

Spatial Dimensions of Florida's Legal Services

Barney Warf

The centrality of services to the nation's economy has been long known, a fact that has been recently studied in some detail by economic geographers (Britton 1990; Daniels 1991; Glasmeier and Howland 1994; Hansen 1994; Marshall and Wood 1995; Bagchi-Sen and Sen 1997; Beyers and Lindahl 1997). Services are an exceptionally heterogeneous group that are frequently classified into two broad categories: consumer services, those that cater to households and individuals, such as retail trade, and producer services, those that are sold to and consumed by other firms, including finance and business services of various sorts (e.g., advertising, accounting, engineering, computer services, etc). Services have grown rapidly for a variety of reasons, including changes in the structure of consumer spending, increasing complexity of the production environment, demographic changes that propel the demand for education and health care, international service exports, and steady rise in public sector activities at the federal, state, and local levels.

Legal services are an important component of the broader category of business services that offer specialized expertise to both corporations and households. Corporate law firms assist their clients in negotiating a highly complicated regulatory and financial environment, including torts, patents, product liability, bankruptcy, anti-discrimination ordinances, anti-trust restrictions, taxes, and financial transactions such as corporate mergers and takeovers. Firms that cater to individuals and households, on the other hand, work largely in the areas of family law (e.g., divorce), inheritance, bankruptcy, and personal litigation. Legal services have mushroomed over the last several decades thanks in part to the growing complexity of the production environment, including enormously dense webs of tax law, mounting environmental and labor regulations, a complicated financial system, and the well-known litigiousness of the public in general.

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In 1996, legal services (SIC 81) employed roughly one million people in the U.S.; indeed, the nation has more lawyers than the rest of the world combined. The geography of American legal services revolves largely around the twin poles of New York City, long the epicenter of corporate law (Mollenkopf 1985), and Washington, DC, which attracts offices from law firms that do business with the federal government, including lobbying (Warf and Wije 1991). Throughout the nation, legal services are dominated by large firms with multiple offices, often in different states (Nelson 1988; Abel 1989). Because attorneys tend to be relatively well paid, particularly those working within the broad domain of corporate law, expenditures by law firms have significant multiplier effects that reverberate through local economies.

This paper examines the contemporary spatial structure of legal services in Florida. First, it summarizes the distribution of employment in this sector in the state. Second, it turns to the spatial patterns of employment of attorneys working for large law firms in Florida, including headquarters and inter-urban distribution of offices around the state, and racial and gender composition. Third, it examines the interstate employment of attorneys employed by firms headquartered here but physically located in offices outside of the state, and, conversely, attorneys employed by firms headquartered elsewhere but working in offices in Florida.

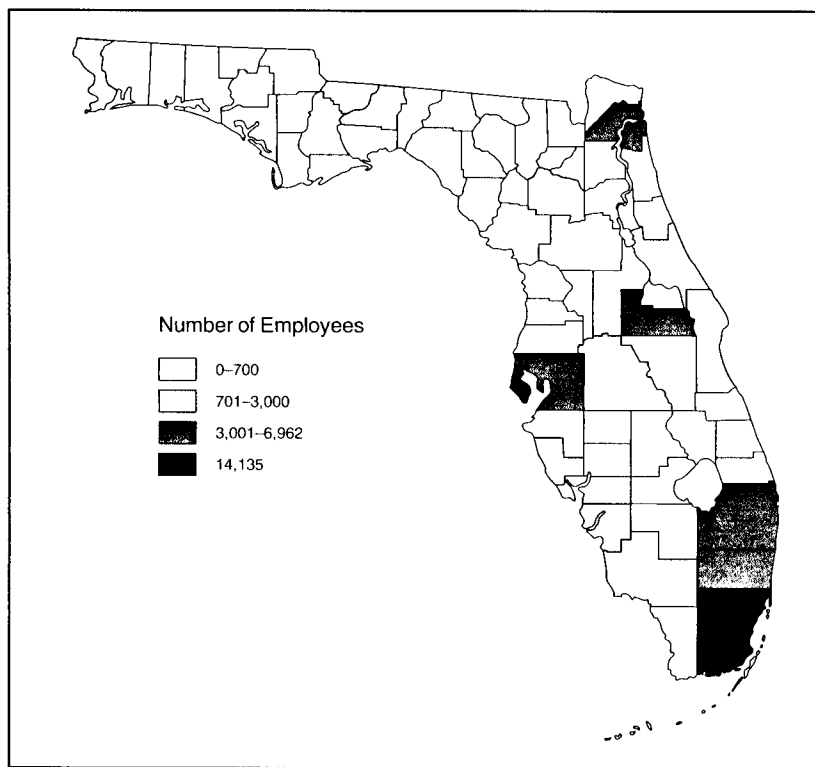
The Social and Spatial Distribution of Florida's Legal Services

