all and be all of practicing law, and alternative positions or means to practice law should be introduced to law students earlier on.



Ocean E.

Place of employment: Boutique firm, Toronto/large city

Current Position: Incoming articling student

DID YOU GO THROUGH THE OCI PROCESS? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

I did – I found the process to be very exciting. The opportunity to meet a very large amount of professionals, from various practice areas, all at once was very unique. I tried to look at the OCI process as an opportunity to network with members of the profession. That state of mind eased the pressure and helped me secure quite a few in-firm interviews. The in-firm process was draining. As well, the virtual nature of the process made it more difficult to connect with my interviewers. Despite having more than 3 interviews with a couple firms, I did not land a position at my top choice. In hindsight, however, I recognize it was a blessing in disguise – I ended up securing a position at a great Toronto litigation boutique.

HOW DID YOU APPLY FOR ARTICLING PLACEMENTS? HOW DID YOU END UP FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

I ended up summering at a very reputable, yet small, corporate commercial firm in Toronto. Although I loved the experience, the work, and the team, I realized I want to train as a litigator. I cold emailed and networked with a number of different firms - small and medium sized - until a few responded noting that they're in the process of hiring articling students. After my first interview at the first firm, I knew I found my top choice. I will note that a strong recommendation really made a difference.

DID YOU END UP ARTICLING AT THE TYPE OF PLACEMENT YOU WERE INITIALLY SEEKING?

Litigation was definitely my objective. However, I didn't know a litigation boutique would be where I'd end up articling. I'm very grateful for how things turned out.

DESCRIBE THE ROLE NETWORKING PLAYED IN FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

Networking really is KEY. Think back to all of your professional and non-professional experiences. Identify all the individuals developed a good working relationship and reach out to them. Leave no stone unturned. Ultimately, those who know and trust you will be more likely to help and recommend you. You'll never know where a contact will lead and it never hurts to reach out. Just make sure to triple check all your correspondence for errors and typos!

DID INTERVIEWS LOOK DIFFERENT THROUGH THE FORMAL RECRUIT VS. OFF THE BEATEN PATH?

The formal recruit was virtual. The interviews I secured outside of the formal recruit were all in person. I found this made a big difference. They were also quite a bit longer. Otherwise, the questions and topics of conversation were similar.

ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

Consider ditching the standard cover letter format. It may or may not work for you - but the moment I made my cover letter simple, short, and sweet, I received a lot more interest from employers. If you're cold emailing, you may even want to consider making your email into your cover letter by highlighting a few short points about yourself and what you can bring to the firm.



Anonymous Contributor

Place of employment: Government, provincial or municipal

Current Position: Articling student

DID YOU GO THROUGH THE OCI PROCESS? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

I did.

HOW DID YOU APPLY FOR ARTICLING PLACEMENTS? HOW DID YOU END UP FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

I told a few trusted mentors that I had struck out in OCIs and they advised me and let me know about any jobs they heard about. I set up job alerts for "articling student" on LinkedIn & Indeed. I landed during the Ottawa formal articling recruit, initially I only applied to firms but then decided to apply to government on a whim. In the end I really enjoyed the recruit process with my ultimate employer and accepted their offer.

DID YOU END UP ARTICLING AT THE TYPE OF PLACEMENT YOU WERE INITIALLY SEEKING?

No, initially I was really focused on private practice. After interviewing for some public sector jobs I became more interested in pursuing that option.

DESCRIBE THE ROLE NETWORKING PLAYED IN FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

I didn't network specifically for my placement, but I still think networking is a huge tool just for getting used to talking to lawyers and carrying an engaging conversation.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

Ultimately things will work out. If you don't land in the formal recruit, you'll find something else - I know it can feel demoralizing, but I promise that job is waiting for you somewhere, as long as you keep putting your best foot forward.



Anonymous Contributor

Place of employment: Boutique firm,

Toronto/large city

Current Position: Articling student

DID YOU GO THROUGH THE OCI PROCESS? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Yes. I went through the OCI experience during 2020. To put it bluntly, this was (1) an inefficient process for securing articles (for both student and employer alike) and (2) an emotionally draining experience. The OCI experience - receiving 20 minutes to "wow" a potential employer - is inherently based on the bias of the employer. I think it disproportionately plays to individuals who have a number of privileges and overlooks talented and strong candidates, simply because they do not adhere to the culture of what the OCI experience attracts.

