

LATHAM & WATKINS VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ATTEMPTS TO BRING LIFE IN BIG LAW ONLINE

A new virtual experience program from Latham & Watkins allows future legal talent to get a taste of a lawyer's daily life without leaving their homes, potentially plugging old gaps in the law school-to-law firm pipeline.

BY FRANK READY

In a world of social distancing, law firm Latham & Watkins launched a new self-directed virtual experience program last month geared toward giving those unfamiliar with the legal industry or life at a big law firm experience working on simulated legal tasks in the realm of emerging companies.

But while a program allowing participants to complete their virtual experience without ever setting foot inside the firm may seem pandemic-friendly, the initiative was developed without the COVID-19 crisis in mind. Instead, Latham seems more interested in expanding its name recognition among the next wave of legal talent.

"This is definitely pre-COVID or COVID neutral. We've been thinking a lot in the firm about how best to begin conversations



and have meaningful interactions with future members of our law firm. And we've also realized that a lot of aspects of the conventional recruiting model are evolving with time," said Benjamin Potter, vice chairman of Latham's emerging companies practice.

The firm's entirely self-directed virtual experience program operates on InsideSherpa, an

open-access platform that simulates tasks designed to mirror real-world career experience. In the case of Latham, that means participants will be completing mock tasks such as devising term sheets for a series A financing or giving advice on optimizing the allocation of shares. The program isn't an internship in the "traditional sense" and participants are not

considered employees of the firm.

The program is “self-paced,” and open to all, with no application process involved. This means that any interested parties can register at InsideSherpa and engage with each project as suits their own schedule, with an overall estimated completion time of between five and six hours for the entire curriculum. Participants will be able to compare and contrast their own work with model solutions drawn up by the firm, with feedback provided by the simulated program. The prize for finishing the program is a personalized completion certificate.

Before the emerging companies module, the firm also launched virtual experience programs built around mergers and acquisitions work and white-collar defense and investigations. According to Potter, the goal is to give participants a meaningful idea of what it’s like to work at Latham and provide a quality of interaction that can be difficult to achieve in the typical law school-to-firm hiring pipeline.

Arranging those initial face-to-face introductions, for example,

can be fraught with logistical challenges, ranging from actually transporting lawyers to a law school campus to coordinating attorney and student schedules. A virtual experience would ideally provide an alternative forum for interested parties who want to get a sense of what life is like at a big firm.

“There are a ton of matching problems that can be eliminated right away, and it’s a nice way to introduce a person, a practice group, an office to a candidate that’s available online. It’s completely scalable and accessible at any time,” Potter said.

The hope is also to broaden the reach of the firm and the emerging companies’ practice by getting its name out to potential future job applicants from different geographies or backgrounds. Potter said that he hasn’t had much time to evaluate applicants yet, but some have already reached out directly to him with inquiries about the program.

“I definitely see evidence that we’re reaching the type of audience that we want and that type of audience is ideally a young lawyer who either has some

sort of business background and just is already excited about working in an entrepreneurial setting with early-stage companies,” Potter said.

To be sure, Latham isn’t the only entity in the legal space attempting to give interested parties a taste of their daily work online. The Georgia Latino Law Foundation announced last week that it would be launching a virtual judicial internship program for second-year law students.

Still, even the virtual world has its limits. Julie Crisp, vice chair of the recruiting committee at Latham, said the firm hopes to continue rolling out virtual experience programs across different practice areas, but doesn’t foresee in-person experiences or contact disappearing from the internship or hiring process any time soon.

“It’s not intended to replicate an in-person experience or in-person on-the-job training, but simply to expand on that and augment it,” Crisp said.

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