Data for this paper were gathered from several sources. The distribution of total employment was derived from *County Business Patterns* for 1996. The size of the state's law schools came from *Peterson's Law Schools Directory*. Data on the inter-urban distribution of headquarters and branch offices, as well as female and minority employment, were derived from *Of Counsel* (1994, vol. 13, no. 9), a legal trade journal. Data on the largest firms in the state for 2000 came from *Florida Trend*. Finally, supplemental data on offices and foreign employment came from the *Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory*. Unfortunately, direct comparisons of these data to one another are not possible as law firms employ numerous workers who are not attorneys, such as paralegals and secretaries, for whom data are not consistently available.

Total employment in legal services in Florida in 1996 totaled 61,730 people in 12,518 firms; the average law firm thus employed five persons. The majority of law firms are quite small, catering to

individuals and households, and tend to be engaged in the practice of family law, torts and property rights (e.g., personal bankruptcy, inheritance), or criminal law. Frequently they may comprise a single attorney, a paralegal, and clerical staff. Spatially, most Florida law firms serve purely local demand, comprising part of what regional economists call the “nonbasic” sector of the economy. Large law firms – the focus of this paper – in contrast cater mostly to corporate clients and export their services among cities, typically using branch offices. The spatial distribution of employment in legal services was dominated by southern Florida (Figure 1), particularly Dade county, which among Florida counties stands in a category by itself with 14,135 employees in 2,900

Figure 1
Employment in Legal Services in Florida, 1996



Source: *County Business Patterns*.

The author thanks Chris Dunham for his assistance with this map.

Table 1
Largest Law Firms in Florida, 2000

Firm	Headquarters	Total Attorneys
Holland and Knight	Tampa	498
Greenberg Traurig	Miami	296
Akerman, Stenterfitt & Eidson	Orlando	265
Carlton, Fields	Tampa	178
Fowler, White, Gillen, Boggs, Villareal and Banker	Tampa	157
Ruden, McClosky, Smith, Schuster & Russell	Ft. Lauderdale	150
Foley & Lardner	Milwaukee, WI	145
Gunster, Yoakley, Valdes-Fauli, & Stewart	W. Palm Beach	145
Broad and Cassel	Orlando	144
Steel, Hector, & Davis	Miami	137
Shutts & Bowen	Miami	125
Lowndes, Drosdick, Doster, Kantor, & Reed	Orlando	119
Stearns, Weaver, Miller, Weissler, Alhadeff, & Sitterson	Miami	87
Becker & Poliakoff	Ft. Lauderdale	84
Adorno & Zeder	Miami	82
Annis, Mitchell, Cockey, Edwards, & Roehn	Tampa	76
Conroy, Simberg, & Gannon	Hollywood	76
Rogers, Towers, Bailey, Jones, & Gay	Jacksonville	71
Gray, Harris, & Robinson	Orlando	70
Wicker, Smith, Tutan, O'Hara, McCoy, Graham, & Ford	Miami	69
Trenam, Kemker	Tampa	69
Rumberger, Kirk, & Caldwell	Orlando	61
Rissman, Weisberg, Barrett, Hurt, Donahue, & McLain	Orlando	59
Katz, Kutter, Haigler, Alderman, Bryant, & Yon	Tallahassee	57
Fowler, White, Burnett, Hurley, Banick, & Strickroot	Miami	55

Source: *Florida Trend*, April 2000.

The author thanks Mort Winsberg for gathering these data.

firms. Tampa, Orlando, and Jacksonville comprise a secondary tier of firms and employees. In contrast, rural areas exhibit disproportionately few employees in this industry.

