

# **PUBLIC INTEREST JOB SEARCH TOOLKIT**



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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We have created the *Public Interest Job Search Toolkit* to assist in your exploration of public interest law and to provide you with guidance on how to secure meaningful and exciting opportunities. Whether you are interested in pursuing public interest law for a summer position, for an internship, or as a career path, there is a lot to learn, and we can help you. No matter what their knowledge or experience was upon entering law school, Columbia Law School students like you have obtained meaningful positions in the public interest world both during their law school years and after graduation. The *Toolkit* will serve as a guide as you explore public interest legal work, think about your options, ready application materials, prepare for interviews, and obtain your desired public interest position(s).

You can find an electronic copy of the *Toolkit*, along with video tutorials and other SJI publications, at [law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications](http://law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications). These resources include guides for charting your path while at Columbia and for obtaining clerkships and fellowships and positions in government honors programs, supplements for LL.M. students and for those seeking international positions, and information about how to finance your public interest career.

Our [advising staff](#) is also available to speak with you about your public interest job search. We especially encourage those of you contemplating public interest, public service, or international human rights work after graduation to meet with us. The *Toolkit* should not serve as a substitute for in-person guidance from our office. We look forward to working with you throughout your time here, and afterwards.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## *Embarking on Your Exploration of Public Interest Law...*

You are beginning an exciting journey. Whether you are committed to public interest or unsure of your career path, there are many ways to use your education and skills to advance the public good.

Social Justice Initiatives (SJI) is available to work with you. We provide individual one-on-one counseling, group information sessions, year-round public interest programming, and career guides and tools. We work closely with students seeking fellowships and permanent public interest jobs immediately, or soon after, school, with those planning to transition later, and with those seeking meaningful pro bono work in the private sector.

We provide guidance about classes, clinics, externships, pro bono, journals, student organizations, and other opportunities so that each student can craft an individual plan. You can also consult with an adviser to discuss summer plans, in the United States or abroad, and academic-year internships.

After you graduate, SJI remains available to you when you are contemplating new opportunities or making a transition. Any student or graduate can consult our full-time staff, as well as our part-time advisers, who are located around the country.

Whether you ultimately work in the public or private sector (or both), we can help you chart a rewarding path. Visit [law.columbia.edu/social-justice-initiatives](http://law.columbia.edu/social-justice-initiatives) for more information.

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## Public Interest at Columbia: A General Overview

### *What Is Public Interest Law?*

We use the term “public interest law” to mean work that is pursued on the basis of individual or group concepts of justice, fairness, and advancement of the public good.<sup>1</sup>

This deliberately broad definition encompasses government work (including criminal prosecution and defense) and work at nonprofits, public interest law firms, and nongovernmental organizations abroad. Types of work include individual client representation, large-scale litigation aimed at establishing broad-based change, advocating in court or before international tribunals, advising nonprofits and community organizations, drafting legislation, and investigating human rights abuses. Of course, public interest lawyers also engage in many activities outside of traditional legal practice, such as media, nonprofit management, research, and foundation work. See the Appendix for a discussion of the range of public interest work and types of public interest employers.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of “public interest” varies for purposes of Columbia’s [Loan Repayment Assistance Program](#), [Guaranteed Summer Funding](#), and [Pro Bono Programs](#). For these definitions, please see the [Law School’s website](#).

## What Are You Looking for?

Once you decide to explore public interest, a thoughtful self-assessment can help clarify your interests. These questions will help you identify what you are seeking in an internship, pro bono opportunity, school experience, or career. Don't worry if you don't have all the answers. Many people are not sure what exactly interests them; others are interested in everything. You will likely change or refine your answers as you go through law school and embark on your career.

### YOUR PROFESSIONAL GOALS

Why did you come to law school?

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### Who do you want to serve?

- Individual clients
- Groups of individuals
- Communities
- Government
- Other

### How do you want to spend your time?

- Conducting legal research and writing
- Investigative reporting and documentation
- Interviewing and representing clients
- Drafting legal education materials or policy manuals
- Appearing in court
- Engaging in alternative dispute resolution
- Meeting with clients
- Meeting with policymakers
- Engaging in oral advocacy
- Community organizing
- A little bit of everything

### What time frame appeals to you?

- Short-term projects with immediate results

- Long-term assignments, focusing on eventual systemic impact
- A mix of short- and long-term projects

### Which characteristics are you looking for in a work environment?

- Small office (fewer than 20 colleagues)
- Larger office (over 20 colleagues)
- Informal setting
- Formal setting
- Frequent travel
- Infrequent travel
- Support staff
- Flexible work schedule
- Multidisciplinary team
- Diverse staff
- Collaborative environment
- Frequent contact with media/public
- Open office layout
- Traditional office environment
- Frequent communication with supervisors

### YOUR PERSONAL GOALS

What are your short- and long-term career goals?

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### Where do you want to work?

- U.S. (particular state/city \_\_\_\_\_)
- Abroad (particular country/city\_\_\_\_\_)
- Major metropolitan area
- Mid-size city
- Rural setting

Do you have family/personal obligations that you need to consider?

- Yes
- No

### How important is prestige to you?

- Important
- Not a priority

**How important is your level of income?**

- Important
- Not a priority

**YOUR INTERESTS**

What have you found interesting in law school?

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Outside of law school, what hobbies and activities are you drawn to?

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**Which legal issues interest you?**

- Access to Justice
- Animal Rights
- Arts/Preservation of Cultural Artifacts
- Bankruptcy
- Business and Human Rights/Corporate Accountability
- Campaign Finance
- Children’s Rights
- Civil Rights
- Community Development
- Consumer Protection
- Criminal Law (Prosecution, Defense, Death Penalty, Prisoner’s Rights, Criminal Tribunals)
- Disability
- Domestic Violence
- Economic Justice
- Education
- Elder Law
- Employment/Labor/Work with Dignity
- Environmental Law
- Family Law
- Financial Regulation
- First Amendment
- Food Security
- Foreclosure

- Government Accountability
- Gun Control
- Health and Human Rights
- Homelessness
- Housing
- Immigration/Asylum
- Indigenous Rights
- International Human Rights
- Judiciary
- Juvenile Justice
- Land Rights
- LGBTQI
- Mass Incarceration
- National Security
- Native American Rights
- Peace and Security
- Poverty
- Public Health/Access to Care
- Racial Justice
- Reproductive Rights
- Sustainable Development
- Transitional Justice
- Torture
- Voting Rights
- Water Rights
- Women’s Rights
- Other

**YOUR SKILLS**

**What skills, experience, and knowledge do you have? Which would you like to develop?**

**Data Skills**

- | Have                     | Develop  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing, evaluating information   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing problems                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Examining, observing                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Investigating                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Long-term planning                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing, classifying information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Research                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing                             |



**People Skills**

Have    Develop

- Advising, counseling
- Listening/Conveying warmth and understanding
- Oral communication
- Initiating relationships, networking
- Inspiring
- Interviewing
- Leading, managing
- Persuading, lobbying, advocating
- Mediating, settling disputes
- Mentoring
- Organizing, coalition-building
- Presenting ideas clearly
- Teaching, training

**Working with Ideas**

Have    Develop

- Conceptualizing
- Coordinating
- Designing, innovating, developing new projects
- Editing
- Explaining, synthesizing
- Implementing ideas
- Public speaking
- Strategizing
- Summarizing
- Troubleshooting

**ADVOCACY TOOLS**

**Which organizational strategies and tactics appeal to you?**

- Community organizing
- Impact litigation
- Policy advocacy and drafting legislation
- Client interviewing and counseling
- Media/social media campaigning
- Coalition-building
- Courtroom advocacy
- Drafting amicus briefs
- Investigating and reporting
- Designing legal training programs
- Public activism

**YOUR PERSONAL VALUES**

**Which values are most significant to your career planning?**

- Activism
- Advancement/Achievement
- Adventure
- Calmness (in life, work environment)
- Civic involvement
- Collaboration
- Control
- Community
- Connection
- Contribution
- Creativity/Expression
- Diversity (perspectives, culture, people)
- Entrepreneurship/Innovation
- Fairness
- Fame/Status
- Financial security
- Ideological compatibility
- Independence
- Intellectual challenge
- Job security/Stability
- Justice
- Kindness
- Leadership
- Public participation
- Service
- Social environment/Collegiality
- Variety (in tasks, projects, settings)

Reflect on your selections and use them to inform your job search. Read job descriptions carefully to evaluate compatibility. Seek opportunities to build the skills you want to develop. Use your values and goals to identify compatible practice settings and work environments. Apply to employers that work on issues you care about. Find opportunities to use advocacy tools that resonate with you.

Tailoring your job search to fit the “true you” will pay dividends and lead to a happier, more productive, more satisfying career.



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## Finding a Good Fit for You

You may not know exactly what you want to do, and you may need to try different things before you find the “right” fit. We encourage students to explore options through internships, externships, clinics, classes, pro bono, research, and work with student organizations. Attend panels and other law school events to learn about different practice areas, meet practitioners, and hear about their work. Columbia graduates working in public interest are enormously generous to interested students. Many come to the law school regularly; others will speak by phone or over coffee. SJI can help you make these connections. It is also helpful to remember that you are not making decisions about your entire career and that—inevitably—you will continue to explore opportunities long after you leave Columbia. Private sector practitioners often continue to explore through pro bono work. Public interest lawyers learn about opportunities, practice areas, and initiatives through networking and working in coalition with other organizations. Many lawyers change practice areas and even entire fields throughout their working lives.

### *What Might Make Me a Good Fit?*

Once you have a general idea of what type of public interest organization, practice area, and/or advocacy mechanism interests you, consider how to make yourself a competitive candidate. In addition to experience (see following section), there are many attributes that employers seek.

#### **Past Experience**

Public interest jobs are very competitive; it is often not sufficient to be a “good person” and have “good thoughts.” Demonstrating interest in the social good (as illustrated by, for example, prior legal or non-legal work or volunteer experience) is very important. If your application additionally demonstrates a dedication to the issues on which the employer works, the clients it serves, its theory of change, or the advocacy it carries out, you will be an even stronger candidate. No employer expects a new law student to possess vast experience, but you should work to build your experiences throughout your three years of law school. Similarly, graduates looking to switch fields need to build up their experience to make themselves competitive in their new field. The more an applicant can demonstrate their dedication to an organization’s issues, clients, or advocacy approach, the more appealing that candidate will be.

#### **Skills and Knowledge**

Particular knowledge and skills can be helpful but may not be critical. Many public interest employers know that they will have to educate and train summer and entry-level or even mid-career employees and are looking for a capacity and willingness to learn.

Employers emphasize different skills based on their issue areas and advocacy strategies—and you may already have some of what they are looking for.

- Communication and interpersonal skills, such as interviewing or language skills, are important to employers that deal directly with clients or work with partner organizations
- Debate, public speaking, or presentation skills are important to organizations engaged in

- litigation, oral advocacy, and community organizing
- Research and writing is important to campaign-based organizations, impact litigation and advocacy groups, and policy centers that draft laws, policy papers, legal briefs, or educational materials
- Knowledge of non-law subject matter can be important to some employers. For example: a scientific background might be important to an environmental organization; experience as a teacher is useful to an education advocacy or children's rights organization

Be prepared to explain why your skill set or background would be helpful to that employer, even if it is not exactly what they do. If your experience with a legal issue is highly personal (for example, you were in foster care and now want to work on children's rights), please meet with an adviser to discuss whether to include this information in your application. Some employers will view this as an asset; others may question your objectivity. Although it can be useful to show familiarity with the issue, you should be careful about how much information you provide and limit the details of your own experience.

**Initiative, responsibility, and good judgment are very important.**

Public interest employers do not hire large numbers of law students and lawyers to simply follow orders and perform repetitive tasks. Interns and new lawyers often are given responsibility for their own matters and are expected to take the initiative. Employers seek those who can work independently, ask for help when they need it, and show good judgment when working on their own.

**Enthusiasm counts.**

Employers like students and lawyers who see the proffered job as a valuable opportunity to put their legal education and experience to work. Even if you have not been trained in that country or issue, having enthusiasm for and interest in their approach goes a long way. Be prepared to offer specifics about why you want this internship or job.

**Character is important.**

Most public interest organizations are small, and people work long hours on issues about which they care deeply, often for modest financial reward. One of the benefits is working with colleagues they trust and respect and whose company they enjoy. Be prepared to convey in your cover letter and demonstrate in the interview that you are reliable, trustworthy, and enjoyable to work with.

**Grades are often less important than other factors.**

Grades tend to dominate decisions less often than they do for private sector employers. Qualities mentioned above (good judgment, dedication, enthusiasm, empathy, strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills, leadership and teamwork ability, cross-cultural competence and a strong work ethic) are very highly valued. Still, however, certain employers, including some judges, impact litigation organizations, public interest law firms, and government agencies may be particularly interested in grades and/or journal work.

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## Exploring Public Interest at Columbia Law School

### *Charting Your Path<sup>1</sup>/Developing Knowledge and Experience*

During law school, there are many opportunities to explore public interest and to hear from practitioners engaged in different kinds of work.

**As a 1L**, you can attend [public interest programs](#) presented by SJI, the Human Rights Institute or other Law School Centers, student groups, other Columbia schools, and other entities around New York City. Students can participate in student organizations, begin to explore pro bono opportunities, and attend the [Public Interest Legal Career \(PILC\) Fair](#), hosted by NYU in February. In addition to providing substantive information, all are opportunities to network with other students and Columbia graduates, professors, SJI staff, or experienced lawyers.

**Upper-year students** planning to do public interest work should be thinking about their second summer by the close of their first summer. Public interest applications generally begin to go out in September. You should continue to attend public interest programs and do pro bono work, participate in clinics and externships, take public interest classes, do term-time internships, work on public interest journals, lead student organizations, work for professors, or publish an article or note on a public interest topic. You should meet with an SJI adviser and continue networking and exploring job fairs like [Equal Justice Works](#) in Washington, DC in October.

If you plan to work in public interest after graduation, **your 2L summer** is very important. You should intern at a public interest organization in a field you are interested in, and you should start planning for postgraduate employment by networking and exploring fellowship sponsorship.

During the fall and winter of **your 3L year**, you will be applying for fellowships (including project-based and organization-based fellowships), as well as exploring public interest job opportunities.

Conversations with [SJI advisers](#), professors, Columbia graduates, and practitioners will be important throughout.

### *Pro Bono Work*

Columbia Law School instituted a [pro bono requirement](#) for all J.D. students in 1992 at the urging of students. The requirement is an expression of our belief that public service should be part of every lawyer's professional life. The school requires at least 40 hours of pro bono work to be completed between the end of 1L year and spring of 3L year, which can be fulfilled through participation in an in-house pro bono project, an uncompensated internship with a public interest organization or government office, or a student-initiated project (upon SJI approval).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For more details, refer to “Your Public Interest Roadmap: Exploring Public Interest/Public Service Law at Columbia Law School” at [law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications](http://law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications).

<sup>2</sup> Visit [law.columbia.edu/pro-bono](http://law.columbia.edu/pro-bono) for more on the pro bono requirements for Columbia and for the New York State Bar. The site provides information on what counts for pro bono, where to find projects, and how to document your work. You may also attend relevant programs and meet with SJI's pro bono staff for guidance.

For those planning a public interest career, be strategic in using your pro bono hours. Engage in pro bono work and internships that will strengthen your skill set and add valuable experiences. Making use of the variety of New York-based public interest organizations to develop your expertise and increase your contacts is an important advantage of studying at Columbia Law School. Remember that many New York-based public interest employers would be happy to take on Columbia interns during the year even though they may not post a formal opening, so feel free to contact employers that interest you.

*Finally, some words of wisdom from the thousands of students who precede you:  
Do not wait until the last minute to satisfy your pro bono requirement. You should be in a position to choose work that is meaningful to you and will be helpful on your career path!*

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## Frequently Asked Questions about Exploring Public Interest/Public Service While in Law School

### **What are the advantages of exploring public interest or government opportunities as a student?**

There are several reasons to explore public interest and government work while at Columbia. You will learn about areas you might be interested in pursuing during your summers or after graduation. You will also begin to make connections in the larger world—with fellow students, professors, Columbia graduates, and other practitioners. Developing these relationships is crucial for charting your path and for fellowship and job applications. You may have passion for a particular public interest subject area, and whether you pursue that passion as a full-time lawyer or as part of your postgraduate pro bono work, developing knowledge of the practice while in law school will be useful and exciting. Finally, you will have fun learning about—and participating in—interesting, meaningful opportunities available to you both during law school and after you graduate.

