Guide to Accepting & Declining Job Offers
# ACCEPTING & DECLINING JOB OFFERS

## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Post-graduate Employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Law Clerk/Summer Associate/Intern Positions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. TIMING</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Consider the Offer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Requesting Additional Time</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Marquette Law School’s Guidelines for the Timing of Offers and Decisions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. ACCEPTING A JOB OFFER</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Call or Write?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The Acceptance Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Do NOT Rescind</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. DECLINING A JOB OFFER</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Call or Write?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Tips for Declining a Job Offer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The Decline Communication</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: Sample Communications</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: Marquette University Law School Recruiting Policies for Employers</td>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Post-graduate Employment.

Ideally, when an employer extends an offer for post-graduation employment, the offer will include a written document or email message detailing salary and benefits. Some employers send written offers as PDF email attachments, and some use the body of the email itself to serve as a written offer. Many employers, particularly smaller law firms, may be less formal in extending offers and provide only a verbal offer of employment. It is appropriate for you to request that the employer provide a written offer. If you feel uncomfortable making this request, you should at minimum email the employer a statement of your understanding of the offer and the terms to which you are agreeing.

B. Law Clerk/Summer Associate/Intern Position.

It is most common that employers will not provide a written offer for law clerk/summer associate/intern positions. The exceptions are often larger law firms and corporations. These employers will email written offers. When accepting a student position that does not include a written offer, it is recommended that you confirm in an email your understanding of the terms of the position relating to start date, expected hours worked, and compensation.

II. TIMING

A. Consider the Offer.

An offer of employment for a post-graduate position requires you to make a thoughtful decision. Decisions are not nearly as weighty when accepting a law clerk or temporary position. When given an offer for an attorney or professional position, you do not need to accept the position immediately. Instead, take time to assess how the opportunity fits your immediate and longer-term career goals. If you have more than one offer, consider which position provides the best launch point for you to move towards achieving your career aspirations. Contemplate and compare the quality of mentoring, practice area exposure, opportunities for interesting work, and clients served among other criteria. Certainly, compensation and location are additional factors to consider.

Draft questions that you have for the employer regarding the offer. It is important that you have your questions answered before committing to a part-time or full-time job. If you are given an offer and you know it is the position you want, and you feel you are well informed regarding salary, benefits, work expectations, and responsibilities, you can accept immediately. If you are not prepared to decide when the offer is extended, you should express enthusiasm for the position and the employer and then inquire as to the deadline for accepting or declining the offer. Always acknowledge receipt of an offer within 24 hours of it being received or extended.

B. Requesting Additional Time.

You have the option of requesting additional time to consider an offer, although understand that employers are not obligated to grant such requests. In addition, some employers will express disappointment when you ask to have additional time. Small law firms, for example, often state a strong preference for students making decisions within a few days.
If/when you request additional time to consider an offer, do not seek career counsel from the offering employer and do not overshare why you need time. While it is appropriate to inform an employer you would like to finish your already scheduled interviews, it is not appropriate to explain that you are waiting to hear from other employers, to share the timelines of other employers, or to share that you need to confer with your parents. Employers do not care about your job search; they care about hiring the best candidate. And the “best candidate” is in part the individual who is really excited about the opportunity, not the individual who needs three weeks to consider the opportunity in order to leverage the offer with preferred employers.

If you are active in a job search and have future interviews scheduled and/or are waiting to hear from employers with whom you have already interviewed, you may find yourself in a quandary of needing to accept or decline an offer before you know all your options. In this instance, we strongly encourage you to meet with a member of the CPC’s professional staff. They will walk you through options and etiquette. We do not recommend relying on guidance from family, friends, or individuals outside the legal community.


The members of the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) – law schools and legal employers – developed Principals for Fair and Ethical Recruitment Process that provide “suggested best practices designed to ensure the highest standards of professionalism, fairness, transparency, and non-discrimination.” These principals guide law school recruiting policies – including those of Marquette Law School – that pertain to employers seeking to recruit law students. Marquette Law School’s Recruiting Policies for Employers, which are set forth in Appendix B of this guide, are designed to create an environment in which students have sufficient time to make informed career decisions and employers can rely on receiving responses within a reasonable time. We encourage you to review and familiarize yourself with these standards. Note that while many legal employers abide by these policies—particularly large law firms,—employers are not obligated to do so. NALP’s guidelines are recommendations only.