Among the 700 largest law firms in the U.S. in 1994, 24 are headquartered in Florida. Florida's largest firms practice several types of law. *Of Counsel* solicits information on the "Leading Practice Area" for each firm, i.e., the domain of law that forms its principal source of revenues and thus an indication of its clients, market niche, and forward linkages. Of those firms that reported on this topic, nine (43 percent) cited litigation as their primary practice area, followed by commercial law (with seven firms, or 33 percent), liability and bankruptcy (two firms each), and real estate law (one firm).

The largest 25 firms in the state in 2000 (Table 1) employ a total of 3,275 attorneys, or an average of 131 each. The number of attorneys range from 55 to 498. Thus firms in this tier average roughly 26 times the size of the average law firm in Florida. The geography of these firms should thus not be taken to represent the industry as a whole. Most large law firms have multiple offices scattered among different cities. Headquarters of law firms act as "command and control" centers that make strategic decisions for the firm, including its client base, and hiring practices. The geography of the headquarters of the largest 25 Florida law firms in 2000 reveals a markedly metropolitan concentration in a handful of cities, most of which are in either the central or southern part of the state. The spatial distribution is dominated by Miami, Orlando, and Tampa (seven firms each), and to a lesser extent, Fort Lauderdale (two firms). One large firm, Roley & Lardner, is headquartered outside of the state, in Wisconsin. Other cities such as Tallahassee, Hollywood, West Palm Beach, and Jacksonville host one large firm each; notable for their absence in this regard are cities in the state that one might expect to be more visible as headquarters locations, including Pensacola, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota.

The attorneys employed by Florida law firms are overwhelmingly white males. Of the 2,295 lawyers employed by the 24 firms in 1994, only 108 – less than five percent – are women, and only 47 – roughly two percent – are ethnic minorities. These ratios are roughly equal to the national average. The low representation by women and minorities reflects the considerable obstacles to entering and completing law school faced by these populations, the continued legacies of sexism and racism, and their opportunities (or lack thereof) in society at large. However, there are

Table 2
Law Schools in Florida, 1999

School	Location	Total Enrollment	% Women	% Black	% Latino
Barry University*	Orlando	378	41	9	16
University of Florida	Gainesville	1,264	42	15	21
Florida Coastal School of Law	Jacksonville	483	43	12	8
Florida State University	Tallahassee	654	45	12	9
Nova Southeastern University	Ft. Lauderdale	169	47	8	18
Stetson University	St. Petersburg	668	53	7	8
St. Thomas University	Miami	531	39	11	21
University of Miami	Miami	1,027	45	8	20

*Credentials status is provisional.

Source: Peterson's Law Schools 2000 and telephone communications. The author thanks Mort Winsberg for his help gathering this data.

grounds to hope that this distribution may change in the future. Many attorneys in the state are graduates of the seven law schools located in the state (Table 2). In 1999, the proportions of women and minority law students were considerably higher than among attorneys in large law firms; to the extent that the current crop of female and minority students percolates into these institutions, therefore, their gender and ethnic composition may come to reflect that of the state as a whole. In 1994 the state's 25 largest law firms employed an additional 309 paralegals (one for every seven attorneys), semi-skilled workers who assist attorneys in the gathering of legal information and preparation for litigation. There are 48 programs in Florida that train paralegals, most of which are offered through community colleges.

The interurban distribution of legal services in Florida reflects both the urban hierarchy of the state and the particularities that shape the spatial structure in the demand for legal services. Outside of the headquarters, the branch offices form a web of intracorporate linkages that tie the state's cities together (Table 3). The pattern of linkages between headquarters and branch offices in 1994 broadly reflects the distribution of the state's population in general, but is heavily dominated by ties among large metropolitan centers; corporate law is, after all, a heavily urbanized activity.