### **How do I figure out where to spend my summers?**

Summers in law school are prime times to try out what you think you might want to do after law school and where you think you may want to do it. When determining where to apply for summer work, start by thinking about what really interests you rather than focusing only on the type of work you have done in the past. Your classes, law school activities, and programs attended can all help you identify different areas of interest. Consider what subject matter you are interested in, what kinds of populations you want to work with, and what legal approach/tool you are most interested in working with (e.g., direct services? Impact litigation? policy or government? For more information, see the Appendix). You should also consider geography and use your summers to try working in locations where you think you might want to live after graduation.

### **Is experiential learning important?**

Yes! If you are considering a career in public interest or government—or if you are simply exploring your options—you should be sure to participate in an array of meaningful experiential learning opportunities while at Columbia. Most successful applicants for public interest and government jobs will have had externship or clinical experiences, or will have participated in practicums. These opportunities enable you to develop knowledge and skills which are critically important for many public interest and government opportunities. They also enable you to get to know professors and practitioners well, and provide you with a source of mentorship. Finally, these experiences allow you to explore areas of interest, provide insights into real lawyering, and allow you to build your credentials for public interest or government careers or pro bono work.

Experiential learning is so important that the American Bar Association now requires every law school student to graduate with six experiential law credits.

In addition to or instead of enrolling in one of the Columbia clinics, externships, or practicums, some students intern with a New York-based public interest or government organization during the term. This is an opportunity to develop your expertise and increase your contacts; and employers frequently hire individuals who have previously interned with them or with similar organizations.

(See “Should I do a term-time internship?,” below).

### **What is the difference between a clinic and an externship, and how do I choose one?**

The Law School offers students many opportunities to work with real clients, either through legal clinics or externships. Both clinics and externships provide opportunities to serve clients or organizations, in addition to having a classroom component. Each has its own benefits, and you can do both a clinic and externships while at Columbia, but not in the same semester.

Clinics are situated on campus and are taught for the most part by full-time faculty who are also experienced practitioners in their fields. Externships, on the other hand, take place off campus, when students work on site at an organization and are taught by adjunct faculty who are experts in the particular field—all of this under the overall supervision of the Columbia Director of Externships. Think about the kind of experience you seek. Clinics allow students to have client relationships and responsibility, with real emphasis on your development as a lawyer. Externships will give you a better sense of what the real world of practice in that office and field would be like. The Law School has many options, so you need to think carefully. First, timing is an issue. Not all clinics and externships are offered every semester. Additionally, some are for only one semester, whereas others are a two-semester commitment. Secondly, you should think about the issues and skills that each clinic and externship focuses on. Try to choose ones that are the most interesting to you, and are geared to the skills you want to develop. Talk to students who have done them. Third, think about the time commitment. Clinics generally give students more responsibility for their cases and therefore involve a greater time commitment and award more credits than externships.

Please remember: if at first you do not get into a clinic or externship, try again later. Spots are limited, and sometimes 3Ls and LL.M.s get preference. This should not discourage you from applying.

More information: [law.columbia.edu/experiential-learning](http://law.columbia.edu/experiential-learning)

### **Should I do a term-time internship?**

Yes, you should definitely consider doing a term-time internship during your 2L or 3L year. Term-time internships are invaluable for building up skills, contacts and knowledge about “real jobs” in the public interest and government worlds. Many Columbia students enjoy interning part-time at organizations as a balance to their class work, studying, and other activities.

A term-time internship differs from a clinic or externship as it generally does not provide academic credit (more below) and or have a seminar component. These internships can provide more flexibility for students than clinics and externships, as they can be created according to a particular student’s schedule and interests, and require less of a time commitment. They are also a good opportunity for students who do not get into a clinic or externship, but desire experiential learning; or are interested in issues that are not covered by existing clinics or externships. Additionally, an internship might give a student an opportunity to gain more advanced skills in an area covered by Columbia offerings.

Columbia students have a big advantage by being in New York City—there are a myriad of public interest opportunities at our doorstep. Many organizations are thrilled to have a Columbia intern



during the year, and often give interesting work and better supervision than in summer when there are more interns competing for attention. In addition, it is often easier to get a term-time position, so if you did not get your “dream job” during the summer, you should apply again for a term-time position with that organization and you will likely have better luck.

To find internships, students can research organizations and contact them directly or view internship postings on [Symplicity](#) or [psjd.org](#). Unlike externships, there is no academic credit—unless you apply for credit as an independent project under Supervised J.D. Experiential Study L6695 (and choose an academic adviser to supervise you), or you link your internship to a course offering. Note that some employers require that you get academic credit or pro bono credit to intern with them, in which case you must explore with your adviser how to get that credit.

***NOTE: For Columbia pro bono credit, an internship must be unpaid and not for academic credit. However, an internship that is paid or receives credit may count towards the New York State Bar pro bono admission requirements. Refer to our website or contact our Pro Bono Coordinator for more information.***

### **Are there certain classes I should take?**

In addition to taking clinics, externships, or practicums, which we strongly recommend, there are many other class offerings that can expand knowledge or hone skills of use in public interest or government work. You should think carefully about which classes to take. There are no “mandatory” classes for getting a public interest or government job, although there are classes that could be helpful, depending on your career direction. For example, if you are interested in litigating, you should consider taking classes that will develop knowledge and skills; these might include classes like evidence, trial practice, federal courts, or negotiation. If you are interested in certain substantive areas, you should be sure to take a few classes in those subjects and get to know the professors. It is also important to take foundational classes (which may not in themselves be specifically public interest- or public service-oriented but will be important for laying a foundation for your legal advocacy as a public interest or government lawyer). It is also important to take some demanding classes that develop your legal knowledge and demonstrate your intellectual ability.

Clinics, externships, and practicums—even if not focused on your particular area of interest—often have broad benefits in providing skills and knowledge to be a public interest or government lawyer in a range of fields. Finally, you want to make sure you take a breadth of classes and not focus on just one thing—it is often helpful to have exposure to several areas of public interest law, since issues and advocacy approaches often overlap or are intersectional.

Be aware that classes are not available every semester, as offerings change and professors take leaves, so plan your schedule accordingly. Additionally, think about taking advantage of new J-term offerings. Meet with an SJI adviser, Student Services adviser, or professor to get their advice as you choose your classes. If you plan to clerk, make sure to consider what would be helpful for that as well. (You can talk to the [Office of Judicial Clerkships](#) or to professors for advice.)

More information: [law.columbia.edu/courses](http://law.columbia.edu/courses)



**Should I do a journal?**

Journal work can be interesting and satisfying, especially if the journal focuses on a topic you are interested in. Public interest employers generally value public interest journals over business-related ones. However, some public interest employers—particularly those that do direct representation and trial work—do not value journals as much as clinics, externships, or internships.

Organizations that do a lot of complex litigation, appellate work, or policy may view journals as good preparation. Judges, academic institutions, and some employers look particularly favorably on the *Columbia Law Review*. Publishing a note, or other legal research and writing experience, is also of interest to them.

More information: [law.columbia.edu/community-life/student-life/student-organizations-journals](http://law.columbia.edu/community-life/student-life/student-organizations-journals)

**How much pro bono should I do as a 1L?**

Law school is a big adjustment, and everyone does it at their own pace. We generally advise 1Ls to take time to acclimate to law school (and focus on classes), and to take on pro bono projects if and when they feel ready. For those who are interested in exploring pro bono options during 1L year, and feel that having some interaction with the “real” world outside of Columbia will be a motivation and not overwhelming, SJI and student organizations have developed in-house projects with manageable and flexible time commitments. There also are off-campus opportunities suitable for some 1Ls. Finally, there are Spring Break Caravans that run in March during spring break. These are week-long pro bono projects that take place in New York City and other locations. For more information, see the [website](#) or contact the Pro Bono Program Coordinator. An important note: 1L pro bono hours do not count towards the Columbia 40-hour pro bono graduation requirement, but will go on the transcript as voluntary pro bono work and may count for the New York State Bar pro bono admission requirement. Any student who completes 100-plus hours of pro bono (including voluntary pro bono hours completed during 1L year) will be honored at SJI’s annual Honors Dinner in the spring.

More information: [law.columbia.edu/pro-bono](http://law.columbia.edu/pro-bono)

**I’m thinking about a public interest career. How will I get a job? Or learn about fellowships?**

Although the public interest job market can be a challenge, there are things you can do to be well-equipped to navigate it. First, make sure to take advantage of public interest opportunities that Columbia has to offer, as outlined in this guide. Second, work closely with an SJI adviser during your three years at Columbia to explore and prepare for postgraduate opportunities. Third, be prepared to not secure a job at the same time as many of your Columbia peers; the private sector timeline is very different than the public sector’s, and you should not feel bad about it! You will be rewarded for your diligence and patience by securing a career that is meaningful and satisfying to you.

We strongly urge you to consider applying for postgraduate fellowships and/or government honors programs, as they provide a direct path to public interest or government employment. Although the process can be time-consuming, it is well worth it, since it is a means of designing or obtaining your “dream” job, and is often the best entrée to public interest or government jobs. If you are interested

in fellowships, SJI will assign you a fellowship adviser at the end of your 2L year to work with you, and provide you with resources like our *Fellowship Toolkit*. For project-based fellowships, you will need to begin working to secure a host organization and a project during the summer after 2L year. Applications for these fellowships, and for many organization-based fellowships (which are more like standard job applications), are due starting early in 3L fall.

If you are interested in government fellowships or honors programs, you should work closely with SJI's government adviser. Some government honors applications are due at the end of 2L summer and early in 3L fall.

Make sure to set up a [psjd.org](https://psjd.org) account to monitor fellowships and consult with SJI regularly.

### **How will I pay my bills?**

Many public interest and government salaries have risen in the past few years and, when combined with Columbia's generous Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) benefits, support a good standard of living (even if not the lavish lifestyle supported by Big Law salaries). Columbia has instituted a new public service bridge loan for recent graduates, which provides even further support.

Most government agencies and many large nonprofit organization salaries are available on their websites. SJI can provide information about other public interest employers—including with recent data from salary surveys of Columbia grads and sample budgets. SJI can also provide advice regarding negotiating salaries. The [SJI](#) and [Financial Aid Office](#) websites contain information about LRAP (including FAQs and a detailed program guide) and other key financial information as well. For FAQs on LRAP, please see the following page.

### **In closing, there are many opportunities to take advantage of at Columbia. Don't forget to:**

- ✓ Attend programming to hear practitioners and professors discuss practice areas, types of lawyering, and current issues. Talk to speakers after the program.
- ✓ Join student organizations. Consider taking a leadership role.
- ✓ Attend social events for the public interest community.
- ✓ Participate in Spring Break Caravans and other pro bono opportunities.
- ✓ Take clinics and externships. Get to know your professors.
- ✓ Take public interest classes. Get to know your professors.
- ✓ Think about doing a term-time internship or pro bono.
- ✓ Think about working on a journal.
- ✓ Meet with SJI advisers on a regular basis.
- ✓ Attend public interest job fairs (on- and off-campus).
- ✓ Pursue public interest opportunities for summer employment.
- ✓ Network whenever you can.

## Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP)

### Frequently Asked Questions



#### What is LRAP?

- LRAP, or the Loan Repayment Assistance Program, is a Columbia program that helps graduates pursuing public interest careers repay their loans.
- In a nutshell, LRAP allows you to pay back your law school loans in 10 years, paying 34.5% of your income over \$55,000\*. If you work for 10 years and have an annual income of \$55,000, you won't pay anything toward your student loans. If you have an annual income of \$65,000, for example, you would pay only \$3,450 per year, or \$34,500 total toward your student loans.

#### Are there options within the LRAP program?

Columbia's LRAP includes three options:

1. **Traditional Option.** The most commonly used program operates as outlined above and is solely done through Columbia.
2. **Federal Option.** There is also a Federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, and if you choose to use this program, Columbia will supplement the federal program. The income threshold for this program is \$100,000, instead of \$55,000. However, there are restrictions, as well as the current uncertainty of the federal program.
3. **Combined Option.** The third option combines the Columbia and federal programs together, but since it relies on the federal program, it also has some level of uncertainty. If you want to find out if the federal program might be a good option for you, talk to the LRAP Administrator, Ms. Seandell James, for more information.

#### How does traditional LRAP actually work?

- After you graduate, you will start getting bills to pay back your student loans. LRAP gives you money, in the form of a forgivable loan, to help you make those payments.
- The amount of money you receive through LRAP depends on your income and loan payments.
- LRAP will cover all of your loan payments based on a 10-year repayment schedule until you make \$55,000. Once your annual income exceeds \$55,000, you will be responsible for 34.5% of the amount over \$55,000. So, if you make \$65,000 and have annual loan payments of \$25,000, you will get \$21,550 as a forgivable loan through LRAP, and you will pay \$3,450 yourself.

#### What do you mean by a "forgivable loan"?

- After working as a public interest lawyer for three years, Columbia will forgive 33% of the LRAP payments they have made to you.
- After four years, Columbia will forgive 67%.
- For years five to ten, Columbia will annually forgive 100% of the LRAP payments they've made. This means that if you are enrolled in LRAP for five or more years, you will not be responsible for paying back any of the payments you received from CLS.

#### So, all of this is based on my "annual income"—how is that calculated?

- Your annual income is calculated based on the amount you earn, and is adjusted based on your undergraduate educational debt, and by your spouse's income.
- Your income will be reduced by the amount of your annual undergraduate loan payments and any eligible dependent allowance.
- Additionally, a married graduate's income is calculated as half of the couple's joint income, or the graduate's income alone, whichever is higher. A spouse's income will be adjusted down by up to \$10,000 for educational loan debt payments.

#### What kinds of debt are covered?

- LRAP covers Columbia Law School debt, borrowed by the student in the form of federal and some private educational student loans, up to the standard cost of attendance as calculated by the school each year.
- LRAP does not cover undergraduate student loans (though undergraduate debt borrowed by the student factors into your salary calculation) or student loans from other graduate programs.

\* \$55,000 threshold effective February 1, 2019

**Disclaimer:** This document is intended for the guidance of students and graduates. While it sets forth a few basic questions about the Law School's LRAP, the sample calculations above are for general information purposes only. For detailed loan repayment and disclosure information, students/graduates must contact their lender/servicer directly. This document is not intended to be and should not be regarded as a contract. For the comprehensive and most current information regarding the Columbia Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP), please refer to the detailed description on the Financial Aid Office's website ([web.law.columbia.edu/financial-aid](http://web.law.columbia.edu/financial-aid)).

#### Does it matter what type of educational loans I borrow - federal or private?

- Yes. The type of loan you choose to borrow may have an impact on which of Columbia's three LRAP options will make the most sense for you to select.
- For instance, borrowers who choose private loans to finance their legal education may be limiting their LRAP preference after graduation when they enter into the Program. Private educational loans borrowed by the student are not eligible for the Federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program which would limit these students to the traditional LRAP option.
- You are encouraged to speak with a staff member in the Financial Aid Office to discuss this matter and how it may impact your individual situation.

#### What kinds of employment count as "public interest"?

- "Public interest" is defined as full-time public interest work as a lawyer, broadly construed, for an organization whose purpose includes the advancement of public interest, as opposed to the interests of particular clients (although advocating for individual clients may count as "public interest" depending on the type of organization).
- Usually, these organizations will be non-profits, international NGOs, or government agencies.
- The law school will determine whether or not a particular job qualifies. If you have questions, talk to the LRAP Administrator, Ms. Seandell James, for guidance.

#### Does it matter where I live?

- No. LRAP coverage is not based on geography.

#### Can I join LRAP a few years after graduating?

- Yes. You can enter LRAP up to 7 years after graduating. However, during your non-LRAP years, you are required to pay your loans on an LRAP schedule—that is, pay 34.5% of your annual earnings above \$55,000 toward your student loans.
- So, if you earned \$180,000 at a law firm for a year, you would need to have paid back \$43,125 (or 34.5% of \$125,000) that year. If you hadn't done so, you would be required to make a lump sum payment on your loans before being eligible to participate.

#### What about clerkships?

- Clerking counts as public interest employment, so for those planning to use LRAP for the full 10 years, clerking does not change anything about the program.
- There is also a special LRAP program for clerkship participants who don't plan to use LRAP after their clerkships. Talk to the LRAP Administrator, Ms. Seandell James, for more information.

