

Williams & Connolly LLP

2017 TOP 100 LAW FIRM HIGHLIGHTS



#1 WASHINGTON, DC

OVERALL

#7 Best to Work For

PRACTICE AREA

- #1 White Collar Defense
- #2 Appellate Litigation

QUALITY OF LIFE

- #1 Associate/Partner Relations
- #1 Business Outlook
- #1 Integration of Laterals/Clerks
- #2 Career Outlook
- #2 Selectivity
- #2 Satisfaction
- #3 Substantive Work
- #4 Firm Culture
- #4 Diversity for Veterans

THE SCOOP

Relatively tiny Williams & Connolly has resisted globalization and continues to hold its own against firms ten times its size by following a basic mantra: keep it simple. The firm's 250+ attorneys focus almost exclusively on litigation from a lone office in Washington, DC, positioning Williams & Connolly as a go-to firm for politicians, celebrities, professional athletes, and even other law firms.

A Short, Illustrious History

Legendary litigator-to-the-stars Edward Bennett Williams teamed with Paul Connolly, a former student of his at Georgetown Law, to open shop in 1967. The fledgling firm soon boasted a client list that included the biggest names in Hollywood, politics, and media—a pattern that has continued over time with representation of—among others—John Hinckley Jr., Oliver North, Bill and Hillary Clinton during the Whitewater and Lewinsky years, and Senator Ted Stevens in a case the firm famously succeeded in having thrown out for prosecutorial misconduct.

The personality cult built around Williams—Jimmy Hoffa's lawyer and one-time owner of the Washington Redskins and Baltimore Orioles—brought the firm attention and cemented its reputation as a Beltway go-to. But the firm isn't just about entertainment—it has political ties in high, high places: Elena Kagan, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, is a former associate of the firm. High-flying political connections aside, however, Williams & Connolly's bread-and-butter lies in its representation of such institutions as Google, Intel, UBS, Pfizer, General Electric, Bayer, Bank of America, Office Depot, Merck, 21st Century Fox, *The Washington Post*, Express Scripts, Mars, Samsung, AutoNation, CVS, Sony, Walt Disney, Eli Lilly, and Sprint.

Shoot for the Stars

Best known for handling high stakes, complex litigation, the firm has a thriving intellectual property practice ranging from pharmaceuticals to electronics, has presented oral argument to the Supreme Court six times in the last five years and serves as national coordinating counsel and trial counsel for large product liability cases. The firm also represents numerous law firms and accounting firms in professional responsibility and other litigation, including over time almost half of the AmLaw 100 and three of the top five accounting firms, making Williams & Connolly the firm that lawyers and other professionals seek out when the going gets rough.

Keeping with its individualist ethos, Williams & Connolly operates without strict departmental boundaries, allowing attorneys to bounce among any number of litigation areas and, thus, creating great flexibility within the firm. That said, successful associates tend to gravitate toward specific focal areas as they become more experienced, as is exemplified by partner

FIRM INFO

725 Twelfth Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 434-5000
www.wc.com

LOCATION

Washington, DC

PRACTICE AREAS

Accountant Liability • Administrative Law • Antitrust • Arbitration • Bankruptcy Litigation • Business Acquisition and Consolidation • Civil Litigation and Trial Practice • Class Action • Commercial Litigation • Congressional Investigations • Contracts • Corporate Governance and Compliance • Counseling for Private Company Formation, Non-Profits, Joint Ventures, LLCs • Credit Facilities • Criminal Defense and Government Investigations • Directors and Officers Liability • Economic Sanctions • Employment Litigation and Counseling • Employment Relationships, Counseling and Advisory Services • Environmental • Executive Compensation • False Claims Act and Qui Tam • FDA Regulation • Federal Programs and Government Contracts • Financial Services and Banking • First Amendment and Media • Foreign Corrupt Practices Act • Health Care Fraud • International Arbitration • International Litigation • Lawyer Liability • Patent Litigation • Products Liability, Torts, and Medicine • Professional Liability • Public Corruption • Real Estate • Representation of Authors, Former Government Officials and Television Correspondents, Anchors, and Producers • Securities Enforcement • Securities Litigation • Sports • Supreme Court and Appellate Litigation • Tax Controversy • Tax Planning • Trade Secrets • Trademark and Copyright • Transactions and Business Counseling • Unfair Competition, Trade Secrets and Restrictive Covenants