III. ACCEPTING A JOB OFFER

A. Call or Write?

While you certainly can accept an offer by telephone or in-person, an acceptance should always be confirmed in writing. It is most common for employers to communicate written offers through email, and you should respond in kind with your written acceptance.

B. The Acceptance Communication.

Even though you secured the job, it is still important that you impress the employer. Doing so reaffirms that they made the right choice. The acceptance letter or email communication should be brief, consisting of three short paragraphs. See Appendix A for sample acceptance letters.

First Paragraph. Express gratitude and confirm your acceptance of the offer with enthusiasm.

Second Paragraph. Confirm relevant employment details such as salary, start date, specific employer office, housing matters, etc.

Third Paragraph. Reiterate your enthusiasm for the job and note that you look forward to working with the employer.
C. **Do NOT Rescind.**

**It is NOT appropriate to accept an offer and to then continue with your job search.** Once you have accepted a job offer, you should withdraw from all outstanding interviews and inform other employers for which you remain a candidate that you no longer wish to be considered for the position. Professional circles are small and memories long. It is unprofessional and unethical to accept a job offer with the intent of continuing an active job search and rescinding your acceptance should you receive a different offer.

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Upon accepting an offer, you **must** conclude your active job search—stop submitting applications, cancel outstanding job interviews, and inform other employers that you are removing your candidacy from consideration.

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**IV. DECLINING A JOB OFFER**

A. **Call or Write?**

As with acceptances, it is appropriate and professional to decline an offer by telephone. You should follow the call with an email confirming your intent to decline. This is particularly important if you are not able to speak with someone and find yourself leaving a voice message.

B. **Tips for Declining a Job Offer.**

When declining an offer, keep the following in mind:

- Avoid saying anything negative about the employer, even if you had a negative experience interviewing.

- If you choose to decline an offer because another offer is a better fit for your interests, strengths, and goals, it is fine to state this, though it is unnecessary. The best approach is to be grateful and to not share specific insights into your reasoning and decision making. Providing details invites the employer to counter your rationale and, in some cases, even criticize your decision.

- You need not state which offer you accepted, though you may do so if you wish.

- Be professional and courteous; the legal community is small, and you may find yourself in the future working for the employer you are declining.

C. **The Decline Communication.**

Only 2-3 brief paragraphs are necessary for the purposes of a decline letter/email. Sample decline letters are provided in *Appendix A*. It is rare to mail a hard copy letter declining a job. Most common is a phone conversation and/or email communication. When sending an email, it should be structured as follows:

**First Paragraph.** Thank the employer for the offer and the opportunity.
Second Paragraph (or part of first paragraph). State that you are declining the offer. Depending on the course of the conversation, you may tactfully and briefly explain in general terms why you are declining, but it’s not necessary to do so.

Your explanation should be no more than a simple statement that you accepted an offer that was a better fit or that your job search has gone in a different direction. If appropriate, consider reiterating your interest in the employer.

Third Paragraph. Express your appreciation for their interest in you.
Sample Acceptance Email:

Dear Mx. Williams:

I am writing to confirm my acceptance of your offer of employment for summer 2024 per our telephone conversation on November 26. I am delighted to be joining Hill, Meagher & Trask.

As we discussed, I will plan to work from May 23 through August 12, 2024, at a salary of $2,800.00 per week. Also, thank you for agreeing to connect me with your colleague who assists summer associates identify housing in the Atlanta area. I look forward to arranging a time to speak with her.

I am excited to work with you and the attorneys at HM&T. I am grateful for the offer, and I intend to take full advantage of the development opportunities provided to me as a summer associate.

Sincerely,

Dika Patel

Sample Acceptance Letter:

October 14, 2023

Attorney Mark L. Jacobson
Gilbert & Jacobson, P.C.
455 E. Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 300
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Attorney Jacobson:

Thank you for the offer of employment as an associate attorney in Gilbert & Jacobson’s commercial litigation practice group. I intend this letter to serve as my official acceptance of the offer. Based on my conversations with you and your colleagues, I know that G&J is an excellent fit for me professionally. I look forward to starting work on June 6, 2024.

In our October 7 email exchange, you indicated that I will receive a first-year salary of $75,000 with end-of-year bonuses based on my productivity. If I am misstating this, please let me know.

I look forward to working at G&J and will reach out in December after my final exams to schedule a lunch as you invited me to do.