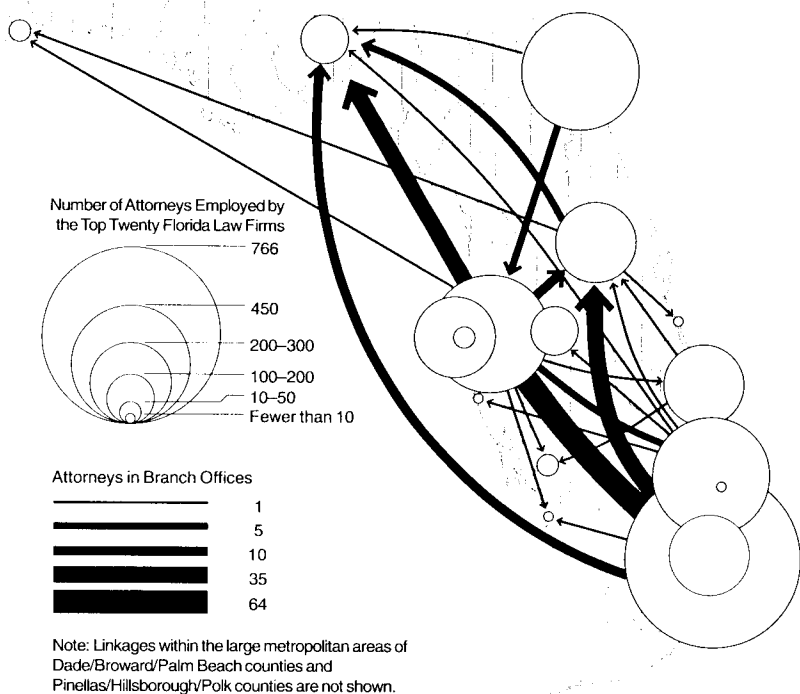
The distribution of employment in both headquarters and branch offices together thus provides a mirror of the state's urban system, and, the ties between headquarters or corporate points of control and branch offices reflects interactions confined to the largest cities (Figure 2). Thus, Miami firms have a significant representation in Tampa and Orlando, which, in turn, have several attorneys in Tallahassee. Jacksonville and Pensacola exhibit conspicuously few linkages to the rest of the state, indicating that their firms serve locally based clients more often than do their counterparts elsewhere in the state. Most interurban linkages are relatively circumscribed within a narrow radius around the main

Table 3
Inter-urban Distribution of Attorneys Employed
by Large Law Firms

Branch Office	Headquarter City						TOTAL
	Ft. Lauderdale	Jacksonville	Miami	Orlando	Tampa	West Palm	
Miami	26		593	83	64		766
Tampa	3		30	22	376		431
Orlando	2		23	230	42		297
Ft Lauderdale	115		64	7	27	14	227
W Palm	6		100	10	19	52	187
Jacksonville	107			33		140	
Tallahassee	6	1	22	20	44		93
St Petersburg	1				37		38
Lakeland					26		26
Clearwater	1				22		23
Stuart				6	7		13
Pensacola				7	4		11
Ft Myers	3				6		9
Boca Raton				9			9
Naples	1		7				8
Sarasota	7						7
Coral Gables			6				6
Melbourne				3			3
Key Largo			1				1
TOTAL	171	108	846	397	707	66	2295

Source: calculated from data in *Of Counsel* 1994, vol. 13, no. 9.

Figure 2
Headquarter-Branch Office Linkages among Large Law Firms



Source: calculated from data in *Of Counsel* 1994, vol. 13, no. 9.

corporate base of operations, i.e., most branch offices are concentrated within driving distance of their headquarters. This pattern is most evident in south Florida, where the largest inter-urban connections are found among neighboring Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach. Similarly, law firms in Tampa dominate the offices in smaller cities along the Gulf Coast, including Sarasota, Clearwater, and St. Petersburg. This distance-decay in inter-urban linkages may reflect the significance of face-to-face meetings in the provision and consumption of legal services; because law firms collect and transmit irregular, unstandardized, context-laden sources of data, in which trust and reputation are crucial, such meetings are a vital part in the negotiation of their forward linkages to clients. The exception to this trend is the

presence of branch offices in Tallahassee, the state capital, in which law firms gather information on legislation first-hand and engage in lobbying of state government politicians.

Inter-State Structure of Florida's Legal Services

Among legal services within the South, Florida constitutes an important pole rivaled only by Washington, DC (Warf and Grimes 1997). State boundaries are significant to understanding the geography of legal services because states independently admit attorneys to the bar and license them, restricting their ability to practice law in more than one state. States are important economically as well: to the extent that firms headquartered in one region or state have branch offices located in another, they control the finances, employment practices, and decisions there.

