

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 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 summer is nuanced and individualized—there is no “one-size-fits-all” answer to whether to split or what kind of split to pursue. This extraordinarily complicated decision has implications for your future employment. You should meet with Social Justice Initiatives (SJI) and Office of Career Services (OCS) advisers to discuss whether a split summer makes sense for you and, if it does, how to conduct your search.

Types of Splits

There are two primary ways to split a summer. Below, we discuss the logistics of each.

In a **firm-sponsored split**, the firm funds you for the whole summer. You spend at least half your summer at the firm and several weeks at a public interest employer. Your firm funding is intended to cover 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.

In a **student-initiated split**, you secure a summer associate position with a firm and then negotiate 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. 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. Additionally, it is highly unusual to split between two firms, as most require 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, often with one stint in a foreign office.

Pros and Cons of Splitting Your Summer

The following pros and cons are important to consider.

On the pro side, 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 second half of your summer.

- Experience two geographic locations.
- Receive greater variety in substantive work.
- Increase the breadth of experience on your resume.
- Increase your networking contacts.

On the con side, a split summer may:

- Reduce your chances at getting your first-choice placements if you can only be there half the summer. Many employers won't even consider it.
- Provide less opportunity to get to know either employers' work, culture, your "fit" there, etc.
- Provide less opportunity 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 public interest employers to question your commitment to public interest and firm employers your commitment to a career at the firm.
- Result in receiving less interesting work.
- Cause you to miss 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. Split summers are ineligible for Columbia Summer Funding and the Human Rights Internship Program.

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). Once you receive an offer (but before you accept it) and check the firm's split summer policy in the NALP Directory, you may inquire about splitting your summer with a public interest or government employer. Do not discuss your interest in a split summer until you receive an offer from a firm. If the firm is amenable to a split, seek out 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 them because they require interns to work a full 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 OCS and SJI.

Resources

[OCS Survey of EIP employers](#) regarding their split-summer policies

[NALP Directory of firm split-summer policies](#)

Lists of firm-sponsored splits published by [PSJD.org](#) and [Yale Law School](#)