

Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox P.L.L.C.

2020 VAULT PROFILE HIGHLIGHTS



TOP 150 UNDER 150

- #5 BEST MIDSIZE LAW FIRM FOR DIVERSITY
- #8 BEST MIDSIZE LAW FIRM FOR PRO BONO
- #14 BEST MIDSIZE LAW FIRM TO WORK FOR



UPPERS

- “Flexibility! I can have any kind of career I want here.”
- “I like the people I work for and with.”
- “Opportunity to work on high-quality work.”

THE FIRM SAYS

Sterne Kessler’s summer associate program not only provides our incoming class with challenging responsibilities and opportunities but also allows them to experience our collegial firm culture. From week one, summer associates work closely with directors and associates on real client work. They have opportunities to meet with clients, attend workshops/trainings, and actively participate in monthly practice group meetings. The program also provides mentoring and coaching, in addition to having mid-point and end-of-summer evaluations, allowing our summer associates to see how they have progressed. We take pride in our firm culture and have been recognized for six consecutive years by *The Washington Post* as a “Top Workplace.” In addition to engaging in client work, our summer associates participate in an array of firm social activities and fun group outings, enjoy our fully staffed barista bar, and make use of our skee ball and air hockey games in our lunchroom.

THE SCOOP

Founded in 1978, Sterne Kessler Goldstein & Fox has grown through the ensuing four decades to become one of the leading IP boutiques in the nation, with a focus on the protection, transfer, and enforcement of intellectual property rights. The DC-based firm employs approximately 130 attorneys and represents clients like Google, Adidas, Apple, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Teva, Pepsico, and the University of California.

ASSOCIATE LIFE

Firm Culture

- “The culture is very welcoming, friendly, and [collegial]. There are regularly scheduled opportunities to socialize and less formal activities. Some attorneys do weekly happy hours.”
- “Several firm-organized activities and social gatherings throughout the year. Monthly group meetings also provide opportunities.”

Associate/Partner Relations

- “Partners are extremely respectful of associates. No yellors here. Vacation and travel time is respected as well. In terms of transparency, probably some of the best. Annual reports on how the firm is doing with actual numbers. Annual reviews with granular feedback on aspect of being an attorney. Starting at year five, they tell you what you need to do to make director, with personal feedback and concrete goals. ...”
- “Partners are respectful of associates and give associates a lot of responsibility and freedom. Feedback is constructive. Performance reviews are conducted yearly and include a lengthy self-evaluation.”

Hours

- “I sometimes feel like I work too much, but that is mostly my own doing. My firm is very sensitive to associate needs—if we say we have too much work, they will help alleviate the burden and redistribute.”

FIRM INFO

LOCATION

Washington, DC

WEBSITE

www.sternekeessler.com

BASE SALARY (2019)

1st year: \$190,000

After the first year, salaries are meritocratic, not lock-step, though generally follow the *updated* “Cravath scale.”

Summer associate (2L): \$3,654/week

Summer associate (1L): \$3,300/week

EMPLOYMENT CONTACT

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- “I have a lot of flexibility with respect to how many hours I work and when/where I work. Occasionally, work can feel unevenly distributed based on client demands and team assignments, but directors are always trying for an even balance.”
- “I am given as much work as I can handle. The firm allows associates to set their own hours for the most part and allows associates to work from home as needed.”

Compensation

- “Compensation is competitive. Bonuses are awarded on a subjective basis that scales with the amount of billable hours.”
- “Compensation is industry leading, and the firm attempts to keep [on] par, as it’s able, with a Cravath scale. Bonuses are merit based and billable-hour based, which appears fair. There is a subjective component to bonuses, which associates appear to be generally confused by. ...”
- “The compensation is at market rate. I appreciate the ability to be flexible with my billable hours for a reduction in compensation.”

Quality of Work

- “There are very good clients and good, challenging work in prosecution, research, and legal writing. Mostly all of the work is substantive. Quality staff are very supportive to get the administrative work done. This is the firm’s best characteristic: the work is great.”
- “Extremely substantive work. As a fourth year, I’ve argued Markman hearings, taken multiple depositions, drafted dispositive motions, and am active in case strategy and management. The firm gives as much as you are willing to take.”
- “Client pressure ensures that work is pushed as far down the chain as it realistically can be, so even junior associates get plenty of substantive work. Writing pleadings [and] motions, taking depositions, communicating with opposing counsel or clients all are assignments given to suitable junior associates.”

Training & Mentoring

- “The firm employs buddy/mentorship programs, training opportunities, and team assignments to learn from others on the firm’s conventions.”
- “Attorneys are always willing to give advice or offer help. There are occasional in-house training sessions, but these are more geared towards newer attorneys.”
- “The firm provides a formal training process and now includes a training syllabus for new attorneys. This training helps with prosecution and exposes new attorneys to many aspects of prosecution. The firm also uses a buddy system using more senior associates so that new employees are able to reach out for help without overburdening directors.”

Career Outlook

- “Promotion to directorship (our firm has ‘directors’ and not ‘partners’) is very realistic and encouraged. The firm is also very open to other paths, including counsel or a senior-associate-type of position. The firm stresses that it is not ‘up or out.’”
- “Partnership is [a] realistic option. For associates who don’t wish to be partner, there are non-partner options, such as [the] ‘counsel’ role.”
- “Associates are eligible for promotion to partner after working for the firm for a set amount of time; many associates seem to be elevated after putting in their time. There are other roles available, such as counsel and different levels of partnership.”

Pro Bono Commitment

- “The firm is very committed to pro bono work. Each associate can apply a predetermined number of pro bono hours towards the billable-hours requirement.”
- “Pro bono is picking up. There are countless opportunities for the litigation department to get pro bono. It would be better if the pro bono credit was unlimited, like at other firms.”

Diversity Efforts

- “We are a very diverse firm, and as a POC myself, this is an aspect which is most endearing to me. The firm constantly promotes a culture of inclusivity in its outreach and communication, and it shows that the top management truly believes in this goal.”
- “We are very diverse, I think. Our parental leave plan was just made much more generous.”
- “The firm has a diversity committee and is also very diverse in its directorship.”

SUMMER PROGRAM

- “[The summer associate program] was like a scaled-down version of what I do now. I had a great experience and learned a lot. The firm had a checklist of different types of work and tried to make sure I was involved in a variety of different projects to cover everything on the list.”
- “We had great camaraderie among summer associates. This was likely due to the well-planned events and time that we spent together. The events were well attended, and I was able to meet many directors.”
- “During my time as a summer associate, I mainly provided legal research, as well as helped to draft articles related to patent law. Working now, I have more substantive and billable tasks, such as drafting patent applications, office action responses, and briefs.”