



Williams & Connolly LLP

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#2 – Associate Satisfaction



#2 – Litigation



#1 Washington, DC

#2 - NATIONWIDE OVERALL ASSOCIATE SATISFACTION

Slipping to No. 2 in overall satisfaction are the competitive lawyers at Williams & Connolly. But is second banana really all that shabby? Hardly. "I love it at Williams & Connolly," exclaims one loyal associate. "By and large, attorneys are exceptional in both social and intellectual terms. This makes for a very stimulating work environment." "I feel like I continue to learn something new every year," concludes another associate, who with seven years of experience behind him should be much more cynical. While they're thrilled with the "diverse and friendly" culture, their free tickets to D.C. and Baltimore sporting events, the time partners take to "get to know associates," and the firm hangout, aka the "dining room where everyone gathers for free lunch," it's the passion for and quality of the work that keeps these associates coming back for more each day. "Here's my description of the firm's culture," explains an objective insider: "'Love to litigate, need to litigate.' The lawyers at this firm love what they do almost to the point of addiction (in the good way) and are very good at it."

THE STATS

No. of attorneys: 212

No. of offices: 1

Summer associate offers: Because most summer associates have judicial clerkships, formal offers are only extended after the clerks receive permission from judges to request offers.

Typically, all summer associates who request offers are welcomed for permanent employment.

Managing Partner: By committee

Hiring Partner: Glenn J. Pfadenhauer

EMPLOYMENT CONTACT

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RANKING METHODOLOGY

In spring 2005, Vault surveyed over 15,000 associates at 156 law firms and asked them to rank the top law firms. We took these scores to calculate our prestige rankings. For our quality of life rankings, we asked associates to rate their own firms on issues such as treatment by partners, training, selectivity, etc., and then scored the firms against each other.

Williams & Connolly LLP

THE SCOOP

If you're headed for a courtroom, Williams & Connolly is the firm you want by your side. The firm's prominent litigation department has been scoring significant victories in courtrooms for decades, and its star-studded roster of clients is steadily increasing.

Playing politics

As a firm, Williams & Connolly's roots go deep into the practice of litigation. The firm was founded in 1967 by one of the greatest trial lawyers of the time, Edward Bennett Williams. Williams was a colorful figure who argued often before the Supreme Court, and influenced great changes in criminal law. After he founded the firm with fellow Georgetown law student Paul Connolly in Washington, D.C., Williams quickly became considered a giant among lawyers. A gifted orator and zealous advocate, Williams was often considered theatrical in the courtroom, but there is no denying that he was one of the most successful litigators of his age.

Over the years, Williams & Connolly has taken both plaintiff and defendant causes, and the firm's clients range from powerful individuals to international corporations to numerous pro bono clients. The firm only has one office, in Washington, D.C., but this enables them access to many political clients. Perhaps most notably, the firm has represented former President Bill Clinton and U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton since 1992, including during the Whitewater investigation and the president's impeachment proceedings.

Speak out!

When it comes to high-profile First Amendment clients and cases, very few firms can match Williams & Connolly. The list itself reads like a Who's Who of the media world: The Washington Post, Newsweek, ABC, NBC, CBS, News Corp., Fox Television, Twentieth Century Fox, AOL Time Warner, CNN, The Walt Disney Co., Paramount Pictures, MGM Studios, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Tribune Company, Simon & Schuster, the Motion Picture Association of America and the Recording Industry Association of America.

May it please the court

Plaintiff or defendant, civil or criminal – Williams & Connolly does not discriminate when it comes to litigation. The firm has successfully defended such luminaries as Henry Cisneros, Oliver North, Don King and U.S. Congressman Harold Ford in criminal cases. The firm has also

represented plaintiffs in some significant actions, including a suit representing 9,000 Department of Justice attorneys seeking \$500 million in unpaid overtime.

Nonetheless, as with many large firms, it's Williams & Connolly's civil defendants that bring in the big bucks for the firm – not that the firm's attorneys don't earn it. The firm defended one of the nation's largest auto retailers, Auto Nation, against thousands of plaintiffs who accused the defendant of fooling them into buying inflated warranties. Williams & Connolly managed to secure a dismissal of all claims and saved its clients millions.

Variety is the spice of life

The firm handles a variety of litigation, including patent litigation. It currently represents Par Pharmaceutical in a patent case involving latanoprost, a leading medication for the topical treatment of glaucoma. The firm has also represented such pharmaceutical giants as Bayer and Wyeth.

GETTING HIRED

Clerks abound

"It is extremely difficult to get hired at Williams & Connolly," says one source. Most associates agree. In addition to "excellent grades," most believe that "a good clerkship is almost essential." Observes one insider, "There are Supreme Court clerks at every turn." However, according to another associate, clerkships are no longer a critical factor: "You used to need a federal clerkship and law review to get hired here, but that standard is lowering as the firm grows in size." To be seriously considered for a position, "a successful applicant needs to demonstrate a real desire to do litigation, as that is the key cultural prerequisite here." One attorney notes that while "grades alone won't get you in," there's no question that "poor grades will probably keep you out." The academic criteria aren't set in stone, however, as "there is some give to this requirement if you have reasonably good grades matched with superior communication and interpersonal skills."

To get a full-time position, it helps greatly to have been a summer associate at the firm. That's not always easy to achieve. Nevertheless, those who don't get the summer associate gig shouldn't despair, as one attorney states that "even if you get rejected for a summer position, you should apply again for a full-time position."

OUR SURVEY SAYS

"Love to litigate, need to litigate."

Life at Williams & Connolly can get intense, but most associates praise the firm's culture, calling it "an unusually tightly-knit place." Though the firm has "a highly professional atmosphere," and most attorneys "tend to be adults who prefer to go home to their families at the end of the day," most attorneys agree that "lawyers socialize, [and] not just peers with peers." The firm "has frequent happy hours, and the firm has monthly attorney socials." For the most part, the culture attracts a wide variety of personalities. "The culture here is diverse and friendly," says a satisfied associate, "with different sorts of people from different backgrounds all working together."

No incentive to bill?

When it comes to compensation, Williams & Connolly associates generally agree that "the base salaries here are at the top of the scale" and often exceed the market rate. However, the firm gives "no hours-based bonus." Far from complaining about the lack of a bonus, many associates feel that this "is a perfect setup." Why? Because since there is no bonus, "there is no financial incentive to bill unnecessary hours." "We prefer no bonuses," says one associate, "because there is less pressure to bill." Most associates agree that the lack of bonuses means that "our higher compensation is assured and we never have to think about hours billed." It makes sense, therefore, that there is "no explicit billable hours requirement" at the firm.

Lots o' partner love

Sources tell us the relationship between partners and associates just couldn't be better at Williams & Connolly. Associates feel that "the partners here have an extraordinary level of respect for associates" and "generally treat associates as valued colleagues rather than 'fungible billing units.'" This may be because most partners keep cool heads in the face of a crisis and "don't seem to yell or curse at associates." "I've only had one partner not treat me with respect," says an associate, adding that "that's been over a five-year period." Associates seem to have no limit to the praise they give to partners. They "value our opinions," and many "won't make a move on a case until they consult the associates that they are working with." One of the most praised elements of the firm is the level of responsibility given to associates – something that many attorneys see as "the surest mark of [partners'] respect for their associate colleagues."