#### Do graduates really use LRAP? What would my life look like on LRAP?


- Yes. Each year, there are approximately 350-370 LRAP participants.
- Be on the lookout for events presented by Social Justice Initiatives (SJI), Financial Aid and student groups to get to know more about the interests, lifestyles, and careers of our LRAP graduates!


#### Where do I find additional LRAP information?


Please visit the following website for the full LRAP description:

 [www.law.columbia.edu/finaid](http://www.law.columbia.edu/finaid).

Also contact the Law School Financial Aid Office:

 [LRAP@law.columbia.edu](mailto:LRAP@law.columbia.edu)

 (212) 854-6522

 William and June Warren Hall, 5th Floor

# PUBLIC INTEREST JOB SEARCH BASICS

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This section contains information to help you begin your job search process. The first step is to meet with an [SJI adviser](#) to construct a plan. It is important that we know who you are! We have advisers who specialize in public interest, government, and human rights. See [our website](#) for more information.

## *Job Search Resources*

The [SJI website](#) lists numerous sources for information about public interest opportunities. Here are some basic resources to help you get started:

- **PSJD.org.** This is a great resource to identify public interest employers within your areas of interest and preferred geographic areas. You can search by subject and location, research organizations, and review job postings. We recommend that in looking for summer opportunities, you start by searching “Employer Profiles” (rather than “Job Postings”). This will allow you to see organizations that meet your criteria, whether or not there is a current posting. After graduation, the situation is different. When looking for a postgraduate job, send a formal application only where there is a posting.
- **The Arizona Guide.** Also known as the Government Honors & Internship Handbook, this guide offers comprehensive information on federal, state, and local government internships and postgraduate honors programs. Visit [law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications](http://law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications) for the link and password.
- **Symlicity.** This internal website contains job postings that are sent specifically to Columbia by outside employers. All public interest, government, and human rights postings that SJI receives are housed in this internal location.
- **Columbia’s Public Interest Database.** For the inside scoop on summer internships, review past interns’ evaluations. Internship evaluations through summer 2017 can be found in the Public Interest Database, located on [LawNet](#) under “Student Services.” Evaluations for summer 2018 through this past summer are housed on [Symlicity](#). To find them, select the “My Account” tab, then the “Evaluations” tab, and then “Search” to search for the employer. Bear in mind this is not a full collection of every student who interned with these employers. We can often help you locate additional students who can share their experiences.
- **SJI’s New York Public Interest Index.** This index, located on our [Job Search Tools page](#), lists organizations in the New York metro area (including New Jersey and upstate New York) by subject area.

**GRAD TIP** Good job search sites include [idealist.org](http://idealist.org), [usajobs.gov](http://usajobs.gov), [higherjobs.org](http://higherjobs.org), [cleaweb.org](http://cleaweb.org), [psjd.org](http://psjd.org), and [LinkedIn](#), where you can follow organizations of interest to receive job notifications and news of their work.

## ***Planning Your Search: Some Frequently Asked Questions***

### **1. As a 1L, how wide should I cast my net, and how many jobs should I apply for?**

Try for your “dream job,” but realize that your goals might be accomplished by being flexible and applying for jobs “outside the box” and in broad geographic areas. There is no limit on the number of jobs you may apply for and no stigma to being offered a job and declining it (as long as you do so in a professional manner). A successful search takes creativity and persistence. We usually recommend beginning with a list of at least 15-20 organizations for 1L summer.

### **2. Should I consider applying for jobs outside of New York City or Washington, DC?**

Students should always consider applying for jobs beyond New York City and Washington, DC, since other markets are less saturated with Columbia Law students. It is often easier to find jobs in smaller markets. Plus, once you are there, you have the advantage of being a “big fish in a small pond” and often can get to know the public interest community more quickly. 1L summer is a great time to explore a new city, whereas 2L summer you should be more targeted to locations you would consider moving after graduation. Always remember that Columbia grads likely live in the city you are looking at, and SJI can help connect you. (If you do apply to an organization in a city where you have no previous ties, be prepared to explain why you want to move there.)

### **3. What if I have no experience in the subject area I want to work in for my 1L summer?**

Some of you will have experience or knowledge that feels obviously relevant to the positions you are applying to; but many of you will not. Don’t despair! The most important things you can offer a 1L summer employer are genuine interest in the organization’s work/mission, commitment to working hard, and thoughtfulness. Your cover letter will need to address the question of why you are applying to the particular office or organization, but you do not have to have worked in that particular field. You DO need to articulate your interest, but that interest may come from such places as undergraduate studies, speakers you have heard at law school, current events you read about, or life experiences. We encourage you to think about what you would like to do for the summer, and then think about why, rather than limiting yourself by your past involvements.

### **4. What if the place I am interested in for the summer does not have an internship posting?**

Apply! Almost every public interest organization takes on legal interns during the summer. Some organizations put out a formal internship posting, usually on their website. Others also post on [psjd.org](#) and/or send to schools, and thus will be on [Simplicity](#). You should check the organization’s website first, but if you do not find information about internships there, apply anyway. Remember that you can always call the organization to ask what the procedure is.

### **5. Should I worry about my online profile?**

Your online profile is relevant. Always consider every entry on social media as if it were publicly posted, out of prudence. Employers may do an internet search of prospective employees or check Facebook, Instagram, and other sites to gain information. Employers will be wary of candidates with inappropriate profiles, pictures, or information. Actively monitor your profile and delete any inappropriate content. Do not try to connect with prospective employers on LinkedIn or “friend” them when you have pending applications.



## 6. What should I do if I receive multiple offers?

If you get an offer from a public interest organization that is not your clear first choice, you should be very appreciative, and then ask the organization for one or two weeks to give them your answer. (They do not have to give you this time, but they may be willing to do so.) Then immediately contact your top-choice organizations, explain that you have another offer but that they are of greater interest to you, and ask if they can make a decision within the necessary timeframe. Respond to the first organization's offer within the time they have allotted, and do not ask for additional time. Of course, if the preferred organization moves ahead and gives you an offer, you should accept. Once you have accepted an offer, withdraw any outstanding applications to other organizations. You have made a commitment that should not be broken. See SJI with any questions.

## 7. May I split my summer?

Although many students who have split a summer have reported positive experiences, we generally advise caution with this option. First, spending a shortened amount of time in each position gives you less opportunity to explore the work, get to know the staff and culture, and develop quality relationships with supervisors or other potential mentors. Second, you will have less time to prove yourself, which can hurt your chances at getting a good reference or an offer, if there is one to be had. Third, you may be given less interesting work because you will be there a shorter time, or because you are not there when they give out initial assignments. Fourth, not all organizations welcome an intern who will be there for only half the summer. Nonetheless, there are situations in which splitting a summer makes sense. This is more often the case for 2L summer than 1L summer. Discuss your situation with an [SJI adviser](#) and refer to “Deciding Whether to Split Your Summer” on our [Job Search Tools](#) page.

## 8. May I still pursue a public interest career if I worked at a private law firm?

If you have worked at a corporate law firm, a public interest employer may still hire you if you have also done public interest work such as internships, externships, clinics, or other substantive assignments. Additionally, if you do pro bono work while at the firm, develop relevant skills while there, or engage in meaningful outside activities related to public interest (such as bar association committee work), the firm experience is less likely to deter public interest employers. However, public interest is very competitive. For postgraduate public interest jobs and fellowships, 2L summer is an important time to gain critical knowledge and relevant experience, and spending time at a corporate firm cuts into that. Some employers and fellowship funders consider a summer at a firm as a strong negative, suggesting ambivalence and lack of commitment, as well as a decision to forego a valuable opportunity. In some fields (e.g., environment, labor), working for the “other side” may close doors to a public interest job. That being said, spending a summer at a law firm is the right choice for some students. Additionally, some impact litigation organizations value time at a firm, as well as clerking, as a way to get litigation training. Some public interest and government employers absolutely understand that financial and other considerations may make going to a firm an important personal choice. These employers will consider your whole resume and the story you tell in your cover letter to confirm your commitment to public interest/public service. In those situations, it is especially important to build your public interest credentials during school and through pro bono. Consult with an [SJI adviser](#) when considering this option.

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## Public Interest Job Search Timelines

Public interest organizations generally do not have a regular hiring schedule for summers or new lawyers, unlike other large private employers. Students also tend to receive job offers late in the cycle and, sometimes, not until after graduation. Students who begin their research early, develop a plan, and follow through are more successful in their search. The following timelines suggest ways in which students can use their time strategically to position themselves for internships, fellowships, and jobs. For more detailed timelines, refer to the publication “Your Public Interest Roadmap: Exploring Public Interest/Public Service Law at Columbia Law School” on our [Job Search Tools](#) page.

**GRAD TIP** While there’s no way to know for certain how long it will take to find a postgraduate position, we recommend beginning your networking nine to twelve months before you would like to change jobs and starting to apply for positions four to six months beforehand. If you want the process to move more quickly, increase your networking activity accordingly.

### *1L Job Search Timeline*

#### **September and Throughout 1L**

- Attend events and programs at Columbia, such as SJI Mondays featuring public interest practitioners and discussions of public interest topics or offering guidance on how to fund a public interest career and on LRAP
- Reflect on your interests and goals
- Think about the issue areas and types of legal work that interest you
- Explore student organizations
- Talk with upper-class students about their public interest work
- Attend events with alumni practicing public interest law
- Look for the SJI Newsletter every Monday and visit [LawCal](#) daily
- Get to know other students interested in public interest
- Meet faculty

#### **Fall 1L**

- Come meet us! Make an appointment with an [SJI adviser](#) to discuss your interests and develop ideas for 1L summer
- Attend Job Search Preparation Mandatory Programs, which offer guidance on how to find a summer internship, prepare application materials, and successfully interview for public interest positions
- Create your account on [psjd.org](#) and begin browsing organizations
- Attend programs to learn from 2L and 3L students about their experiences
- Revise your resume to standard public interest legal format
- Have your resume reviewed by SJI. You can submit your resume to the 1L Online Resume and Cover Letter Review Portal for quick review by an SJI adviser. Visit the “[Meet the SJI Team](#)” page for the link.



- Research summer internship opportunities and create a list of 10-15 public interest organizations to apply to
- Be aware of any early application deadlines
- Begin preparation of cover letters and submit to your [SJI adviser](#) for review. You can also submit cover letters for review to the 1L Online Resume and Cover Letter Review Portal.
- Send in your Statement of Interest for the [Human Rights Internship Program \(HRIP\)](#)
- Sign up for [Guaranteed Summer Funding \(GSF\)](#)
- Register to attend the Public Interest Legal Career (PILC) Fair (held every February) at [pilcfair.law.nyu.edu](http://pilcfair.law.nyu.edu).

### Winter 1L

- Apply for summer internships
- Apply for interviews at the PILC Fair
- Update your voicemail so that it is appropriate to receive messages from employers
- Check your online presence—what will employers find if they search?
- Participate in SJI's Public Interest Mock Interview Program
- Attend PILC Fair in February (watch for SJI's prep session)
- Consult with an [SJI adviser](#)
- Follow up on job applications if necessary
- Send out additional applications if necessary

### Spring 1L

- Consider applying to clinics/externships for 2L year; attend info sessions
- Consider journals and organization leadership positions; attend info sessions
- Learn what opportunities will be available through the On-Campus Interview (OCI) and Early Interview (EIP) Programs. OCI will host a number of public interest and government offices, and EIP may have a very small number of government agencies participating
- Attend a Summer Payment Session if you are participating in GSF or HRIP
- Understand [LRAP](#); attend info sessions on financing a public interest career
- Attend relevant SJI programs

## *2L Job Search Timeline*

**TIP:** Your 2L job search will be different from your 1L search in several important ways. Keep the following in mind as you begin planning for your 2L summer.

- As a 2L, you will be in greater demand than you were as a 1L. You have significantly more to offer, and you will be viewed by employers as committed to forging a public interest career. Therefore, you can be more intentional and selective in the places you apply and will likely need to apply for fewer jobs than you did as a 1L. We encourage you to be proactive and to apply to your top choices first. Consider your postgraduate career goals in targeting opportunities that will strengthen the skills, knowledge, and connections you will need.
- Your 2L job search will begin in late August/early September. Employers hire 2Ls earlier than 1Ls, even if no separate deadline is indicated.
- You will need to update your resume, sometimes significantly. In addition to your 1L sum-

mer internship, you may include any clinic/externship you are enrolled in for the fall (with no text description until it begins), as well as student groups and/or pro bono projects you are committed to. Your cover letter will be different as well, and it will be very important to your application. Seek SJI guidance in developing your materials.

- Splitting your summer between a firm and a public interest organization (and sometimes between two public interest organizations) is, for some students, the right option. If you are thinking about a split summer at all, it is important that you speak with both SJI and the [Office of Career Services and Professional Development \(OCS\)](#).
- Finally, remember that SJI is open all summer long, and [advisers](#) are available to you in person or by phone. Don't hesitate to reach out! Advisers can also connect you with upper-class students and alumni who have had experiences relevant to your interests and goals.

### Throughout 2L

- Participate in clinics, externships, internships, and pro bono projects
- Select classes and seminars relevant to the skills you want to build and the practice areas you want to learn about
- Build your network; talk with people whose work inspires you
- Attend programs, panels, and events featuring public interest practitioners

### 1L Summer (Rising 2L)

- Reflect on your 1L summer internship
- Speak with attorneys working in your areas of interest
- If possible, develop a writing sample
- Speak with an [SJI adviser](#) about 2L summer; the application period for 2L summer jobs is in early fall
- Make list of organizations to apply to for 2L summer. Note early deadlines
- Watch for information about Fall OCI; be aware of early application deadlines
- Update materials! Consult with SJI
- Apply for OCI interviews with employers of interest
- Prepare and send internship applications to public interest organizations and government agencies. Even if no deadline is listed, most employers expect 2L applications in the fall.

### Fall 2L

- Continue to attend programs and events of interest
- Watch for emails from SJI; monitor [Simplicity](#) and [psjd.org](#)
- Keep track of deadlines
- Meet with SJI if needed
- Apply for 2L positions
- Register for the [Equal Justice Works \(EJW\) Career Fair](#) (held every fall in Washington, DC) and apply for interviews
- Attend EJW Career Fair
- Attend relevant SJI programs
- Participate in OCI if appropriate
- Sign up for [GSF/HRIP](#)
- Interview for 2L positions; consult with SJI

**Spring 2L**

- If considering project-based fellowships, brainstorm organizations and project ideas
- Consider clinics and externship for 3L year
- Attend a Summer Session Payment Session if you are participating in GSF or HRIP
- Note any early fellowship deadlines and apply if applicable
- Meet with the [Office of Judicial Clerkships](#) if you are interested in postgraduate clerkships

*3L Job Search Timeline***Throughout 3L**

- Maintain contact with [SJI](#)
- Connect with alumni as you ready applications and prepare for interviews

**Summer 2L (Rising 3L)**

- If you are interested in clerkships, start applying
- Research and identify postgraduate options, application requirements, and deadlines (including government honors programs, Presidential Management Fellowships, organization-based fellowships, and hosts for project-based fellowships)
- Set up alerts on [psjd.org](#); monitor [Symplicity](#); watch for SJI emails
- Work with a fellowship adviser
- Secure host and develop project for project-based fellowships
- Be aware of early government, organization-based fellowship, and public defender deadlines
- Begin drafting applications and cover letters and have them reviewed by SJI
- Identify recommenders
- Work with SJI throughout the summer
- Set up a deadline tracking system

**Fall 3L**

- Complete applications to programs and fellowships with early fall deadlines (government honors programs, EJW, Skadden, Columbia fellowships, etc.)
- Throughout the fall semester, attend information sessions on relevant postgraduate fellowship opportunities
- Regularly check [Symplicity](#), the [Arizona Guide](#), and [psjd.org](#) for job postings
- Participate in [EJW Career Fair](#), if relevant
- Contact SJI for mock interviews
- Interview for fellowships and jobs

**Spring 3L**

- Continue to consult with [SJI adviser](#)
- Continue to monitor opportunities and send out fellowship and job applications
- Interviews continue
- Make sure you are set up for [LRAP](#) (and the [Bridge Loan](#), if applicable)
- Register for the bar exam
- Apply for [Enhanced LRAP Fellowships](#)

# PUBLIC INTEREST RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

This section contains:

- **A resume checklist and a “workbook”** to help you get started on your resume. Please review the pointers even if you think you know the basics or have practiced law for several years.
- **Some quick tips** regarding language and more.
- **Sample resumes**, including “before” and “after” 1L/2L/3L and graduate resumes and portions of resumes geared toward specific situations. Please review all of these carefully. *Be sure to use the sample resumes as a reference guide only; do not copy them verbatim.*

For international jobs, please review our “International Public Interest Job Search Toolkit Supplement.” LL.M.s may review our “LL.M. Supplement.” Both are on our [Job Search Tools page](#).