HOW DID YOU APPLY FOR ARTICLING PLACEMENTS? HOW DID YOU END UP FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

I went through the formal articling recruit and did not secure a position. I ended up interning at the current firm I am at, and they offered me a position.

DESCRIBE THE ROLE NETWORKING PLAYED IN FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

Absolutely critical. I secured my articling position based off the kindness and generosity of the people I networked with.

DID INTERVIEWS LOOK DIFFERENT THROUGH THE FORMAL RECRUIT VS. OFF THE BEATEN PATH?

Yes. The formal recruit was just that - "formal". Traditional interviewing style, yet virtual. I found it difficult to establish genuine rapport online. It was hard to get a feel of the employer, and I'm sure, likewise for them.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

Articling is just the final step to completing the law degree and obtain licensure. It doesn't make or break you as a person or lawyer. I think it is important to emphasize that it can be just as temporary as you'd like it to be. It does not "set the foundation" for the rest of your career. It is a stepping stone, a means to an end, to getting licensed. Ultimately, it is 8 - 10 months of an internship in which you can be empowered to learn what it is you dis/like about your placement, and in its culmination, you will be better informed about your next steps.



David Y.

Place of employment: Full-service firm, Toronto, Macdonald Sager LLP

Current Position: Summer law student

DID YOU GO THROUGH THE OCI PROCESS? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

I did apply to various law firms through the OCI process and was unsuccessful.

HOW DID YOU APPLY FOR ARTICLING PLACEMENTS? HOW DID YOU END UP FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

I summered at Macdonald Sager and towards the middle of the term, I was offered an articling placement.

DID YOU END UP ARTICLING AT THE TYPE OF PLACEMENT YOU WERE INITIALLY SEEKING?

Yes. I sought an articling placement at a full-service firm that offered both litigation and corporate/commercial work. In law school, I had an interest in litigation but having a finance degree, I wanted to gain some more exposure to corporate work. Having completed rotations in both practice areas, I am confident that I want to pursue a career in litigation.

DESCRIBE THE ROLE NETWORKING PLAYED IN FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

“Without networking, it would have been impossible to secure the summer position at Macdonald Sager. Thinking back, once the OCI process had concluded, I felt that I was a failure for not having secured a job. It was difficult to reconcile the feeling of joy for my friends who had gotten amazing positions with the feeling of ineptitude and isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly compounded this feeling of isolation.

It is important to remember that you are not alone. So many of your peers have gone through the exact same OCI process, were unsuccessful, but have secured excellent opportunities. I reached out to several of my upper year colleagues and asked for the best approach forward.

The best advice I received was not to remain idle or tread water. This is a process and will largely be self-driven.

I continually refined my application materials with the help of my mentors and invested considerable time in tailoring my cover letter to the individual firms. Networking provided the opportunity to speak knowledgeably about the firm’s practice areas and culture in my cover letters.