However, the data suggest that Florida's law firms, even the largest, cater almost exclusively to local sources of demand, with few operations outside of the state. Few of the state's large law firms have offices or attorneys outside of the state. Only three firms had American offices outside of Florida in 1994 (employing a total of 86 attorneys), including one firm (Holland and Knight, in Tampa) with 72 attorneys in Washington, DC. Similarly, the international dimensions of Florida's legal services are negligible. In 1994, only three firms had offices abroad, and included three attorneys in London and two in Prague. By 2000, foreign employment had expanded to four offices in Europe, six in Latin America, and two in Asia.

Firms headquartered outside of Florida play a considerable role in the state's legal services, employing 767 attorneys in the state in 1994 (Table 4), equal to 33 percent of all attorneys working for large firms headquartered in the state. Headquarter states with firms that were particularly heavily represented in Florida included New York (216) and Wisconsin (144), and to a lesser extent, Illinois (80), Ohio and Pennsylvania (77 each), and Michigan (64). The headquarter states fall clearly into two groups, the Northeast and Midwest, a distribution that likely reflects the major sources of retirees and "snowbirds" who migrate seasonally to Florida and gravitate to lawyers from firms based near their homes. Law firms in other Southern states, in contrast, had very few offices in Florida, and those located in the West none at all. The distribution of these attorneys resembles that of lawyers working in state-based firms (Table 5), with a large concentration in south Florida, par-

Table 4
Employment by Non-Florida
Based Law Firms in Florida

HQ State	Attorneys in Florida
New York	216
Wisconsin	144
Illinois	80
Ohio	77
Pennsylvania	77
Michigan	64
DC	29
Minnesota	28
Connecticut	17
Rhode Island	13
South Carolina	10
Missouri	7
Georgia	4
New Jersey	1
Total	767

Source: calculated from data in *Of Counsel* 1994, vol. 13, no. 9.

Table 5
Distribution of Attorneys
Employed by Non-Florida
Based Law Firms

City	Attorneys
Miami	320
Orlando	101
Tampa	68
Naples	65
Jacksonville	57
Boca Raton	47
Palm Beach	46
West Palm Beach	39
Ft. Lauderdale	15
Ft. Myers	6
Tallahassee	2
Gulf Breeze	1
Total	767

Source: calculated from data in *Of Counsel* 1994, vol. 13, no. 9.

ticularly Miami, and to a lesser extent, Orlando, Tampa, and Jacksonville.

Concluding Thoughts

Florida is overwhelmingly a service-based economy, of which legal services constitute an important and growing part. More than 61,000 Floridians work in this sector, which provides specialized expertise to individuals and corporations. While most law firms are very small (less than five persons), and serve local clients, a handful of large firms, with offices in multiple cities, dominates the corporate segment of the industry.

Of the 700 largest law firms in the nation, Florida hosts 24, which together employ 2,295 attorneys (almost all of whom are

white males) and 309 paralegals. The Miami metropolitan region is home to the greatest concentration of firms and attorneys working for such firms. Two-thirds of attorneys employed in such firms work in their corporate headquarters, while the remainder work in branch offices scattered elsewhere. The linkages between headquarters and branch offices of such firms revolve heavily around the top-most tier of the state's urban hierarchy, and exhibit a strong distance-decay effect, a reflection of the pressing need for face-to-face contact among such actors. Branch offices tend to be located fairly closely to their headquarters, giving rise to regional networks and linkages. Such patterns indicate that law firms and attorneys operate within fairly restricted geographical contexts, producing and reflecting linkages that are constrained to pathways connecting a small group of large cities. The exception to this trend is the relatively large number of attorneys of these firms in Tallahassee, the state capital.

Firms headquartered outside of Florida, which are concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest, and employ another 767 attorneys (an additional one-third of the pool working for the largest firms). Most are concentrated in the greater Miami region. Florida law firms, however, exhibit very few offices outside of the state (with one exception), and virtually none overseas. On the basis of interstate patterns of employment, therefore, it may be concluded that Florida is thus much more of an importer than an exporter of legal services.

The economic and social geography of services in general is poorly understood. Despite a half-century of steady growth, services are still considered by many to be purely local in nature; some even deem them to be parasitic or unproductive! Florida, despite its significant agricultural sector, is overwhelmingly a service-based economy, a structure not limited to tourism. Indeed, producer services are the mainstay for the labor markets in most, if not all, of the state's cities, especially large ones. The purpose of this paper, other than to explicate the geography of Florida's legal services, has been to draw attention to the complexity that underpins the geography of this sort of economy.

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