## Resume Checklist

### FORMAT

- The resume is one page (You can go on to a second page in special circumstances; e.g., you graduated more than five years ago or have published extensively. More than that is rarely acceptable.)
- Eleven- or 12-pt font (such as Times New Roman or Garamond) with generous margins
- NO typos or grammatical errors
- No underlining or bullet points
- Format is similar to our samples
- Resume is not cluttered and is easy to read

### CONTENT

- The resume has a top header and “Education” and “Experience” sections
- Your contact information is professional and up to date
- The resume is tailored to the job you are seeking
- All relevant jobs, volunteer work, and activities are included
- You have included pro bono, internships, externships, clinics, journals, campus organizations, and research for a professor
- There is no “Objectives” section
- You have not included computer skills, classes (except clinics), or grades (except honors)
- High school information has been removed (see an SJI adviser for special circumstances)
- For public interest, we generally advise against including an “Interests” section. For government jobs, however, including clerkships and international internships, you may wish to include one. Wondering if an “Interests” section is appropriate for you? Speak with SJI.
- You have included “Languages,” “Bar Membership,” and “Publications,” if applicable

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## Resume Workbook

### 1. Create Your Top Header

It should include your name, address, email, and phone. Include your permanent address only if applying for jobs in that region. Before including your cell phone number, make sure your voicemail message is appropriate and that you are prepared to handle calls from potential employers in public locations. Include your Skype address if applying to employers located outside of the United States.

#### *Example*

**GIDEON TAYLOR**

919 West 185th Street, #B1, New York, NY 10036  
212-888-2285 • gt667@columbia.edu • Skype:GT2285

### 2. Create Your “Education” Section

Begin by listing all of your education post-high school, starting with your most recent degree. If you are more than five years out of law school, you can move this section beneath the “Experience” section. Next, make a list of all honors and activities in which you have participated since you started college. These will go under the “Honors” and “Activities” subsections under each degree.

#### *Example*

**EDUCATION**

**COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2018

Activities: Columbia Society for International Law  
Society for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

**UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER**, Rochester, NY

B.A. in Political Science and Spanish, *summa cum laude*, received May 2015

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa  
Susan B. Anthony Institute Women’s Leadership Award  
Golden Key Scholarship (awarded to the highest-ranked female junior)

Activities: Political Science Students Advisory Committee

### 3. Create Your “Honors” Section

The “Honors” section of your resume should include all of your academic honors, scholarships, fellowships, and awards. List the proper name, often in Latin, of the honor. Consider including brief descriptions, in parenthesis, next to the formal title, if helpful.

#### 4. Create Your “Activities” Section

Include your student organizations, journals, moot court, etc. If you have a title, include it. Do not include clinics, pro bono, externships, internships, and legal projects like TRP, UAC, or CAP—these are better in the “Experience” section if you have done substantive legal work. Be selective about activities you list and do not list activities you are only marginally involved with. If the nature of the activity is not clear from the title of the group or club, include a parenthetical explanation.

##### *If You Studied Abroad*

This can be included under “Activities” or a “Study Abroad” subsection under your college, if you did not receive a separate degree from that institution.

##### *Example*

**Study Abroad:** Columbia in Beijing at Tsinghua University  
Semester Abroad Program at Université de Neuchâtel (Neuchâtel, Switzerland)

##### *If You Published a Thesis/Note*

The title of your college thesis or law school note can be included under a third subsection below “Activities” and “Honors,” entitled “Thesis” or “Note” or “Publication,” under that school.

##### *Example*

**Thesis:** *Act, Identity, and the Fourteenth Amendment*

#### 5. Create Your “Experience” Section

Begin by making a list of all jobs, legal and non-legal, paid and volunteer, in reverse chronological order. Include the name of the organization, your job title, dates, location, and a brief description of the work you did. Your most relevant experiences (not necessarily the most recent) should have the longest descriptions. Begin each sentence with an action verb (see list in this packet and sample resumes). Think strategically about which experiences to include and what to highlight in each description. Do not exaggerate and do not include high school experience (if specific reasons exist to include it, talk to an [SJI adviser](#)). If your resume is intended for an international employer, see “Internationalizing Your Resume” in the “International Supplement to the Public Interest Job Search Toolkit,” available on the [Job Search Tools](#) page.

##### *Example*

##### **EXPERIENCE**

##### **Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.**

*Senior Program Specialist/Team Leader*

Led annual allocation of over \$2.5 million in federal funds to 980 literacy programs through federal subcontracts. Provided direct training and assistance to local programs. Trained, supervised, and evaluated four staff members. Analyzed program data and prepared reports.

Washington, DC

Aug. 2011-July 2012

## 6. Create Your “Language Skills,” “Bar Admissions,” and “Publications” Sections (If Applicable)

### Language Skills

This section should be included if you are applying for jobs where languages are useful (such as overseas positions or direct service work). Describe your ability (like “fluent” or “proficient”). Be truthful—this is fair game to test during an interview!

#### *Example*

**LANGUAGES:** French (native); Arabic (fluent); German (full professional proficiency)

### Bar Membership/Bar Admissions

You should include this section if you are a graduate and have taken a bar exam. Include any bar committees on which you serve.

#### *Example*

#### **BAR MEMBERSHIP**

Admitted to practice in New York and the District of Columbia. Member of the D.C. Bar Committee on Immigration and International Human Rights.

### Publications

This section can be included at the bottom of the resume if you have several publications of relevance to the job. As noted above, if you have a note or thesis, it can be included as a subsection under your school in the “Education” section. If necessary, this section can be on a second page of the resume. Be selective—unless you are applying for an academic position, list only a few of the most relevant publications.

#### *Example*

#### **PUBLICATIONS**

*Know Your Rights: A Guide for Immigrant Women Navigating U.S. Workplaces*, Harvard University Press

*South Asian Refugees and Immigrants: A Human Rights Dilemma*, 22 Hum. Rts. Q. 59. (2011)



## *Quick Tips for International Resumes*

If you are applying to a job based outside the U.S. or to a job with an international employer in the U.S., review your resume to eliminate anything that might be unclear or confusing to someone who is not familiar with U.S. geography, abbreviations, or references. For example, write out state names (“Rhode Island,” not “RI”) and dates (“June-August 2012,” not “Summer 2012”). Include a “Languages” section, if applicable. If you have substantial and relevant international travel experience, consider adding a “Travel” section. Please consult our [“International Supplement to the Public Interest Job Search Toolkit”](#) for further details on internationalizing your resume.

## *Resume Action Verbs*

Below is a list of action verbs to assist you in describing your experiences and accomplishments.

accelerated	compiled	effected	improved	outlined	rewrote
accomplished	completed	elicited	increased	oversaw	routed
achieved	composed	encouraged	informed	perceived	scheduled
acquired	computed	established	initiated	performed	searched
activated	conducted	evaluated	instituted	persuaded	selected
adapted	consolidated	examined	instructed	planned	served
adjusted	constructed	executed	interpreted	planted	shaped
administered	contacted	exhibited	interviewed	presented	shared
advised	continued	expanded	introduced	presided	showed
allocated	contracted	expedited	invented	printed	simplified
analyzed	convened	experienced	investigated	produced	solicited
annotated	conveyed	experimented	judged	protected	solved
anticipated	coordinated	explained	led	provided	specified
applied	corresponded	explored	listened	publicized	spoke
appraised	counseled	facilitated	maintained	questioned	stimulated
arranged	created	figured	managed	raised	structured
articulated	critiqued	financed	marketed	recommended	studied
assembled	decided	focused	mastered	recorded	supervised
assessed	defined	forecasted	measured	recruited	supported
assigned	delegated	formed	mediated	reduced	synthesized
authored	delivered	formulated	modeled	rendered	targeted
balanced	demonstrated	fostered	modified	repaired	taught
briefed	derived	founded	molded	reported	tested
budgeted	designed	functioned	monitored	represented	trained
built	detected	generated	motivated	reproduced	translated
catalogued	determined	governed	named	researched	tutored
categorized	developed	grouped	negotiated	resolved	updated
chaired	devised	guided	observed	responded	utilized
clarified	directed	helped	obtained	restored	verified
cleared	distributed	identified	operated	retained	wrote
coded	drafted	illustrated	ordered	retrieved	
collaborated	edited	immunized	organized	reviewed	
compared	educated	implemented	originated	revised	

## *Insider Tips for a Standout Resume*

- Your name should stand out at the top of the page but should not be too large, with a font size of 14-18 points.
- Use a professional, legible font, such as Calibri, Garamond, or Times New Roman.
- Spacing is important. Make sure that there are no more than one or two spaces between your section header and the accompanying text. Otherwise, your resume should be single-spaced.
- Make sure that your resume is correctly aligned at the margins.
- Remove bullets from your resume to free up space and improve the overall presentation.
- Abbreviate longer dates (Sept. instead of September).
- Remember to use a professional email address on your resume.
- If you are a graduate, it is expected that you will use a personal email address for employers to contact you directly.
- When applying for international internships or jobs, it is important to emphasize your experiences abroad in your “Education” and/or “Experience” sections.
- Current law school activities go under “Education.” Employers care about these, especially those related to the employer’s work. Even unrelated activities show you as well-rounded. You may want to skip activities that conflict with an employer’s goals, such as conservative political activities when applying to a progressive organization. You can list clinics and externships in your “Experience” section.
- If you have a position or title with a student organization, include it.
- If you are listing an academic prize or honor, include a brief description to illustrate the prestige of your achievement.
- Give thought to the activities and student organizations you include. Prioritize those that apply to your professional goals as well as those in which you held a leadership position.

### **GRAD TIP**

If you are a graduate with five-plus years of experience, begin your resume with your “Experience” section. If you are an experienced attorney with more than five years managing your own cases, a “**Representative Matters List**” may be a good addition to your resume. Contact Senior Career Adviser Tory Messina at [tmessina@law.columbia.edu](mailto:tmessina@law.columbia.edu) for a sample.

- Remove a separate campus and community activities section and place all activities in one section under the appropriate institution in the “Education” section.
- Descriptions should highlight your public interest experience.
- Write out what you did for each job, internship, or pro bono project as if you were answering a question during an interview and then edit it down to concise sentences. Never submit a resume with sparse descriptions of your experience. The reader should be able to understand what you did in your last position from reading the document. Remember to include anything that a legal employer would care about (such as exposure to legislative advocacy work); and include achievements (such as promotions).
- Use a variety of verbs in your work descriptions and highlight a variety of skills (communication, analytical, interpersonal).
- If you worked in an unrelated field prior to law school or could not do undergraduate internships because you had to work to support yourself, draft descriptions for those jobs that highlight the skills and experience that would interest a legal employer. For example, managing a team of 25 servers at a restaurant could demonstrate your ability to supervise large teams, prioritize tasks, and work efficiently under pressure. Working as a lifeguard could demonstrate your ability to respond well in a crisis. Working as a medical researcher could demonstrate your ability to conduct complex research and report your findings. Write clear descriptions of your work that highlight these transferable skills. However, if you have more relevant work experience covering the same time period, you may want to consider omitting the less relevant jobs from your resume.
- Include all substantial volunteer experiences (such as volunteer jobs that required you to donate several hours a week for an extended period of time) in your “Experience” section.
- Save your resume as a .pdf file before emailing it as an attachment to your application.

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## Sample Resumes

The following pages include sample resumes. We include resumes that are fairly typical of first-year students at Columbia, as well as resumes of upper-class public interest students and grads. You will see that what your resume will look like next year and the year after will depend in large part on how you use your time in law school and what story you want to tell.

### 1L Resumes

- Gideon Taylor (Before and After)
- Ruby Thomas (Before and After)
- Morgan Henry
- Ben Ahmed
- Abel Assefa Zenawi
- Naomi Bennett

### 2L Resumes

- Francesca Silvestri (Before)
- Francesca Silvestri (After)
- Michael Goldberg
- Nidhi Khan
- Darius Wiley

### 3L Resumes

- Mai Nguyen
- Douglas Povinelli

### Graduate Resumes

- Stephanie Montenegro
- Mary Cummings Brown

### Other Resumes

- Andrew Park (Joint degree student)
- Solomon King (Example of a resume that includes a current and a permanent address)
- Akeyla Harrison (Transfer student; example of a resume that includes a clinic to be taken the subsequent semester)
- Julia Thomas (Student who transferred schools as an undergraduate)

## Sample 1L Resume: Before Revisions

# GIDEON TAYLOR

919 West 185<sup>th</sup> St #B1 NY, NY 10036 • 212-888-2285 • gt667@columbia.edu • Skype:GT2285

## EDUCATION

**COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY Juris Doctor expected May 2023

**UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND**, Kingston, RI  
Bachelor of Arts in History, *cum laude*, received May 2020

## EXPERIENCE

<b>ACLU OF RHODE ISLAND</b> <i>Assistant Clerk</i> Organized files and reviewed forms.	Providence, RI Summer 2020
<b>BROWN UNIVERSITY SPORTS FOUNDATION</b> <i>Intern</i> Helped with fundraising efforts.	Providence, RI Summer 2019
<b>SHOWCASE CINEMA</b> <i>Ticket Agent</i> Assisted patrons with ticket purchases.	Warwick, RI Summer 2018
<b>YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION</b> <i>Lifeguard</i> Monitored Olympic-size pool on team of lifeguards.	Riverside, RI Summer 2017

**Sample 1L Resume: After Revisions****GIDEON TAYLOR**

919 West 185<sup>th</sup> Street, #B1, New York, NY 10036 • 212-888-2285 • gt667@columbia.edu • Skype: GT2285

**EDUCATION****COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: New England Law Students Association  
Deans' Cup  
Environmental Law Society

**UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND**, Kingston, RI

B.A., *cum laude*, received May 2020

Major: History  
Honors: Scholar Athlete Award  
Activities: Men's Soccer Team (4 years)  
Campus Orientation and Tour Committee

**EXPERIENCE****ACLU OF RHODE ISLAND**

*Assistant Clerk*

Providence, RI  
May–Aug. 2020

Organized legislative files from past legislative sessions on bills pertaining to voting rights, free speech and immigrant rights. Reviewed complaint forms submitted by individuals seeking ACLU assistance and submitted written summaries to attorneys.

**BROWN UNIVERSITY SPORTS FOUNDATION**

*Intern*

Providence, RI  
May–Aug. 2019

Helped with fundraising efforts and outreach to donors for Brown Athletics Department by placing calls to alumni, drafting newsletters, and updating the department's website.

**SHOWCASE CINEMA**

*Ticket Agent*

Warwick, RI  
May–Aug. 2018

Assisted patrons with ticket purchases. Coordinated with a team to complete tasks throughout the theater.

**YMCA**

*Lifeguard*

Riverside, RI  
May–Aug. 2017

Monitored Olympic-size pool as part of a team of lifeguards. Promoted to supervising role after one month and trained and supervised 10 lifeguards.

## Sample 1L Resume: Before Revisions

### RUBY THOMAS

200 West 111<sup>th</sup> Street, Apartment 2K, New York, NY 10027  
(212) 555-0011, sunshinebunny92@gmail.com

#### EDUCATION

**Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

*Juris Doctor, expected May 2023*

Activities

- Journal of Gender and Law
- Columbia Law Women's Association
- DeVinimus

**University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA**

*Bachelor of Arts in Social Movements, Protest, and Policy in America, received May 2017*

Honors

- Graduated *cum laude* with Distinction in all Subjects
- Dean's Scholar Research Grant
- University Honors Society

Thesis

- *Act, Identity, and the Fourteenth Amendment*

Activities

- LGBT Liaison for University of Iowa Student Assembly
- Kappa Delta Tri Sorority

#### EXPERIENCE

**Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.**

*Senior Program Specialist/Team Leader*

Washington, DC

Aug. 2019–July 2020

- Led annual allocation of over \$2.5 million dollars in federal funds to 980 literacy programs through federal subcontracts.
- Provided direct training and assistance to local programs.
- Trained, supervised and evaluated four staff members.
- Analyzed program data and prepared reports.

