

The JD Advantage: Rethinking Legal Careers 3 min read

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potential benefits for law graduates, and the supplementary skill sets that JDs bring to these positions.

What Are JD Advantage Careers?

JDA roles span various sectors, including healthcare, technology, finance, government, business, and nonprofits. They leverage core law school skills like critical analysis, persuasive writing, and strategic thinking. However, JDA job titles vary widely, which can make them harder to identify for students seeking these opportunities. Examples include compliance officer, policy analyst, risk advisor, public affairs manager, title examiner, cybersecurity specialist, and third-party manager. To identify these roles, resources like NALP's JD Advantage Guide and O*NET Online are valuable tools.

In fields such as tax, healthcare, and intellectual property, where expertise in both law and a specialized subject matter is critical, second career students are particularly desirable. Their ability to perform high-level work with minimal additional training sets them apart. Less experienced candidates can also excel by leveraging unique skill sets. For instance, students with backgrounds in economics or statistics may excel in risk management, while those with customer service experience may thrive in operations, human resources, or negotiation roles.

Traditionally, law school graduates have pursued careers as lawyers, practicing in courtrooms or corporate offices.

However, the legal profession has evolved, and law schools now equip students with valuable skills that extend beyond traditional practice, opening doors to diverse career opportunities.

For those exploring options outside of becoming a lawyer, JD Advantage (JDA) roles

offer a compelling alternative. These positions, sometimes referred to as non-traditional roles, often do not require a law degree.

JDA roles emphasize the value of the skills acquired during legal training, even if the degree itself is not a prerequisite. JD Preferred positions specifically prioritize candidates with a law degree, *often making it a hiring criterion*. This article will explore common JDA roles, their

JDA careers often appeal to students seeking refined interests, greater work-life balance, or alternatives to traditional legal practice. These positions can resemble in-house roles, offering stable hours, long-term growth potential, and collaborative environments. Additionally, they often provide exposure to various organizational divisions, enhancing versatility and career development.

Insights from JD Professionals

Conversations with current JD professionals thriving in nontraditional JDA roles reveal a consistent theme: success often hinges on a distinct skill set tailored to modern organizational needs. Brandon Cooper, Vice President of Technology Policy Governance at Citibank, and Jeff Cox, Director of Global Content Marketing at vLex, share their insights on excelling in JDA careers.

Cooper emphasizes the importance of understanding business organizations and their structures. “A stronger grasp of the roles, rules, and ethics within private, public, and nonprofit entities provides JD graduates with a competitive edge,” he explains. Critical skills include communication, presentation, and proficiency in tools like Excel, PowerPoint, and analytical reporting. Additionally, exposure to compliance, risk management, governance, and audit principles can be a significant advantage.

Cox highlights complementary skills such as project management, public speaking, critical thinking, problem-solving, and legal writing. “JD graduates have a wealth of opportunities within legal operations, legal technology, and legal marketing that they are well-positioned to attain and succeed in,” Cox notes.

This article aims to empower advisors, career coaches, and counselors with valuable insights to guide their students and alumni in navigating JD Advantage careers.

Transitioning into these roles requires strategic preparation. Cox recommends exploring organizations such as CLOC ([Corporate Legal Operations Consortium](#)), ILTA ([International Legal Technology Association](#)), and LMA ([Legal Marketing Association](#)). Building certifications in project management (e.g., Six Sigma, Agile), compliance, or data analytics can further enhance marketability. Networking with mentors in JD-preferred fields is also critical.

By blending legal acumen with organizational expertise, JD graduates can excel in impactful roles. Both Cooper and Cox agree that success in these careers lies in leveraging the unique skills JD graduates bring to meet modern organizational needs.

Final Thoughts

A law degree unlocks opportunities in unconventional careers, encouraging graduates to merge their skills and passions with the foundations of legal training. JD Advantage roles inspire students to think beyond traditional practice, exploring fields like governance,

policy, and operations where legal expertise is a key asset.

This article aims to empower advisors, career coaches, and counselors with valuable insights to guide their students and alumni in navigating JD Advantage careers. By understanding these opportunities and the steps required for a successful transition, advisors can better support graduates in crafting fulfilling paths that align with their unique strengths and aspirations. +

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