THE STATS

No. of Attorneys: 331

No. of Offices: 1

Summer Associate Offers (2016):*

**The firm says: "Because nearly all of our summer associates obtain 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."*

Executive Director: Jennifer Scott

Managing Partner: Kevin Hodges

Hiring Committee Chair: Daniel P. Shanahan

EMPLOYMENT CONTACT

Natasha M. Zech, Esq.
Director of Attorney Recruiting
and Development
(202) 434-5605
nzech@wc.com



Robert Barnett. In addition to litigating for corporate clients such as Deutsche Bank and Toyota, Barnett is one of the foremost representatives of non-fiction literary and television talent in the nation. He has represented the Clintons, Jordan's Queen Noor, Benazir Bhutto, Barack Obama, and Tony Blair on book deals. Barnett has also helped Katie Couric, Sam Donaldson, and CNN contributor Sanjay Gupta remain handsomely paid.

Big Base, No Bonus

As one might expect of a firm that plays by its own rules, Williams & Connolly's no-bonus compensation structure is a bit of an anomaly in the legal arena. The firm, however, endeavors to make up for the absence of stocking stuffers by routinely leading the pack in the race to pay first-year associates exorbitant sums of cash. In April 2015, Williams & Connolly increased its beginning salary again, this time to \$200,000.

IN THE NEWS

May 2016: How Appealing!

Williams & Connolly represented Bank of America in a recent Second Circuit appeal in which the court reversed a \$1.27 billion judgment against the bank, concluding that the government did not prove that a Bank of America unit had committed fraud when it sold packages of mortgage loans to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in the wake of the financial crisis. The court of appeals remanded the case with an order to enter judgment in favor of the Bank.

August 2015: Flash Boys

Williams & Connolly represented the NYSE in two sets of class actions lawsuits relating to high-frequency trading, a topic that has received wide public attention recently through Michael Lewis's book, *Flash Boys*. One alleged that the national securities exchanges violated the securities laws by allowing some customers advance access to market information, which those customers allegedly used to the detriment of the plaintiff-class. Following defendants' motion to dismiss, the court dismissed the case with prejudice in August 2015. The second class action made similar allegations under state law. In April 2015, the court granted defendants' motions to dismiss with prejudice.

May 2015: It's Not TV. It's HBO.

Williams & Connolly represented HBO as lead trial counsel in the first major defamation case to go to trial against a national television broadcaster in years. Mitre Sports, a major soccer ball manufacturer, brought this action against HBO, asserting that a segment on HBO's "Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel" falsely portrayed the company as using, or turning a blind eye to the use of, child labor in the manufacture of soccer balls in India. Mitre sought tens of millions in damages. After a four-week trial—and only five hours of deliberations—the jury returned a verdict in HBO's favor.

January 2015: Hack the Planet

Williams & Connolly was lead counsel for News Corp in the four-year U.S. DOJ investigation regarding the alleged bribery of public officials in London and the alleged interception of voicemail messages by its U.K. newspaper subsidiary, *News of the World*. In January 2015, DOJ notified Williams & Connolly that it was closing the investigation without bringing charges.

GETTING HIRED

Vault's Verdict: Gulp—get ready for one of the most selective hiring processes out there. Top grades from a top school are a given, but a federal clerkship plus a passion for litigation will help cinch the deal.

Hiring Process

- "The hiring process is a difficult one. W&C only interviews applicants with sterling credentials, but that alone will not get you an offer. W&C also places great emphasis on interviews and the personality of the applicant."
- "The firm looks for top candidates from elite schools with journal experience who are likely to get clerkships. Not everyone meets this description, but far and away most do. Beyond that, because the firm doesn't hire laterals but relies heavily on keeping people around, the firm really cares about intangibles such as whether someone would be good to work with. And this is in its soul a trial firm, so I imagine partners are looking for people who want to work hard and could hold up in court."
- "I believe this is probably in substantive terms the most difficult firm in the country to win an offer. The uniform brilliance of my colleagues is unparalleled, and I have worked for other employers that recruit the best qualified people alive."

Interview Questions

- "You will always be asked, 'Why W&C?' The firm is a unique place with a unique structure and culture. The most impressive candidates are the ones who have thought carefully about whether they would be a good fit at the firm and can convey why they think they would do well here."