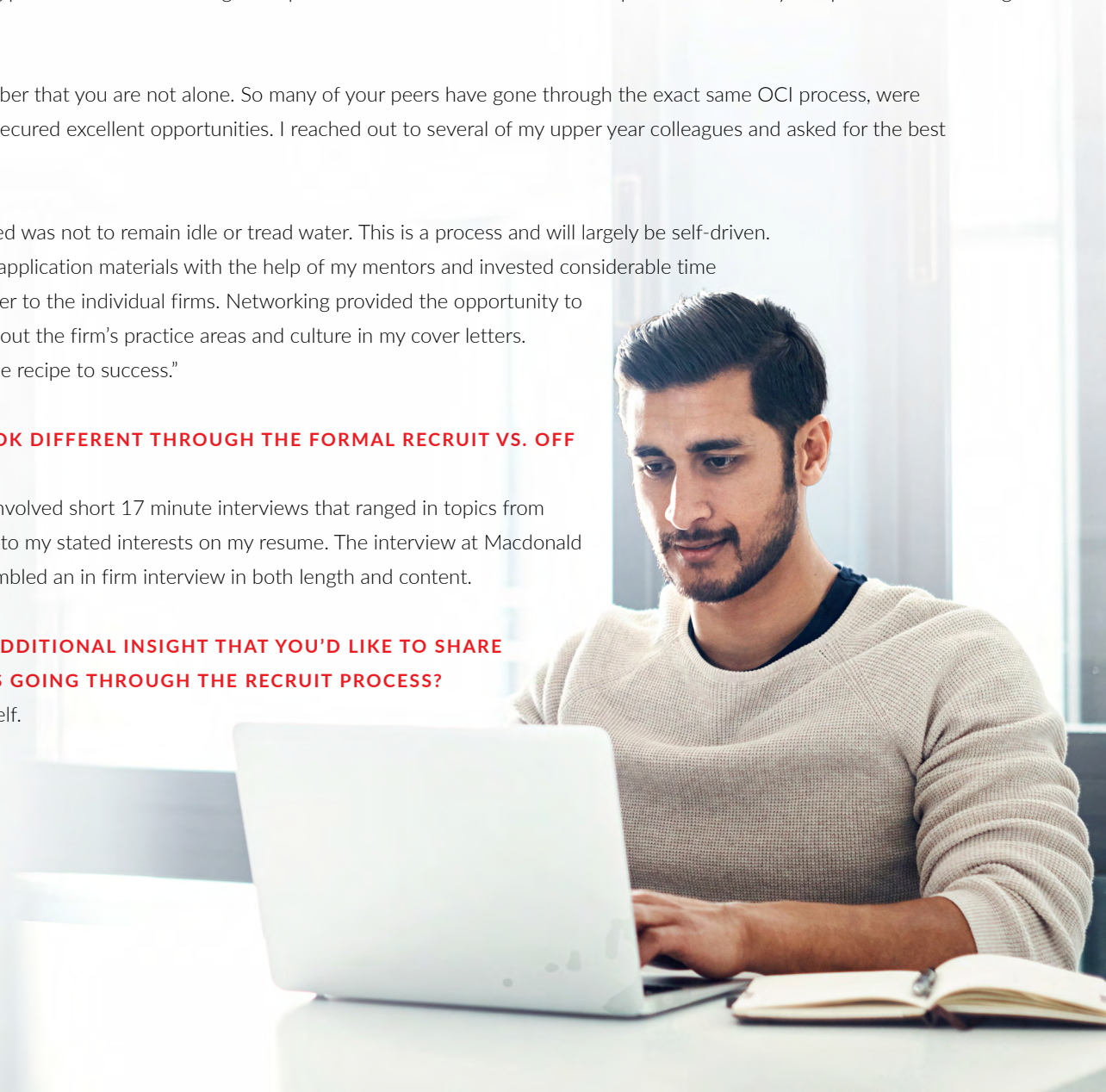
I believe that this was the recipe to success.”

DID INTERVIEWS LOOK DIFFERENT THROUGH THE FORMAL RECRUIT VS. OFF THE BEATEN PATH?

Yes. The formal recruit involved short 17 minute interviews that ranged in topics from the firm’s practice areas to my stated interests on my resume. The interview at Macdonald Sager more closely resembled an in firm interview in both length and content.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

Be honest and be yourself.



Shaniqwa T.

Place of employment: Full-service firm, Stewart McKelvey LLP

Current Position: Incoming articling clerk

DID YOU GO THROUGH THE OCI PROCESS? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Yes, and the OCI process is something you have to prepare for and is an emotional roller coaster that is filled with ups and downs felt in a short period of time.

HOW DID YOU APPLY FOR ARTICLING PLACEMENTS? HOW DID YOU END UP FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

School career development office listing and career fair network connections.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

You have something to offer firms just as much as they have something to offer you!

Be confident in yourself and be yourself! Its stressful but you got it!

Denis I.

Place of employment: Boutique firm, Toronto/large city,

Nanua & Ioffe Lawyers

Current Position: Managing Partner

DESCRIBE THE ROLE NETWORKING PLAYED IN FINDING YOUR ARTICLING PLACEMENT?

The only reason I had an articling position was because I was networking and meeting new people. I did not go through OCIs and I never interviewed anywhere other than with the people I networked with during law school and beforehand.

ANY ADDITIONAL INSIGHT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE OR OFFER STUDENTS GOING THROUGH THE RECRUIT PROCESS?

I always felt it was important to find more contacts and connect with people that are doing what I would like to do one day with my career. Every experience counts, every person you meet can potentially impact your life in different ways.



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Law Firm Interview Tip Sheet – Know the Firm You're Interviewing With

You've landed an interview with your dream firm. As part of your preparation you may be considering questions you will be asked. Questions like "Why are you interested in this firm?". You need an intelligent, well thought-out response – something that will differentiate you from the next candidate. Learn how to prepare conversation points and responses around frequently cited cases from the firm you're interviewing with.

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