*Program Specialist*

Jan. 2018–Aug. 2019

- Reviewed several hundred proposal packages for federal funding for children's literacy programs.
- Provided written and verbal technical assistance and training to program coordinators.
- Developed new training materials and revised existing materials. Facilitated trainings.

**Feminist Majority Foundation**

*Campus Organizer*

Arlington, VA

Aug. 2017–Dec. 2017

- Organized college activists into pro-choice feminist student organizations.
- Advised students on event planning and meeting facilitation.
- Presented workshops.

**Advocates for Youth**

*Intern, HIV/STD Department*

Washington, DC

May 2017–Aug. 2017

- Revised, researched and edited a peer education manual for adolescents on HIV/AIDS.
- Drafted several new sections of the handbook.



## Sample 1L Resume: After Revisions

### RUBY THOMAS

200 West 111<sup>th</sup> Street, Apartment 2K, New York, NY 10027  
(212) 555-0011, rgt2279@columbia.edu<sup>1</sup>

#### EDUCATION

##### **Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities<sup>2</sup>: *Journal of Gender and Law*  
Columbia Law Women's Association (1L Representative)  
Outlaws

##### **University of Iowa**, Iowa City, IA

B.A., *cum laude*, received May 2017

Major: Social Movements, Protest, and Policy in America

Honors: Dean's Scholar Research Grant

University Honors Society

Activities<sup>3</sup>: LGBT Liaison for University of Iowa Student Assembly  
University of Iowa Committee on Non-Discrimination Policy

Thesis: *Act, Identity, and the Fourteenth Amendment*

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.**

Washington, DC

*Senior Program Specialist/Team Leader*

Aug. 2019–July 2020

Led annual allocation of millions in federal funds to hundreds of literacy programs through federal subcontracts. Provided direct training and assistance to local programs. Trained, supervised and evaluated four staff members. Analyzed program data and prepared reports.

##### *Program Specialist*

Jan. 2018–Aug. 2019

Reviewed several hundred proposal packages for federal funding for children's literacy programs. Provided written and verbal technical assistance and training to program coordinators. Developed new training materials and revised existing materials. Facilitated trainings.

##### **Feminist Majority Foundation**

Arlington, VA

*Campus Organizer*

Aug. 2017–Dec. 2017

Organized college activists into pro-choice feminist student organizations. Advised students on event planning and meeting facilitation. Presented workshops on organizing and reproductive rights.

##### **Advocates for Youth**

Washington, DC

*Intern*, HIV/STD Department

May 2017–Aug. 2017

Revised, researched and edited a peer education manual for adolescents on HIV/AIDS. Drafted several new sections of the handbook including a section on cultural competency.

##### **Office of Representative John E. Baldacci (D-ME)**

Bangor, ME

*Intern*

June 2016

Answered constituents' phone calls. Drafted letters to constituents about their concerns.

<sup>1</sup> Remember to use a professional email address on your resume.

<sup>2</sup> Student removed DeVinimus, a wine-drinking student group, from her activities section and replaced it with another more relevant student group that demonstrates her commitment to public service. Be sure to note any leadership positions you have held as well.

<sup>3</sup> Student removed Kappa Delta Tri Sorority from her resume. You should be careful about including sorority and fraternity memberships on your resume, except for academic fraternities. Speak to an SJI adviser if you have any questions.

## Sample 1L Resume

### MORGAN S. HENRY

555 West 112<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 3B, New York, NY 10027  
(212) 555-7777 • msh2222@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: Civil Rights Law Society  
National Native American Moot Court Competition  
Columbia Human Rights Internship

##### YALE UNIVERSITY, New Haven, CT

B.A., received May 2019

Major: History  
Honors: Mellon Grant for Senior Essay Research  
Activities: Yale Women's Rowing

#### EXPERIENCE

##### UNCONTESTED DIVORCE WORKSHOP

New York, NY

*Student Advocate*

Fall 2020-Present

In conjunction with attorneys from Sanctuary for Families, draft divorce petition and advocate for client in court.

##### HEALTH AND EDUCATION CENTER FOR YOUTH

San Francisco, CA

*Program Associate*

Fall 2019-Spring 2020

Designed and facilitated educational sessions for youth on topics such as HIV education, STDs, pregnancy prevention, decision-making, self-esteem, and substance abuse. Developed programs for a variety of settings and audiences. Instructed youths in peer-led HIV education trainings.

##### GLOBAL SERVICE CORPS

Machakos, Kenya

*HIV Educator*

Summer 2018

Developed an AIDS education program in conjunction with the Kenyan Red Cross, the Machakos Ministry of Education, and community leaders to increase awareness of HIV, free testing, and safer sex practices. Presented program to students, rural women's groups, and truck drivers.

##### ALFORD LAKE CAMP

Hope, ME

*Resident Counselor/ Staff Coordinator*

Summers 2016, 2017

Directed "Out-of-Camp" trip program. Trained staff of four to assess risks and respond to emergencies on hiking and canoeing trips ranging from 1-5 days. Managed logistics including food, transportation, and safety for 30 trips. Provided first-aid training to staff.

##### CITYQUICKER.COM

New York, NY

*Assistant*

Summer 2015

Proofread web content for Internet start-up company providing professionals with relocation information.

#### LANGUAGES Proficiency in French

**Sample 1L Resume****BEN AHMED**

444 West 77<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 2K, New York, NY 10024  
 (212) 555-0011 • bya1822@columbia.edu

**EDUCATION**

**Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: Public Interest Law Foundation  
 Environmental Law Society  
 Columbia Society for Law, Science, and Technology  
 South Asian Law Students Association

**Cornell University**, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Ithaca, NY

B.S., *magna cum laude*, received May 2017

Major: Applied Economics and Business Management

Honors: Ho-Nun-De-Kah, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences Honor Society  
 Golden Key National Honor Society  
 Dean's List

Activities: Ho-Nun-De-Kah Honor Society, Publicity Chair  
 Cornell University Program Board  
 Student Orientation Committee

**EXPERIENCE**

**Pillsbury Winthrop LLP**

New York, NY

*Legal Assistant*

July 2018–Aug. 2020

Interviewed expert witnesses for pro bono litigation involving a wrongful death penalty conviction.

Prepared, filed, and coordinated service of pleadings in Chapter 11 bankruptcy cases. Conducted legal and factual research. Prepared marketing materials for potential clients and legal notices for publication in national media.

**Cornell Office of Counseling, Advising, and Minority Programs**

Ithaca, NY

*Peer Advisor and Administrative Assistant*

Aug. 2017–June 2018

Advised new, underrepresented students on topics of academic, professional, and personal interest. Provided information and referrals on academic majors, university support networks, college procedures and deadlines, and campus events. Performed general administrative duties.

**Department of Agricultural, Resource, and Managerial Economics**

Ithaca, NY

*Teaching Assistant, Marketing Management*

Jan.–May 2017

Analyzed and presented marketing case studies for instructional use. Evaluated student papers and assisted in grading examinations.

**TakeNote, Inc.**

Ithaca, NY

*Business Editor*

Aug. 2016–Jan. 2017

Reviewed notes for undergraduate business classes. Revised factual, grammatical, and typographical errors. Clarified ambiguities in material presented and adjusted formatting of notes to fit standard company template.

**Penguin Putnam Inc.**

New York, NY

*Subsidiary Rights Intern*

June–Aug. 2016

Helped to negotiate and draft subsidiary rights contracts with book clubs and film studios.

## Sample 1L Resume

### **ABEL ASSEFA ZENAWI**

874 West 119th Street, #10B • New York, NY 10027 • 301-267-8514 • az5412@columbia.edu

#### **EDUCATION**

##### **COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: African Law Students Association

##### **UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**, College Park, MD

B.A., with honors, received May 2020

Major: Anthropology

Activities: Anthropology Student Association Semester Abroad in Jamaica

Thesis: *The Economic and Social Ramifications of Conflict on Youth in War-Torn Africa*

#### **EXPERIENCE**

##### **UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

College Park, MD

*Department of Anthropology, Research Assistant*

June 2020–Aug. 2020

Worked remotely to research topics pertaining to indigenous people’s rights in Argentina for Dr. Judith Freidenberg. Led remote outreach efforts to Native American communities to develop new anthropological studies program.

##### **UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

College Park, MD

*Admissions Assistant*

Sept. 2019–May 2020

Assisted staff in Office of Undergraduate Admissions with preparations for incoming freshman activities. Edited admissions materials for upcoming admissions cycle.

##### **GIANT SUPERMARKET<sup>1</sup>**

Silver Spring, MD

*Sales Clerk*

June 2018–Aug. 2019

Assisted customers with grocery checkout and bagging. Led efforts to educate management about African cuisine in effort to expand offerings in international ingredient aisle.

##### **WALGREENS**

College Park, MD

*Stockroom Clerk*

Aug. 2016–May 2018

Stocked store shelves and organized excess inventory in stockroom.

#### **LANGUAGE** Fluent in Amharic, Oromo

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<sup>1</sup> This 1L included his work experience at Giant Supermarket and Walgreens on his resume to reference skills he developed at these jobs, to demonstrate that he had to work to support himself, and to explain why he did not have any internships. As he starts gaining legal experience, he will take this off his resume. If and when you have more relevant work experience, you will leave positions like this off your resume.

## Sample 1L Resume

### NAOMI BENNETT

407 West 118th Street, Apt. 7B New York, NY 10027  
(510) 222-3344 • nlb2234@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### **COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: Criminal Justice Action Network, 1L Representative  
High School Law Institute, Criminal Law Teacher  
Student Public Interest Network

##### **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY**, Berkeley, CA

B.A. in Psychology, *magna cum laude*, received May 2019

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa

Activities: *The Daily Californian*, Writer  
Student Environmental Resource Center  
Summer Abroad in Argentina, University of Buenos Aires  
Spanish Language Club

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **EAST BAY FAMILY DEFENDERS**, Oakland, CA

*Paralegal*

June 2019-August 2020

Supported attorneys and social workers in small legal services office dedicated to serving parents of children in foster care. Accompanied clients to appointments, including visits with their children. Served subpoenas and other documents, attended and took notes at court hearings. Assisted with community outreach and office-sponsored events.

##### **PEOPLE'S TEST PREPARATION SERVICES**, Berkeley, CA

*Co-Director and Coordinator, SAT Math Teacher*

September 2017-May 2019

Oversaw staff of teachers providing free SAT classes to 200+ underprivileged Bay Area high school students every semester; facilitated weekly meetings. Created lesson plans and slides; taught two-hour SAT Math classes to 20-30 students every week.

##### **FAMILY VIOLENCE LAW CENTER**, Oakland, CA

*Domestic Violence Crisis Line Intern*

June-August 2018

Assisted victims of domestic violence by locating shelters and appropriate service agencies. Conducted initial case intakes for by interviewing prospective clients and writing summaries. Organized case files. Attended trainings.

##### **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY**, Berkeley, CA

*Research Assistant to Professor Leslie Davidson, Department of Psychology* September 2017-May 2018

Assisted professor with manuscript for book. Maintained records of current studies, transcribed interviews, organized and recorded data.

**LANGUAGE SKILLS:** Spanish (conversational)

## Sample 2L Resume: Before Revisions

# FRANCESCA SILVESTRI

111 West 121<sup>st</sup> St #555 New York, NY 10027 212-555-1212 [fus1111@columbia.edu](mailto:fus1111@columbia.edu)

## EDUCATION

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- 2019–2022 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY  
J.D. degree anticipated May 2020
- 2015–2019 UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER, Rochester, NY  
B.A. degree, *summa cum laude*, awarded May 2017  
Double major in Political Science and Spanish  
Minor in Latin American Studies
- 2014–2015 COLEGIO VILLA RICA, Veracruz, MEXICO  
Rotary International Exchange Student following graduation from high school  
Attended Colegio Villa Rica for one full year, becoming fluent in Spanish  
Traveled extensively throughout central Mexico and the Yucatán peninsula

## HONORS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

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- Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society Member  
Selected as Chief Student Marshall at the University of Rochester 2019 Commencement  
Golden Key Scholarship, awarded to highest academically ranked junior  
Susan B. Anthony Institute Women's Leadership Award  
U.S. Department of Defense National Security Education Program, David L. Boren Scholar

## INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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- Spring Semester 2018 SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING, Fortaleza, Ceará, BRAZIL  
*Culture, Development, and Social Justice Scholar*. Participated in a study abroad program focused on heightening social awareness through a seminar on Brazil's history, economics, politics and culture, including field studies. Completed an advanced Portuguese language course  
Conducted original research on Brazilian agrarian reform and the social movement surrounding it.
- Summer 2017 U.S. EMBASSY, INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, Mexico City, MEXICO  
*Office for Latin America Intern*. Utilizing bilingual Spanish-English skills, advised and counseled Mexican and Latin American citizens regarding policies and approaches for completing high school, undergraduate, and graduate studies in the U.S. Conducted group orientation sessions in Spanish. Assisted with the research, editing, and design of the *Bilingual Schools in Mexico City* publication. Created a law school informational diskett and electronic newsletter.
- Summer 2015 AMIGOS DE LAS AMERICAS INTERNATIONAL, Rio Grande do Norte, BRAZIL  
*Health Care Volunteer*. Worked in a rural Brazilian village to improve health and sanitary conditions. Built latrines; planted trees; renovated an elementary school; and provided education in dental health, breastfeeding, and first aid. Became proficient in conversational Portuguese.



## WORK EXPERIENCE

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- Fall 2020–present      OPEN SOCIETY JUSTICE INITIATIVE, New York, NY  
*Legal Intern for the Mexico Migration Project.* Researching the effects of the U.S.’s border management policies on Mexico’s domestic immigration policies and procedures. Comparing Mexico’s policies of migrants’ due process rights to the international standards.
- Summer 2018            DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, Minneapolis, MN  
*Office of Chief Counsel, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Intern.* Attended deportation hearings and provided assistance when needed. Conducted in-depth research on Central American asylum cases, utilizing knowledge of the historical political situations and language skills. Acquired a broad understanding of the Department’s duties through attending seminars on fraudulent documents, attending interviews of applicants for benefits, and observing the U.S. Border Patrol at the Minneapolis International Airport.
- Summer 2017            HENNEPIN COUNTY ATTORNEY’S OFFICE, Minneapolis, MN  
*Child Protection Division Intern.* Worked in the division filing system and databases, and assisted with the newly developed electronic distribution of reports. Provided Spanish translation for victim-witness staff in the Juvenile Prosecution Division.
- 2017–2018              UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER, Rochester, NY  
*Teaching Assistant for Elementary Spanish and Microeconomics.* Prepared and facilitated weekly recitation sessions, held weekly office hours, assisted with student test preparation and grading. Served as a general liaison between faculty and students.
- 2017–2018              *Community Assistant & Resident Advisor.* Created residential climate conducive to academic achievement, good scholarship, and intellectual stimulation. Duties included community development; organizing programs and events for residents; serving as an emergency resource, counselor and advisor; and operating as a floor leader.
- 2015–2017              *Sesquicentennial Student Manager and Fairbank Alumni House Office Assistant.* Provided office support related to marketing the University to alumni and friends. Became proficient with Excel spreadsheets and several other databases. Appointed “Student Sesquicentennial Manager” for the University’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary; responsibilities included managing a special account of book orders for the Alumni Department regarding the University’s Pictorial History.

## CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

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- 2019–present            *Columbia Society of Immigrant and Refugee Rights.* Attend meetings.
- 2019–present            *Columbia Society of International Law.* Assist in the coordination of the Friedman Conference, a one-day conference focusing on an issue of Public International Law. This year’s conference is focusing on Nation Building.
- 2017–2018              *University of Rochester Student Government Chief-of-Staff.* Appointed by the President to serve as second-in-command in the Executive Cabinet. Created, coordinated, and executed projects to better the lives of the Rochester students. Collected and provided feedback as an official representative of the student body.

## Sample 2L Resume: After Revisions

### FRANCESCA SILVESTRI

111 West 121<sup>st</sup> Street, #555, New York, NY 10027  
212-555-1212 • fus1111@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### Columbia Law School, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: Columbia Society for International Law  
Society for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

##### University of Rochester, Rochester, NY

B.A., *summa cum laude*, in Political Science and Spanish<sup>1</sup> received May 2019

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa  
U.S. Department of Defense Boren Scholar  
Golden Key Scholarship (awarded to highest-ranked female junior)  
Susan B. Anthony Institute Women's Leadership Award

Activities: Student Government, Chief-of-Staff (University Presidential Appointment)  
Semester abroad (with fieldwork) in Fortaleza, Brazil

#### EXPERIENCE

##### Open Society Justice Initiative

*Legal Intern, Mexico Migration Project*

New York, NY  
Sept. 2020-Present

Research effects of U.S. border management policies on Mexico's domestic immigration policy. Compare Mexico's policies on migrants' due process rights to international standards.