Lateral Integration

- "The firm hires a large proportion of its incoming associates classes from clerkships (perhaps as many as half in some years), meaning there is a strong and cohesive effort to orient us and make sure we hit the ground running. Post-clerkship hires are treated no differently than returning summer associates."
- "Incoming classes are a mix of associates from clerkships, other firms, and fresh out of law school, so there is no feeling that you are out of step with a particular 'class.'"

OUR SURVEY SAYS

Vault's Verdict: The partnership at Williams & Connolly's doesn't need to brag, the associates do it for them—they rave about associate satisfaction, firm culture, associate/partner relations, substantive work, firm outlook, and realistic partnership prospects.

ASSOCIATE LIFE

Satisfaction

- “I really couldn't expect much more from an experience as a junior associate at a big law firm. The work has been substantive and interesting, my schedule has been (relatively) flexible, and I really feel that the partners are invested in seeing me develop skills and experience. I wouldn't want to be at any other firm.”
- “I came to W&C because I wanted to litigate fascinating cases that challenged me and reminded me why I love the law. On that front, the firm has delivered. Compared to peers at other firms, I am materially happier at my job, as measured by the quality of cases I'm working on, the responsibility I've been given as a relatively junior lawyer, and my treatment by partners and more senior associates.”
- “W&C is a great place to work. We get cutting-edge cases and significant responsibility early. The partners are usually great to work with, and have a strong interest in mentoring young associates. I think one of the best things about working at W&C, though, is the complete control associates have over their schedule and docket.”

Firm Culture

- “The firm feels, if not exactly like a family, then like a platoon. The sense across the entire firm is that we are on a mission together. We expect a lot from each other but also offer each other real friendship, mentorship, and personal and professional support.”
- “Although the firm feels pretty close-knit in many ways, it's not the place to come if you are looking for a ton of organized social events outside of work hours. I think most people prefer it that way, though. It makes it feel like they respect the fact that we have lives outside of the office.”
- “The firm is a fairly buttoned-down place, as you'd expect. But don't mistake that for unfriendly. For example, during my first several weeks here, people--partners, associates, and staff—who didn't recognize me made a point of stopping in the elevator or hall to introduce themselves and welcome me to the firm. On a more regular basis, for those who choose to go, the dining room is an excellent way to hang out with friends and to get to know your colleagues in a relatively informal setting. New associates are especially encouraged to make a habit of finding the 30 minutes or each day to eat there, instead of eating lunch in one's office.”

Associate/Partner Relations

- “Perhaps because of the low partner-to-associate ratio and the swelling ranks of junior partners, the associate/partner divide seems less like two castes than a continuum. That's a good thing. In my experience partners always treat associates with respect, giving them real work and investing in them to ensure they have the opportunity to grow their skills. As a junior associate, I sense that my input is valued and often I am given the opportunity to contribute to or lead key tasks or deliverables.”

- “Partners view associates as valued colleagues and even the most junior associates have direct access to the most senior partners. Decision-making within the partnership is a bit of a black-box, however, though they have made an effort to send more firm-wide emails announcing larger changes.”

HOURS/MONEY

Hours

- “I don't feel that the hours expectations are unreasonable. Because we use the free market system, attorneys have a lot of control over their own workload. This is definitely not a 'face-time' firm. Although sometimes people put in extra hours at night or on weekends when they are busy, working from home is almost always fine. Most people seem to leave the office at a reasonable hour.”
- “The firm keeps team sizes down, which increases the amount of substantive work associates get but can also raise the overall amount of hours. Lawyers at the firm also go to trial more often than most other BigLaw attorneys, which can create periods of long hours. But there is very little pressure to put in 'face-time,' and most partners are accommodating when it comes to shifting work around if one person gets overloaded.”
- “There's no pressure here to bill just to bill. The motto seems to be, “take as much time as you need to do something right.” The partners put a premium on excellent, thorough work product, so, if you're a Type A person as most lawyers are, you work hard because you want to succeed. There is no face time requirement. Because of the one-location nature of the firm, people are traveling too often for the firm to have a face-time requirement. You just work until you are proud of what you produce.”