Sincerely,

/s/ Aaron A. Downing

Aaron A. Downing
Sample Decline Email:

Dear Atty. Hertzel:

Thank you for your telephone call and email offering me the position of Assistant General Counsel with JLM International’s legal department. While I appreciate the opportunity the company offers, I received another offer that I determined more closely aligns with my current career goals and interests. The decision was a difficult one, but I am declining the position with JLM.

I greatly appreciate all the hospitality extended to me by you and your colleagues throughout my recruitment process.

Sincerely,

Asia Johnson

Sample Decline Letter:

October 30, 2023

Ms. Julia P. Reynolds, Hiring Partner
Billings, Taft, Golden & Harkes, S.C.
400 Miller Plaza, 40th Floor
850 Water Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Ms. Reynolds:

Thank you very much for considering me for Billings, Taft, Golden & Harkes' 2024 Summer Associate Program and for your recent offer. I appreciate the time you and the other attorneys at BTGH took to interview me.

After much consideration, I decided to accept a position with another law firm, and, therefore, must decline your generous opportunity. I was extremely impressed with Billings Taft and the attorneys I met throughout the interview process, and I will look again apply for a position with the firm if appropriate based on my future circumstances.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Charles R. Barry
RECRUITING POLICIES FOR EMPLOYERS

Marquette Law School’s Career Planning Center (CPC) values its relationships with employers and is pleased to offer our facilities and resources to assist employers in meeting their recruiting needs. The CPC’s recruiting policies are guided by the National Association for Law Placement’s Principles for a Fair and Ethical Recruitment Process. We encourage you to contact us if you have any questions about the below policies or recruiting at Marquette Law School generally.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Marquette Law School is committed to providing its students and graduates with the opportunity to obtain employment without discrimination or segregation based on any personal factor unrelated to qualifications or performance such as, without limitation, race or color, ethnic background, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, religion, creed, age, disability or perceived disability, pregnancy status, or veteran's status. The CPC restricts its services and resources, including the posting of jobs and participation in Marquette Law School’s on-campus interview programs, to employers that agree to abide by this policy.

Recruiting and Timing Guidelines

Marquette Law School has adopted the following guidelines regarding 1) the timing of and response to offers for employment and 2) employer contact with first-year students.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERAL PROVISIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• When scheduling interviews with students when classes are in session, employers are asked to inquire about and make all reasonable efforts to avoid class conflicts and otherwise not disrupt students’ studies.</td>
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<td>• All offers for employment should remain open for at least 14 days from the date of the written offer, excepting private sector employers with more than 40 attorneys (see the guidelines below).</td>
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<td>• The below guidelines notwithstanding, we request that employers treat Marquette Law School students no less favorably than students from any other law school with respect to the amount of time students are given to respond to offers of employment.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST-YEAR STUDENT RECRUITMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Application Date</td>
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<td>We ask employers to not initiate formal one-on-one recruiting contact with first-year students, including applications, interviews or offers for employment, before November 15, particularly if final employment decisions are not expected to be made before first-semester grades are available in January. In limited circumstances, government</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
employers requiring extensive background checks may solicit and review applications prior to November 15.

**Interview Dates**

Employers should not conduct interviews with first-year students between Thanksgiving and the end of fall semester examinations unless the student has been offered alternative dates outside this window and the student expresses a preference to interview during this period.

**OFFERS TO SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS (Private Sector Employers with Over 40 Attorneys)**

- Offers for summer employment should be made in writing and remain open for at least 21 days from the offer letter, OR until December 1, whichever comes first, *except* that:
  a) Offers made before the first day of the Marquette’s Fall OCI should remain open for at least 21 days from the first day of OCI.
  b) Offers made after December 1 should remain open for at least two (2) weeks from the date of the offer letter.
- If requested by the employer in the offer letter, students should reaffirm their interest in the offer within the timeframe and/or by the date specified in the offer letter (if the offer has not already been accepted or declined).

**2L Students Not Previously Employed by the Employer**

- Offers for summer employment should remain open for 21 days from the first day of Marquette’s Fall OCI.

**2L Students Previously Employed by the Employer**

- Offers for post-graduate employment made to students on or before December 1 should remain open for 21 days from the date of the written offer.
- Offers for post-graduate employment made to students after December 1 should remain open for 14 days from the date of the offer letter.

**OFFERS FOR FULL-TIME, POST-GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT (Private Sector Employers with Over 40 Attorneys)**

- Offers for post-graduate employment should remain open for 21 days from the date of the offer letter.