##### Department of Homeland Security

*Intern, Office of Chief Counsel, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement*

Minneapolis, MN  
Summer 2020

Assisted attorneys in deportation hearings remotely. Conducted research on Central American asylum cases.

##### Hennepin County Attorney's Office

*Intern, Child Protection Division*

Minneapolis, MN  
Summer 2019

Updated the division filing system and databases. Provided translation for victims and staff.

##### University of Rochester

*Teaching Assistant for Spanish and Microeconomics*

Rochester, NY  
2018-2019

Prepared and facilitated weekly recitation sessions. Assisted with test preparation and grading.

*Resident Advisor*

2018-2019

Created supportive residential climate for students. Served as advisor and floor leader.

##### U.S. Embassy, Institute of International Education

*Intern, Office for Latin America*

Mexico City, Mexico  
Summer 2017

Advised Mexican and Latin American citizens regarding policies and approaches for completing high school, undergraduate, and graduate studies in the U.S.

#### LANGUAGE SKILLS<sup>2</sup> Spanish (fluent); Portuguese (proficient).

<sup>1</sup> Student removed her minor from the resume. You do not need to include your undergraduate minor on your resume unless it is particularly relevant to work for which you are applying or fills in a piece of your narrative that isn't apparent from other parts of your resume.

<sup>2</sup> Remember, there is generally no "Interests" section on a public interest resume.

## Sample 2L Resume

### MICHAEL GOLDBERG

555 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 3, New York, NY 10027  
212-555-1212 • mhg4487@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Honors: Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar (for superior academic achievement)  
Class of 1912 Prize (for top 1L student in the subject of contracts)

Activities: *Human Rights Law Review*

##### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, Philadelphia, PA

B.A., *summa cum laude*, received May 2019

Major: Cognitive Science

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa  
College Alumni Society Prize in Cognitive Science

Publication: “Approval Voting and Parochialism,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (forthcoming), with Jonathan Baron and Stephan Kroll

Activities: Cuba Health Project  
Peer Advisor

#### EXPERIENCE

##### COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE CLINIC

New York, NY

*Student Participant*

Fall 2020

Provide legal assistance (including transactional, regulatory, and tax assistance) to non-profit organizations and small businesses. Work on community development issues. Clients include Housing Plus Solutions and UHAB Housing Development Fund Corporation.

##### COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

New York, NY

*Research Assistant to Professor Vincent Blasi*

Fall 2020

Research first amendment issues related to campaign spending regulations. Provide research and editorial assistance for revision of textbook on First Amendment Law.

##### U.S. ATTORNEY’S OFFICE, S.D.N.Y.

New York, NY

*Intern*

Summer 2020

Researched and wrote memoranda on a variety of civil litigation matters, including *Bivens* suits, Title VII, immigration, and taxation cases. Drafted motions, deposition outlines and correspondence. Attended depositions, mediation sessions, trials, oral arguments and client interviews.

##### COURTROOM ADVOCATES PROJECT, SANCTUARIES FOR FAMILIES

New York, NY

*Student Advocate*

Fall 2019

Assisted a victim of domestic violence to obtain an order of protection. Conducted client interviews, drafted pleadings, and appeared in court as the client’s advocate.

##### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia, PA

*Department of Neurology, Undergraduate Research Assistant*

2017–2019

Assisted with processing, organizing and collating neuroimaging data and patient data files.

## Sample 2L Resume

### Nidhi Khan

222 West 111<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 2T, New York, NY 10027  
(212) 555-5599 • nk2211@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Honors: *Columbia Law Review*

Activities: South Asian Law Students Association, Academic Chair  
Student Public Interest Network, Board Member

##### BOSTON COLLEGE, Boston, MA

B.A. in International Relations and English, *cum laude*, received May 2018

Activities: Center for the Advanced Study of India, Research Assistant  
Writing Across the University, Writing Advisor  
South Asian Students Association

#### EXPERIENCE

##### ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE & EDUCATION FUND

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Spring 2021

Investigated wage and hour, and unsafe workplace claims by day laborers of South Asian descent. Organized outreach projects to inform community of immigrants' and workers' rights.

##### NEUFELD SCHECK & BRUSTIN, LLP

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Fall 2020

Researched and wrote memoranda on legal issues related to wrongful conviction. Drafted motions and complaints. Conducted document review of discovery, including police and forensic reports, to prepare for depositions.

##### NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE OF HARLEM

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2020

Assisted with preparation of witnesses for direct and cross examination during trial. Interviewed clients and witnesses. Researched and drafted legal instruments such as motions and pleadings.

##### TENANTS RIGHTS PROJECT, COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Fall 2019-Spring 2020

Worked with low income clients to file petitions against landlords for violations of housing codes in their apartments. Advocated for clients in court hearings and settlement discussions with landlords' attorneys.

##### BAIN & COMPANY

Boston, MA

*Associate Consultant*

Summer 2018-Spring 2019

Researched and analyzed financial services, consumer products, and retail industries by interviewing experts and surveying customers. *Pro bono* work included research on the recession's impact on NYC non-profit sector.

#### PUBLICATIONS

*Know Your Rights: A Guide for Immigrant Women Navigating U.S. Workplaces*, Harvard University Press (forthcoming)

*South Asian Refugees and Immigrants: A Human Rights Dilemma*, 22 Hum. Rts. Q. 59. (2019)

## Sample 2L Resume

### DARIUS WILEY

222 West 121<sup>st</sup> Street, Apt. 3K, New York, NY 10027  
(212) 555-6677 • dew323@columbia.edu

## EDUCATION

### Columbia Law School, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Honors: *Columbia Law Review*  
Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar (for academic achievement)  
Dean's Honors, Conflict of Laws, Spring 2020

Activities: Black Law Students Association  
Frederick Douglass Moot Court  
Capitol Appeals Project (spring break pro bono project, March 2020)

### Columbia University, New York, NY

B.A. in Economics, received May 2017

Honors: Dean's List  
King's Crown Leadership Award

Activities: Black Students Organization  
Habitat for Humanity  
Club Soccer

## EXPERIENCE

### Challenging the Consequences of Mass Incarceration Clinic, New York, NY

Fall 2020

*Student participant*

Member of team engaged in litigation in federal and state court related to prisoners' conditions of confinement. Conduct legal research, visit prisons, meet with clients, participate in strategy sessions.

### Center for Constitutional Rights, New York, NY

Summer 2020

*Summer Intern*

Researched and wrote memoranda on: immigrants' due process rights, governmental infringement of the Fourth Amendment, racial discrimination patterns in law enforcement, and various issues arising out of international human rights litigation in U.S. courts.

### Public Defender Service of DC, Washington, DC

Fall 2017-Spring 2019

*Investigator*

Served as investigator for lawyers representing indigent defendants in felony proceedings. Interviewed and took statements from witnesses, photographed crime scenes, served subpoenas, and reviewed medical records and police videos.

### NYC Parks Department, New York, NY

Summers 2016, 2017

*Counselor and Tutor*

Served as counselor for youth ages 10-12 in NYC day camp program serving low-income communities. Worked with other counselors to develop and supervise recreational activities and team sports events. Tutored campers in math and reading.

## Sample 3L Resume

### Mai Nguyen

222 West 121<sup>st</sup> Street, Apt. 3K, New York, NY 10027  
(212) 555-6677 • mn323@columbia.edu

## EDUCATION

### Columbia Law School, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2021

Honors: *Columbia Law Review*, Senior Editor  
Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar (for academic achievement)

Activities: Rightslink  
Human Rights Internship Program  
Capital Appeals Project (spring break pro bono project, March 2020)

### Columbia University, New York, NY

B.A. in Economics and Political Science, received May 2016

Honors: Dean's List  
King's Crown Leadership Award

Activities: Reading tutor with Washington Heights Tutors

### International School of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

Bilingual International Baccalaureate Diploma, received August 2015

## EXPERIENCE

### Center for Constitutional Rights, New York, NY

Summer 2020

*Summer Intern*

Researched and wrote memoranda on: immigrants' due process rights, governmental infringement of the Fourth Amendment, racial discrimination patterns in law enforcement, and various issues arising out of international human rights litigation in U.S. courts.

### National Coalition for Haitian Rights, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Summer 2019

*Summer Intern*

Assisted activists and lawyers in monitoring the judiciary, police, and other governmental institutions. Organized basic legal and human rights education seminars for members of grassroots organizations. Investigated abuses of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic.

### U.S. Peace Corps, New York, NY/Dakar, Senegal

2016- 2018

*Intern*

Taught conversational English and basic grammar to youth between the ages of 8-21. Organized summer arts program for young children. Facilitated activities to promote civic engagement among community members.

### U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, Geneva, Switzerland

Summer 2015

*Intern*

Researched and wrote on North-South inter-firm cooperation in the construction industry and its effects on technology transfer and development.

## LANGUAGES

Fluent in Mandarin and French



## Sample 3L Resume

### DOUGLAS POVINELLI

22 West 102<sup>nd</sup> Street, Apartment 4C, New York, NY 10025  
(917) 677-7777 • douglas.povinelli@law.columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

**Columbia University School of Law**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2021

Honors: James Kent Scholar (for outstanding academic achievement)  
Emil Schlesinger Labor Prize (for student most proficient in the subject of labor law)  
Class of 1912 Prize (for first-year student most proficient in the subject of contracts)

Activities: *Columbia Journal of Law & Social Problems*  
Student Public Interest Network

**Columbia University, Columbia College**, New York NY

B.A., *summa cum laude*, received May 2015

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa, inducted junior year (for the top two percent of the graduating class)  
Dean's List, all semesters  
Columbia University Named Scholarship

Activities: Columbia University Student Health Outreach, Coordinator

#### EXPERIENCE

**Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP<sup>1</sup>**, New York, NY

*Summer Associate, May – July 2020*

Conducted research and wrote memos on a variety of tax law questions, with a particular focus on the taxation of real estate and real estate transactions. Wrote a report on proposed Treasury Regulations for the NYS Bar Association. Conducted research for a matter litigated before Tax Court.

**South Brooklyn Legal Services, Foreclosure Prevention Project**, Brooklyn, NY

*Summer Intern, June – August 2019*

Drafted motions on behalf of foreclosure defendants. Conducted research and wrote memos on predatory lending and related real property questions for ongoing litigation in both state and federal court. Advocated for clients facing foreclosure by calling lenders to negotiate loan modifications. Staffed a walk-in clinic at Brooklyn Supreme Court and advised clients of their rights before and during foreclosure.

**Lenox Hill Neighborhood House**, New York, NY

*Health Care Advocate, September 2016 – August 2018*

Advised clients of legal rights with respect to public benefits and tenant-landlord disputes. Represented clients who were erroneously denied benefits at administrative hearings. Enrolled individuals into public health insurance programs. Assisted clients in applying for food stamps, Medicare Savings Programs, Unemployment Insurance Benefits, Public Assistance and other public benefits. Conducted self-help workshops on public benefits.

**Food Bank For New York City**, New York, NY

*Policy Intern, May – August 2014, August 2015- September 2016*

Prepared agency directors for testimonies before the New York City Council on summer meals and obesity. Researched and coauthored policy papers that proposed legislative and community-based approaches to hunger relief. Facilitated meetings of emergency food providers and local elected officials to discuss implementing hunger policy.

<sup>1</sup> If you received a summer associate offer and the firm canceled its program due to the COVID-19 crisis, you can list this as:

**Firm Name**, Location

*Summer Associate (Offeree)*

Summer 2020

The firm canceled its summer associate program due to the COVID-19 crisis [and extended an offer to return as a full-time associate].

## Sample Graduate Resume

# STEPHANIE MONTENEGRO

202 West 99<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10024  
sjm@gmail.com • 202-228-2297

## EDUCATION

### COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, New York, NY

J.D., received May 2019

Honors: Kent Scholar 2018-2019 (for outstanding academic achievement)  
Stone Scholar 2017-2018 (for superior academic achievement)  
Hamilton Fellowship (merit-based full tuition scholarship)  
Activities: *Columbia Journal of European Law* (member of editorial board)  
Student Senate (Graduation Co-chair)  
Empowering Women of Color

### GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, Washington, DC

*B.A., magna cum laude*, in History, received May 2016

Honors: Phi Alpha Theta, National History Honors Society  
Activities: *The Georgetown Voice* (staff writer)

## EXPERIENCE

### FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF NEW YORK

New York, NY

*Law School Post-Graduate Fellowship*

Sept. 2019-Present

Brief senior staff in preparation for congressional hearing; analyze Dodd-Frank rule proposals; assist in the implementation of transparency initiatives; help craft legislative proposals for aiding underwater mortgage holders.

### FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Washington, DC

*Law Clerk, Bureau of Consumer Protection*

Summer 2018

Surveyed state law on fair hiring practices; prepared training memo on the Commission's consumer protection jurisdictional constraints; surveyed emerging legal concerns with social networking websites.

### NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT

New York, NY

*Extern, Administrative Law Division*

Spring 2018

Wrote answers to Article 78 petitions for the NYPD Licensing Division and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; researched a variety of agency practices; prepared documents for court submission.

### NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Raleigh, NC

*Legal Intern, Consumer Protection Division*

Summer 2017

Interviewed consumers and wrote declarations; drafted CIDs; participated in e-discovery; prepared legal memoranda on issues of federal law; filed consent decrees at state courthouse; wrote criminal appellate brief regarding plea bargaining.

## BAR ADMISSIONS

Admitted in New York State and Southern District of New York.

## Sample Graduate Resume

### MARY CUMMINGS BROWN

200 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Apt. 12E, Washington, DC 20001  
marybrown@gmail.com • (202) 222-2222

## EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup>

### NATIONAL WOMEN’S LAW CENTER

Washington, DC

*Staff Attorney*

2015-Present

Draft amicus briefs for pending Supreme Court cases and federal court cases on a variety of women’s health and employment issues. Draft testimony for legislative hearings, including Violence Against Women Act reauthorization hearings. Present updated state-by-state analysis of contraceptive equity laws, and draft edits to consumer guide entitled “Contraceptive Equity Laws in Your State: Know Your Rights – Use Your Rights” (available at [www.nwlc.org/pdf/concovstateguide2009.pdf](http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/concovstateguide2009.pdf)).

### QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

New York, NY

*Extern*

Spring 2015

Handled own prosecution of misdemeanor domestic violence cases at Queens Family Justice Center, in conjunction with Columbia Law School Domestic Violence Prosecution Externship. Participated in trial advocacy skills seminar.

### CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2014

Researched evidentiary issues for challenge to state law requiring pregnant women to view ultrasounds prior to scheduling abortions. Drafted memo assessing potential legal challenge to recently introduced state fetal personhood law. Participated in national conference calls on state and federal legislative issues.

### LINCOLN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2013

Drafted memoranda and assisted the General Counsel on a broad range of legal issues, including entertainment law, intellectual property law, labor and employment law, and trusts and estates.

## EDUCATION

### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., received May 2015

Honors: Pauline Berman Heller Prize Fund (highest-ranked female graduating law student)

Best Oral Argument, 1L Moot Court Competition

Activities: *Columbia Law Review*, Notes Editor

Law Students for Reproductive Justice

### YALE UNIVERSITY, New Haven, CT

B.A., *cum laude*, received May 2012

Major: Art History

Honors: Departmental honors in Art History

Activities: *Yale Undergraduate Journal of Comparative Literature*

## BAR ADMISSIONS

Admitted in New York State

<sup>1</sup> This student put her “Experience” section before her “Education” section because she is a graduate with at least five years of experience.

