

Deciding Whether to Split Your Summer

Many Columbia Law School students will pursue careers that involve both the public and private sectors. While in law school, you have numerous opportunities to explore both sectors, including through summer employment. This might mean you spend one summer in the public sector and one in the private. Alternatively, some students choose to split their 2L summer employment between two employers—most often, a law firm followed by a public interest or government employer. When we refer to split summers, we generally mean 2L summer; we strongly discourage 1L summer splits.

The decision to split your 2L summer is nuanced and individualized—there is no “one-size-fits-all” answer to whether to split or what kind of split to pursue. The decision is extraordinarily complicated, and may have implications for your future employment. You should meet with advisers from the [Office for Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers](#) (PI/PS Office) and the [Office of Private Sector Careers](#) (OPSC) to discuss whether a split summer makes sense for you and, if so, how to conduct your search.

Types of Splits

Firm-Sponsored Split: Private and Public Sectors

The firm funds you for the whole summer. You spend at least half your summer at the firm and a number of weeks at a public interest employer. Your firm funding is intended to cover both your work at the firm and your unpaid public interest work. Each firm’s program is slightly different. Some hire a class of summer associates and then allow them to apply for a sponsored split; others handle it differently.

Student-Initiated Split: Private and Public Sectors

You secure a summer associate position with a firm and then request to split the summer with a public interest employer. The firm pays you while you are working there, but you fund the rest of the summer, since public interest work is typically unpaid. Usually, this kind of split requires you to work more than 10 weeks of your summer. Market forces may limit firms’ willingness to allow a split.

Student-Initiated Split: All Private Sector

It is highly unusual to split between two firms, as most require seven or eight weeks of work and prefer an early summer start date, although a two-firm split is an option in the Texas market. More often, students split between two offices of the same firm, occasionally with a stint in a foreign office.

Pros and Cons of Splitting Your Summer

All of the following pros and cons are important to consider.

A split can allow you to:

- Explore two different options to really get a sense of your best fit.
- Make money to help pay for the public interest half of your summer, which is often unpaid.
- Experience two geographic locations.
- Receive greater variety in substantive work.
- Increase the breadth of experience on your resume.
- Increase your networking contacts.

However, a split summer may:

- Reduce your chances at getting your first-choice placements if you can only be there half the summer. Many employers will not consider splits.
- Result in receiving less interesting or substantial assignments.
- Provide less opportunity to get to know either employer's work, culture, your "fit" there, etc.
- Provide fewer opportunities to get to know the lawyers you work with (and those in the field more broadly) or to cultivate mentors.
- Offer less opportunity to "prove" yourself, which could affect the quality of your references and your chances at a fellowship sponsorship or job offer.
- Make it harder to build a strong public interest resume.
- Lead some employers to question your actual interest in their work.
- Cause you to miss components of established summer programs (social events, brown bags, speakers, getting to know other interns/associates, doing pro bono work at the firm, etc.).
- Present potential conflicts of interest.
- Be difficult to fund. Note that if you work in the private sector for 21 days or more during the summer, you are not eligible to receive Columbia Summer Funding/Human Rights Internship Program funding for the public interest portion of your summer.

Logistics of a Split Summer

- Generally, for a student-initiated split, you should secure the firm position first. (Firm-sponsored splits usually have specific application processes.)
- Do not discuss your interest in a split summer until you receive an offer from a firm.
- Once you receive the firm's offer, but before you accept, and after checking the firm's split summer policy in the NALP Directory and speaking with [OPSC](#), you may inquire with the firm about splitting your summer with a public interest or government employer.
- If the firm is amenable to a split, work with a [PI/PS Office adviser](#) to plan your approach for finding a public sector placement.
- Public interest and government employers have been open to splits on a case-by-case basis, although some do not allow it because they require interns to work a full summer.
- Your [PI/PS Office adviser](#) can provide input on your public interest cover letter, including whether to mention your interest in a split summer.

Conclusion

For some students, a split summer is an ideal choice for 2L summer employment, but the decision needs to be carefully considered in conjunction with advisers from [OPSC](#) and [PI/PS Office](#).