Compensation

- “The incentives are in the right place—we don't have our compensation tied to some arbitrary billable hours requirement. The firm's model is to pay above the base market salary, and my understanding is that this means that junior associates in particular are paid well above market taking bonuses into account. Given how much money we are making in general, I would not trade a billable requirement for some bonus.”
- “The high-base, no-bonus approach makes planning easier and helps with cash flow (not to mention student loan refinancing). The benefits are extremely generous, including complete subsidization of a top-class health plan so that [associates] pay no premium at all.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Work Assignments

- “I do entirely substantive work and am given far more responsibility than associates at my level at our competitor firms. The opportunities I have been given to grow as a lawyer and learn to gradually take on increasingly complex work are a big part of why I am still at my firm when most of my law school classmates have already left private practice.”

- “The overwhelming majority of my work so far has been legal and substantive. Most of my work has involved research and writing, including first-drafting briefs at the trial through Supreme Court levels. My role in discovery has been to find ways to use key documents in our depositions.”

Training & Mentoring

- “Because of the promote-from-within culture, partners take an active interest in improving associates’ skills and showing us the ropes, leading to abundant mentoring and informal training. The culture of the firm has shied away from formal training in the past, but in 2016 the firm is starting a multiday trial training program to help associates hone standup skills.”
- “There are optional formal training sessions, but the rubber hits the road with informal mentoring, sponsorship, and training, which is superb.”

Career Outlook

- “Because Williams & Connolly only promotes from within, partnership is a real possibility here. For people that choose to leave, the exit opportunities are outstanding.”
- “I absolutely feel like partnership is a realistic possibility, which is especially impressive considering my part-time status. Most associates who leave go into government, in-house, or to a firm out of state. Rarely do associates leave for other DC firms.”
- “With one notable exception, every partner at the firm was an associate here. Not only do associates who want to make partner have a real shot at doing so, but every associate benefits from a culture where partners are made from within.”

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Pro Bono Commitment

- “The firm has several formal pro bono programs, which it views as offering associates valuable trial and appellate experience. Partners also have individual relationships with organizations and thus bring in pro bono cases of their own. All pro bono cases are treated like any other case—no effort or expense is spared to do what’s needed for the client.”
- “The firm strongly encourages pro bono work, particularly as a means of acquiring trial experience. The firm is very open to new pro bono projects, and focuses on those programs that help the local community.”
- “I have billed a significant number of pro bono hours over the course of my five years at the firm and the firm has always been very supportive of pro bono. Pro bono hours are treated the same as other billable hours and the firm provides the same level of supervision, mentoring, and support for associates on pro bono cases as on paying cases.”

Diversity Efforts

- “The maternity leave is fabulous—4 months paid and unlimited unpaid. Most associates take 6 months. The firm also announced a formal paternity leave policy of one month in the first six months after the baby is born. There are a few options for part-time schedules, but the most common is to drop to 80%. Some women do that by working fewer hours each day and some work four days a week—the firm is fine letting you decide what works best for your situation.”
- “The firm recognizes it hasn’t been proactive on diversity recruitment, retention, and mentoring in the past and is noticeably devoting resources to improving in these areas.”

OVERALL BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Outlook

- “As far as I can tell the firm never lacks work. Because we don’t have practice groups and attorneys are encouraged to practice in many areas of law, it’s easy to redeploy attorneys based on where the work is.”
- “Firm is very conservatively managed—no vanity offices in Newport Beach—which allowed us to weather prior downturns without any effect on associates (no layoffs).”
- “The general feeling around here is that the firm has always been on extremely solid ground.”

SUMMER PROGRAM

Social Scene

- “The summer class really jelled socially and the firm provided many firm-sponsored social events. On balance it’s probably less of a party summer than some firms and there are fewer fancy lunches, but the work is great, the firm is generous, and the other summers are the best part. Plus, the firm pays summers the first-year-associate rate, which is a nice extra boost in income.”
- “The summer program gave me a pretty good sense of what it would be like to work here as an associate. There was certainly plenty of social events, but it wasn’t overwhelming. I had a great experience.”

Training & Assignments

- “It was not all grind, but it also was not a three-month party. My teams took me in as a fellow member and had me perform real work that helped us out. I think I was on a client call during my first week.”
- “I got to spend my summer doing a lot of real, meaningful work, more so than anyone I have ever met did in their summer at any other firm.”

Associate Experience vs. Summer Expectations

- “Summering was fun, but actually working at the firm is so much more rewarding. It’s great to fully dive into cases and make greater contributions than I could as a summer. The work has remained very interesting but my role is larger. I’m happier as an associate than as a summer.”