## Portion of Sample Resume with Joint Degrees

### Option 1

## ANDREW PARK

105 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 2n, New York, NY 10027 212.699.9999 • andrew.park@columbia.edu

### EDUCATION

**COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2021

Activities: American Constitution Society  
Moot Court  
*Columbia Human Rights Law Review*  
Columbia Society of International Law

**PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS**, Princeton, NJ

M.P.A, expected May 2021

Concentration: International Relations

**RICE UNIVERSITY**, Houston, TX

B.A., *magna cum laude*, received June 2017

Activities: Semester Abroad at University of London  
Big Brothers Big Sisters Program  
Thesis: *The Remaining Resistance: The Role of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*

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### Option 2

## ANDREW PARK

105 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 2n, New York, NY 10027 212.699.9999 • andrew.park@columbia.edu

### EDUCATION

**COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL/ PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS**, New York, NY/ Princeton, NJ

Joint J.D./Master of Public Affairs Degree, expected May 2021

Concentration: International Relations

Activities: American Constitution Society  
Moot Court  
*Columbia Human Rights Law Review*  
Columbia Society of International Law

**RICE UNIVERSITY**, Houston, TX

B.A., *magna cum laude*, received June 2017

Activities: Semester Abroad at University of London  
Big Brothers Big Sisters Program  
Thesis: *The Remaining Resistance: The Role of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*

## Portion of Sample Resume with Permanent Address

### SOLOMON A. KING

Solomon.King@law.columbia.edu | 347.847.9923

#### Current Address:

400 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 9  
New York, NY 10027

#### Permanent Address:<sup>1</sup>

31 Weaver Drive  
Philadelphia, PA 99999

## EDUCATION

### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: Public Interest Law Foundation  
Student Senate  
ACLU

### UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Charlottesville, V

B.A., with distinction, received May 2017

Major: Political Science  
Honors: Holland Scholar (full-tuition scholarship)  
Activities: College Democrats

## EXPERIENCE

### NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

New York, NY

*Extern, Civil Rights Bureau*

Fall 2020

Assisted lawyers in Civil Rights Bureau through Columbia Law School's externship program. Investigated potential claim concerning an employer's denial of a request for religious accommodation. Performed legal research about the ADA's public accommodation provision pertaining to polling site.

### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

New York, NY

*Research Assistant to Professor Matthew Waxman*

Summer 2020

Researched U.S. national security intelligence and surveillance restrictions. Researched and edited content for casebook on privacy issues and Fourth Amendment jurisprudence in light of new digital technologies.

### TEACH FOR AMERICA

Oregon City, OR

*Kindergarten Teacher*

Summer 2017-Spring 2019

Taught 30 students to exceed one year's growth in reading and mastery of key state benchmarks in math. Established afterschool program and new reading programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Tip: Use your permanent address when applying for summer internships or jobs in that geographic area.

## Portion of Sample Resume for a Transfer Student

### Portion of Sample Resume for Clinic Committed to Next Semester

#### AKEYLA HARRISON

222 Riverside Drive, #2, New York, NY 10026  
212-227-9153 • akeyla.harrison@law.columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### **Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: Harlan Fiske Stone Moot Court Society  
*Columbia Journal of Environmental Law*, Submissions Editor  
Publication: Legal Measures to Curtail Global Warming, 22 *CJEL* (2015) (forthcoming)

##### **Brooklyn Law School**, Brooklyn, NY

September 2019-May 2020 (then transferred)

Honors: Phi Delta Phi Honor Society  
Activities: Black Law Students Association  
Health Law and Policy Association

##### **McGill University**, Montreal, Canada

B.A., with great distinction, received May 2017

Honors: Edward Beatty Scholarship  
Activities: Greenpeace University Chapter, President  
QPIRG, Board of Directors  
Simply Sweetly Choir

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **Environmental Law Clinic, Columbia Law School<sup>1</sup>**

*Student Participant*

New York, NY  
Spring 2021

##### **Earthjustice**

*Summer Law Clerk*

New York, NY  
Summer 2020

Researched and wrote memoranda on legal issues concerning civil procedure and environmental regulations for cases dealing with fracking, toxic chemicals, and concentrated animal feeding operations.

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<sup>1</sup> It may be appropriate to list an experience to which you are *committed in the near future*. If you have not yet begun the experience, you should omit any description, as here. When the clinic begins in spring 2021, the student will add description of what she is working on, written in present tense. When the clinic ends, she will rewrite the description to be in past tense.

## Portion of Sample Resume with Undergraduate Transfer<sup>1</sup>

### JULIA THOMAS

205 West 103rd Street, #14K, New York, NY 10027  
212-555-3634 • julia.thomas@law.columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### **Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: Environmental Law Society  
*Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, Editor

##### **Georgetown University**, Washington, DC

B.A. in Environmental Studies, received May 2020

Honors: Dean's List  
Activities: *The Hoya*, Writer & Editor  
Academic Resource Center Tutor

##### **Tufts University**, Medford, MA

September 2016-May 2017 (then transferred)

Honors: Dean's List  
Activities: Medford Tutoring Project  
Tufts Senate, Freshman Senator

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<sup>1</sup> See an SJI adviser if you transferred during your undergraduate years and are not sure whether to include your first college or university on your resume. In this case, the student is applying for a summer internship in Boston and might consider including Tufts on her resume to show her connection to the area. If the student was applying to internships in New York or Washington, DC, she might not find it necessary to keep Tufts on her resume, especially if space on the page was an issue.



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## Introduction to Public Interest Cover Letters

The goal of a cover letter is to highlight your credentials and provide a narrative as to why you are a great fit for the job. Public interest, human rights, and government employers often rely more on cover letters than resumes to assess candidates, so cover letters make a difference! Additionally, although your experience may not seem like a perfect fit, the cover letter can make connections between your experiences and the job for which you are applying.

In this section, we provide several cover letters. Read them all, even the ones that are not at your experience level (like those of upper-class students or graduates). Pay special attention to the tips included in the footnotes. At the end of this section, we also provide resume and cover letter “pairings” to show how a good cover letter can be crafted from a specific resume. Read these carefully.

If you are applying to an international employer or for international jobs, please also review our “International Public Interest Job Search Toolkit Supplement.” LL.M.s should review our “LL.M. Supplement.” Both are available on our website, under Job Search Tools.

### *Public Interest Cover Letter Checklist*

#### **The Goal of the Cover Letter**

Your cover letter is a persuasive “brief” to state why you want a particular job and why you are the best candidate. Convince the employer that you are passionate about and committed to their issue area and that you are the best/most qualified person for the job due to experience, skills, and knowledge. ***Focus on how you can help the employer and its clients, not on how the job will help you.***

#### **Cover Letter Do’s and Don’ts**

- **DO** revamp your cover letters for each job you are applying to (although letters for jobs in the same sector may be similar). Public interest letters are different than private sector or clerkship letters.
- **DON’T** assume the employer has read your resume. Some read the cover letter first.
- **DO** use topic sentences.
- **DON’T** just list credentials—carefully craft an explanation of your merits.
- **DO** carefully read the job announcement (if one exists) and be responsive to it.
- **DO** remember to sign your cover letters.
- **DO** save your cover letter as a .pdf file before emailing it as an attachment to your application.

#### **Should I Use Mx. Instead of Ms. or Mr. When Addressing the Hiring Director or Manager?**

Mx. is an honorific that has recently come into use as ideas about gender have changed. Honorifics are typically used in cover letters to address the person responsible for hiring for a specific position. At this point in time, our office recommends using Mx. only when you know the recipient prefers it or identifies as gender nonbinary. Not sure which honorific to use? Check the staff list or biographies, if available.

**Remember!**

If your interest in a job or issue stems from personal involvement (e.g., you want to work at the DA's sex crimes unit because you are a rape survivor or go into foster care advocacy because you were a foster child), consult with an adviser before including this information. Some employers may view this as an asset; others may question your objectivity and view your application with caution.

**GRAD TIP** Your cover letter may be significantly longer than a law student's letter, although it should follow the content guide. Clearly state how your personal mission and the mission of the organization align. Don't be afraid to go onto a second page or use a slightly smaller font.

## *Cover Letter Content Guide*

Student Name  
Street Address, #1a  
New York, NY 10027  
email  
  
Date

Emp Loyer, Managing Attorney  
The Public Interest Organization  
100 Attorney Street  
New York, NY 10027

Dear Ms. Loyer,

First paragraph: This states who you are (e.g. “I am a second-year student at Columbia Law School.”); and what you are looking for (a summer internship/position/fellowship); and your funding status (e.g. “As a recipient of Guaranteed Summer Funding at Columbia, I am able to accept an unpaid position”). If you have any connection to the organization (e.g. if you heard someone speak on a panel, or if you have spoken to their former intern) mention it here.

Second paragraph: Highlight your past experience, commitment, and passion. **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE LETTER, SO MAKE IT GOOD!** Be sure to include any connections or linkages to your past work and the job for which you are applying.

Third paragraph: Explain any relevant skills you have (a 1L may have less to put here than an upper year student or graduate). If there is a job announcement, make sure to specifically address as many of the desired skills and qualifications as possible.

Fourth paragraph: Reiterate your interest. Tell them what materials you have enclosed. Sound appreciative and eager. If you will be in their location, offer to come in and meet with them.

Sincerely,  
Student Name

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## Sample Cover Letters

### 1L Cover Letters

- Vladimir Eleryk
- Eduardo Mazier
- Amy Chiu
- Abel Zenawi
- Julia Thomas

### 2L Cover Letters

Angelica Vega

### 3L Cover Letters

Mia Johnson

### Graduate Cover Letters

- Sharma Phuyal
- Yula Virks
- Miao Tian

## Sample 1L Cover Letter

44 West 114th Street, Apt. 4  
New York, NY 10027  
ve244@columbia.edu

December 19, 2020

Joseph Smith, Internship Coordinator  
United States Attorney's Office Eastern District of New York  
147 Pierrepont Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a first-year student at Columbia Law School (CLS) and am seeking an internship with the Criminal Division of the United States Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of New York for this upcoming summer. I attended a panel on the U.S. Attorney's Offices in New York this fall at CLS and spoke with several students who have participated in internship programs with your office. Given my strong commitment to working in the field of criminal law, and the excellent reviews your office received from other students, I would welcome the opportunity to intern in your office this summer. As a recipient of summer funding from CLS, I am able to accept an unpaid internship.<sup>1</sup>

My interest in criminal law stems from my work in the Speaker's Office for the Illinois House of Representatives. As a staffer for the House Criminal Law Committee, I researched criminal law issues related to pending legislation and reform of the criminal justice system. I had the opportunity to talk with experts and representatives from such diverse groups as state's attorneys, legislators, public defenders, law enforcement officials, academics, community organizers, and reporters. Issues of particular interest were the expansion of DNA databases, racial disparity in drug sentencing, the effects of mandatory sentencing, and the privatization of correctional facilities. I saw the disparity between how criminal justice reforms are perceived and actually enacted into law, and became interested in learning more.

Since coming to law school, I have furthered my interest in criminal justice by joining Prison Access Working Group, through which I had the opportunity to visit the Edna Mahon State Prison in New Jersey.

In addition, I have gained practical courtroom experience as a member of the Courtroom Advocates Project at CLS. Through CAP, I have appeared before a judge while assisting a victim of domestic violence to obtain an Order of Protection. I have also improved my research and writing skills through my law school classes and moot court.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to pursue my interest in criminal law through an internship with your office this summer. Enclosed please find my resume, which highlights my experience and skills. I will forward my transcript and legal writing sample under a separate cover when they become available. Thank you for your consideration of my application. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,  
Vladimir Eleryk

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<sup>1</sup> Tip: Do not directly copy this introductory paragraph; make sure you write an opening that will suit your own individual needs.

## Sample 1L Cover Letter

99 West 89th Street, #3  
New York, NY 10026  
(917) 777-7878

December 4, 2020

Dawn Frank, Esq.  
Legal Aid Services of Oregon  
1827 NE 44th Avenue, Ste 230  
Portland, OR 97213

Dear Ms. Frank:

I am a first-year student at Columbia Law School and I am interested in working for your office this summer. I am looking to work with lawyers providing legal services to low-income Native Americans and tribes. As a recipient of Columbia's summer funding, I am able to accept an unpaid internship.

I first became aware of the plight of Native Americans in college, when I spent a summer at the Pascua Yaqui Indian Reservation in Tucson, AZ, helping rebuild homes. In addition to observing the abject poverty of the residents, I spent time at the legal services center, talking to the prosecutor about the conflicts between federal law and tribal law. I also spent time learning about the history of the tribe and their relocation by the U.S. government. Part of my motivation for coming to law school was to help Native Americans, or other Americans in similarly dire situations.

While at Columbia, I have begun to participate in NNALSA (National Native American Law Students Association) Moot Court Competition. This semester I am researching and writing a brief on the issue of Indian mineral rights. Next semester I will present my arguments orally in the Moot Court competition. I plan to participate in a pro bono project next semester (during spring break) which will be targeting health and housing issues of low-income individuals. I will be doing intake interviews and providing referrals to social service agencies and legal clinics in North Dakota, and some of my clients will likely be Native Americans.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to focus on legal issues and advocacy for Native Americans through an internship with your office this summer. Enclosed please find my resume and list of references. I plan to be in Portland over the winter break (December 12-January 5) and am available to speak with you in person about my application.

Sincerely,  
Eduardo Mazier

## Sample 1L Cover Letter

444 W. 114th St., #44  
New York, NY 10024  
(212) 555-5544

January 15, 2020

Maria Smith, Internship Coordinator  
ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project  
125 Broad Street, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004-2400

Dear Ms. Smith:

I write to apply for the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project summer internship. I am a first-year law student at Columbia Law School (Columbia) and plan to pursue a career in health policy. Because my primary area of interest and study is reproductive health, I am particularly interested in the Reproductive Freedom Project. I have received a stipend from Columbia for the summer, so I am able to accept an unpaid position.

I developed an interest in reproductive health and women's rights when I worked as a peer educator for Planned Parenthood of Central Texas. This interest was refined in college, where I studied the physiology and technology of reproduction as a Biology major, and learned more about the connection between women's health, reproductive rights and development in courses on bioethics and public health. During my senior year, I built upon my science background by conducting research and analysis on "fetal pain" for a seminar on Reproduction and the Law. While at law school, I have done some research on women's health for the Women's Link Worldwide Project. This coming semester, I will expand my understanding of the legal issues in reproductive and women's rights through participating in a forum with Columbia Law School's Health Law Society.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to my background in reproductive health policy and law, I have spent three summers interning with a law firm in Austin, Texas. As a litigation department assistant at Brown McCarroll, I worked with attorneys and legal assistants to prepare discovery materials and develop expert witness testimony for trial. My familiarity with the mechanics of litigation has been enhanced through two years of participation in mock trial competitions at the regional and national levels.

I would be delighted to have an opportunity to apply my background in reproductive policy and litigation to help protect reproductive rights through the ACLU summer internship. I have enclosed a copy of my resume for your review. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of my application.

Sincerely  
Amy R. Chiu

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<sup>1</sup> Tip: You are in control of your experience. Seek opportunities to develop skills relevant to jobs of interest to you. A commitment to a specific future project is almost as good as past experience, particularly for a 1L.



## Sample 1L Cover Letter

Abel Assefa Zenawi  
874 W. 119th St., #10B  
New York, NY 10027  
az5412@columbia.edu  
301-267-8514

December 5, 2020

Deepa Bijpuria, Immigration Staff Attorney  
Tahirih Justice Center  
201 N. Charles St., Ste. 920  
Baltimore<sup>1</sup>, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Bijpuria:

I am a first-year student at Columbia Law School seeking a summer 2021 internship with your organization. As a graduate of University of Maryland, I would be grateful for the opportunity to return to Maryland this summer and participate in the work of Tahirih Justice Center. As an African immigrant, I truly understand and believe in your mission of protecting immigrant women and girls from violence, and I would be honored to use my legal training for this goal. I have received funding from Columbia for the summer and therefore can accept an unpaid internship.

As both an immigrant from a war-torn region in Africa<sup>2</sup>, and as an anthropology student studying the effects of regional strife on Africa's youth, I have become aware of the social and economic effects that violence can have on individuals. Although my experience has focused on the impacts of war, rather than gender-based violence, my knowledge and commitment to eradicating the effects of violence would serve me well at your organization. While at Columbia, I intend to continue to focus on the issue of violence. I have joined the African Law Students Association, and am organizing a panel of guest speakers next semester, focusing on legal tools to eradicate the effects of violence on the individual. I also look forward to taking classes such as African Human Rights Systems in Comparative Perspective, Anthropology and the Law, Gender Justice and various health law classes. I also plan to participate in Columbia's Immigration Defense externship, and possibly an externship on the prosecution of domestic violence crimes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tip: 1Ls should try to be geographically flexible, and apply to organizations that are in cities/regions that are less popular with Columbia Law students, such as Baltimore in this case. If you have a personal connection to the region, make sure to mention it in your letter, as that will strengthen your application.

<sup>2</sup> Tip: Although it can be helpful to show familiarity with the issues the organization works on, you need to be careful how much information you provide. Abel fled from a war-torn region and immigrated to the U.S. Although gender violence was not something he was fleeing from, he has seen firsthand the effects of violence on women, and has experienced firsthand the struggles of assimilating in the U.S. Although some employers may think this helps his application, other employers may worry that he is not objective and would be too emotionally impacted by helping clients. Therefore, he was careful in this letter to mention his immigration status, but not delve into all the details.

<sup>3</sup> Tip: Even if you don't have directly relevant experience, you can still write a good cover letter. Think about how your past experiences are relevant to the job. Don't highlight your lack of experience; instead draw parallels to other experiences you have had, or identify similarities. You can also talk about things you plan to do in the future. Abel has no previous legal experience and had to work to support himself so never did any internships. He has never done work with women immigrants or on gender violence/domestic violence issues. He has never worked with legal clients, or done advocacy or policy work, yet he does not dwell on how he is NOT a good fit with the organization; rather he focuses on how his past experience would translate to being helpful for this office.

My past experiences have provided me with skills that would serve me well as an intern at Tahirih Justice Center. Despite having to work for four years to pay for my tuition and housing, I was able to maintain a high GPA at University of Maryland, and was accepted into the Anthropology Honors Program. While pursuing my honors degree, I honed my research and writing skills through writing my thesis, *The Economic and Social Ramifications of Conflict on Youth in War-Torn Africa*. Through my work at the Giant Supermarket and Walgreens, I proved to be a dependable employee and was recognized for my hard work and exemplary customer service. These experiences also enabled me to learn to interact with different types of people with different needs, and would help me with client intake at your organization. Additionally, my cultural background and language skills would be an asset if I had the opportunity to work with African immigrant clients. Finally, while working as a research assistant, I led outreach efforts to Native American populations, which trained me well for any outreach I would need to perform as a summer intern with Tahirih Justice Center.

I would appreciate the chance to speak with you further about my application. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Abel Assefa Zenawi

## Sample 1L Cover Letter<sup>1</sup>

205 West 103rd Street, Apt. 14K  
 New York, NY 10027  
 julia.thomas@law.columbia.edu

December 15, 2020

Deborah Katz, Internship Coordinator  
 Lenox Hill Neighborhood House  
 331 East 70th Street  
 New York, NY 10021

Dear Ms. Katz:

I am a first-year student at Columbia Law School and I am interested in working for your office this summer. I plan to pursue a career in direct legal services and am committed to the mission of Lenox Hill Neighborhood House to provide legal services using an interdisciplinary and holistic approach. As a recipient of Columbia's summer funding, I am able to accept an unpaid internship.

I first became interested in providing legal services to low-income families and other vulnerable populations during a Social Justice Initiatives panel at Columbia focused on careers in legal services. During the panel I had the opportunity to hear from practitioners from various legal services organizations, including staff attorney Louis Hansen from your organization. I was inspired to hear about the work these attorneys do to help people in the community who would not otherwise have access to quality advocates. I was particularly struck by the way in which Lenox Hill Neighborhood House works with families to provide services in all aspects of their lives, including health and education.

In addition to my strong commitment to providing legal services to those who most need assistance, through my work as a writer and editor of *The Hoya* daily newspaper at Georgetown, I gained extensive experience interacting with diverse populations through the many interviews I conducted in the DC area. As part of the newspaper, I enjoyed working on a team, both as a writer and later in a supervisory role as an editor. During my time at Columbia, I have honed my research and writing skills through my classes and by participating in moot court. I am hoping to further develop my interest in legal services by participating in Columbia's Bronx Defenders Holistic Defense externship in the fall.

I would be honored to have the opportunity to contribute to the important work of Lenox Hill Neighborhood House this summer. Enclosed please find my resume. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
 Julia Thomas

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<sup>1</sup> Even if you have absolutely no prior experience working in the field in which you are applying for the summer, do not be intimidated. You can still show your interest in and commitment to the work, as well as highlight the skills you'll bring to the job, as this student does.

## Sample 2L Cover Letter

55-01 31st Ave., Apt. 3D  
Woodside, NY 11377  
212-993-5465

October 2, 2020

John Kim  
Advancement Project – California Programs Office  
1910 W. Sunset Blvd., Ste. 500  
Los Angeles, CA 90026

Dear Mr. Kim:

I am a second-year dual degree student (law and social work) at Columbia University. I am writing to express my interest in working at the Advancement Project this upcoming summer. I learned about the Advancement Project through a panel on “Nontraditional and Holistic Approaches to Legal Change,” which was sponsored by Columbia Law School’s Social Justice Initiatives office. I would be honored to help further the Advancement Project’s agenda of innovative social change by interning at your office this summer.

I am committed to using a broad set of tools to effect legal change. Thus far, I have explored both impact litigation and community organizing as a means of promoting justice. More specifically, at the Migrant Farmworker Justice Project, I worked with a small group of attorneys challenging labor abuses through large class action suits in federal court. This strategy produced definite results for the farmworkers, yet the entire process seemed disempowering since the individual voices of the farmworkers were not heard. In contrast, as a volunteer at the Workplace Project last year, I saw immigrant workers being empowered to find creative solutions to their problems through community organizing. However, these alternative pressure tactics were often the workers’ only available option, and there were many instances in which I thought a lawsuit might have been more powerful to effect long-lasting change. As someone interested in making the law accessible to those most affected by its shortcomings and abuse, I would like to explore the ways in which lawyers can work with communities and still achieve large-scale impact through the law.

I believe my skill set would serve me well at the Advancement Project. Apart from my strong policy background and legal research, writing, and analytical skills, I bring my social work training, and experience working in direct client services. As a family therapist, I have sharpened my interviewing and counseling skills. As an organizer, I have gained practical experience identifying key concerns within a community and mobilizing community resources around those issues. Finally, as someone who is both bilingual and bicultural, I hope to be an asset to your work within the Latino community and immigrant communities in California.

Enclosed please find a detailed resume highlighting my experience and education. I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you further about my interest in the Advancement Project. Thank you, in advance, for your time.

Sincerely,  
Angelica Vega

## Sample 3L Cover Letter

Mia Johnson  
 333 W. 113th St.  
 New York, NY 10027  
 Mia.Johnson@law.columbia.edu, 212-555-1212

September 2, 2020

Director, Administration Management and HR Division<sup>1</sup>  
 Legal Honors Program  
 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
 Office of General Counsel, Room 10245  
 451 Seventh Street, SW  
 Washington, DC 20410

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a third-year law student at Columbia Law School. I write to express my interest in joining the Legal Honors Program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) next year. I am deeply committed to increasing access to affordable housing and promoting healthy, safe, and prosperous communities. I would be honored to pursue this commitment at HUD.

My diverse professional and academic experiences have fueled my interest in housing policy and my strong interest in joining HUD's Legal Honors Program. As a paralegal for the Alabama Law Center for the Homeless, I represented clients seeking public housing, appealing denials, facing eviction, and navigating the Hope VI relocation process. I later joined the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and Housing to gain a state policy perspective on the issues HUD works to address. My work as a paralegal at O'Melveny & Myers exposed me to the investor and developer side of housing policy, and confirmed my resolve to pursue housing law from a different perspective. Finally, while in law school, I have pursued course work in housing, community development policy, land use law, and administrative law in order to explore the field of law and policy I would encounter at HUD.

In addition to fostering my passion for housing work, my experiences have given me the legal and policy skills to effectively contribute to the work of HUD. Through my Federal Court Clerk Externship at the SDNY, I developed my research and writing skills, and learned to recognize effective advocacy through court room observation and analysis. As an editor for the Columbia Journal of Law and Social Problems, I developed my skills as an effective researcher and efficient editor. Through my work on policy matters for the Office of Congressman John Lewis and the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and Housing, I have experience drafting legislation, navigating the legislative process, and evaluating proposed legislative reform.

My experiences before and during law school have given me a passion for housing and community development as well as the technical skills to contribute to the important work of HUD. I sincerely appreciate your consideration of my application for the Legal Honors Program. I hope to have the opportunity to speak with you further about my interests and experiences.

Sincerely,  
 Mia Johnson

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<sup>1</sup> Tip: If a job posting specifies that applications be sent to a specific address (as in this instance with no name) do not use the name of the individual who may be reviewing your application since you must always remember to follow the directions specified in the job posting.

## Sample Graduate Cover Letter

April 4, 2020

Amy Carroll, Deputy Director  
Center for Popular Democracy  
133 St. James Place  
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Dear Ms. Carroll:

I write to express great interest in the Staff Attorney position with the Center for Popular Democracy. Throughout my career, I have worked to defend the civil rights of marginalized communities, including immigrants, people of color, and low-wage workers who face a host of rights violations at the hands of people in positions of power. As an immigrant and committed public interest advocate, I deeply appreciate CPD's passionate and cutting-edge agenda to collaborate with community-based organizations and assist community members in setting advocacy priorities, pursuing policy proposals, and building power within the community to propel change for the long term.

Both during and since graduating law school, I have been committed to using the law as an instrument of social change and helping give a voice to individuals outmatched by the system. During my Skadden Fellowship with the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project, I observed first-hand how the very existence of immigrant communities, particularly workers, is increasingly under siege in this country. When Arizona passed SB 1070, I participated in a large coalition of advocacy organizations that helped mobilize the community's opposition to the law and filed suit to prevent the law from going into effect. Likewise, in response to the increasing reliance on immigration detainers, I investigated and helped initiate a lawsuit challenging the illegal detention of a naturalized mother of three with the goal of exposing the racial profiling and due process violations attendant to detainer practice. While at the Legal Aid Society, when resource constraints prevented others from doing so, I took on the case of a hardworking grandmother and widow who had become ensnared in the web of immigrant detention. I worked with her daughters, friends, and former employer to draft affidavits and assemble evidence for a parole petition, which, despite all odds, succeeded in convincing immigration authorities to release her.

Working on these and other cases, I honed a number of important advocacy skills that would serve me well as a Staff Attorney at the CPD. I have extensive experience communicating with different audiences, from talking with clients who are experiencing profound and at times deeply personal challenges, to community advocates and co-counsel in collaborative campaigns. My fellowship required that I delve into new topics quickly and efficiently and help devise legal and communications strategies on how to proceed. In all my positions, I have been tasked with a great deal of writing, such as drafting district and appellate court briefs and memoranda analyzing clients' legal and factual questions. I have worked on legislative advocacy as well, including providing a briefing to Congressional staffers in the wake of Republican House members' introduction of anti-immigrant legislation.

I believe the CPD's objectives of helping build community-based infrastructure, develop leadership at the grassroots level, and create momentum for community-driven progressive change are well-calibrated, critical interventions in which I would be honored to assist. I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Sharma Phuyal

## Sample Graduate Cover Letter

Yula Virks  
62 West 72nd Street  
New York, NY 10111  
(719) 890-5678

August 1, 2020

Fred Sizer, Esq.  
Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Competition  
601 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Mr. Sizer:

I am a 2018 graduate of Columbia Law School seeking an entry-level position with the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Competition for this upcoming fall. Immediately following law school, I clerked for the Honorable Robert N. Chatigny at the District of Connecticut. I am currently clerking for the Honorable John M. Walker, Jr. on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Once my clerkship has concluded, I cannot think of a better place to begin my career than the Federal Trade Commission. The Commission's work in regulating major industries like healthcare and energy has a tremendous effect on the everyday lives of Americans. The Commission considers complex and cutting-edge legal issues—issues I have encountered in academic and professional settings and that are meaningful to me.

I believe my interests and experience make me an excellent fit for the Bureau of Competition. I came to law school with a strong desire to further the public interest. Antitrust enforcement would allow me to do so while engaging with fascinating legal issues. Since entering law school, I have found that I most enjoy untangling complicated legal puzzles. I took an antitrust course during my third year and immediately recognized it as a field that solved important social problems by understanding and regulating complex real-world interactions—exactly what I was looking for. I dove into the class and received an A on the final exam.

My legal skills are well-suited to the Bureau's practice. I believe my academic record reflects an ability to understand and apply new legal concepts. I also have strong research and writing skills. In law school, I reviewed and edited academic articles as an editor on Columbia Law Review. Additionally, I wrote and published a student note on a technical aspect of campaign finance regulation. While clerking on the district court, I drafted numerous memos, orders, and opinions. I saw a tremendous amount of legal writing and learned what was effective and what was not. As an appeals court clerk, I draft bench memos and opinions on novel legal issues. These experiences have taught me to convey complex legal ideas clearly and accurately, a skill that would be valuable in a field as intricate as antitrust enforcement.

I would be honored to join the Bureau of Competition this fall. I have attached a resume, transcript, writing sample and list of references. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like more information.

Sincerely,  
Yula Virks



## Sample Graduate Cover Letter

Miao Tian 201  
Avenue A, Apt. 4  
New York, NY 12111  
miao.tian@gmail.com  
212-852-7413

June 15, 2020

Jennifer Rodriguez, Deputy Managing Attorney  
The Legal Aid Society, Juvenile Rights Practice  
199 Water Street  
New York, NY 10038

Dear Ms. Rodriguez:

I am writing to express my interest in a position as a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society. Since graduating from Columbia Law School in 2015, I have worked as a litigator at the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP (“Paul Weiss”). In private practice, I have undertaken a number of projects (some in conjunction with your organization) involving families in the legal system and have acquired broad litigation experience, which has solidified my intent to transition into a career focused on protecting and asserting the rights of children and families.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, I have long pursued opportunities to make a positive impact in the lives of families. Before law school, I worked briefly in the entertainment industry, and then elected to attend law school out of a desire for a career in which I would directly impact individuals’ lives and the public good. While attending Columbia Law School, I represented children in foster care in permanency and immigration hearings, in connection with the Columbia Child Advocacy Clinic. It was during these experiences that I became acutely aware of the profound complexity of the personal and systemic factors that affect families, and the enormous opportunities for committed advocates to improve outcomes for families and children involved with the courts and public agencies.

At Paul Weiss, I have taken primary responsibility for a range of matters touching on family law and child welfare. I researched and wrote memos on children’s rights for the Children’s Rights Litigation Committee of the ABA. As mentioned, I have also had the opportunity to serve as counsel for children in custody and visitation issues in collaboration with the Legal Aid Society, which provided further insights into the practical challenges and potential for injustice faced by parents in the legal system. I also represented a child in foster care, providing advocacy in court and making his voice heard by the agencies charged with his care. My practice has also enabled me to acquire crucial civil litigation, project management, and research and writing skills, while exploring a variety of substantive practice areas.

While I have been fortunate to have had varied and challenging experiences in my legal practice, I now seek to focus my work exclusively on child advocacy. I believe that my commitment to asserting the rights of children and families, combined with my broad experiences and skills, would serve me well at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you in advance for your time, and I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you.

Sincerely,  
Miao Tian

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## Sample Resume and Cover Letter Pairings

These pairings are included to illustrate how resumes and cover letters work together. They are two different documents that TOGETHER provide a persuasive narrative.

### **Resume and Cover Letter Pairings**

- Abel Assefa Zenawi (1L)
- Jasmine Harris (Recent Graduate)
- Stephanie Montenegro (Recent Graduate)

## Sample 1L Pairing<sup>1</sup>

Abel Assefa Zenawi  
874 West 119th Street, #10B  
New York, NY 10027  
az5412@columbia.edu, 301-267-8514

December 5, 2020

Deepa Bijpuria, Immigration Staff Attorney  
Tahirih Justice Center  
201 North Charles Street, Ste. 920  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Bijpuria:

I am a first-year student at Columbia Law School seeking a summer 2021 internship with your organization. As a graduate of University of Maryland, I am hoping to return to Maryland this summer and participate in the work of Tahirih Justice Center. As an African immigrant, I truly understand and believe in your mission of protecting immigrant women and girls from violence, and I would be honored to use my legal training for this goal. I have received funding from Columbia for the summer and therefore can accept an unpaid internship.

As both an immigrant from a war-torn region in Africa, and as an anthropology student studying the effects of regional strife on Africa's youth, I have become aware of the social and economic effects that violence can have on individuals. Although my experience has focused on the impacts of war, rather than gender-based violence, my knowledge and commitment to eradicating the effects of violence would serve me well at your organization. While at Columbia, I intend to continue to focus on the issue of violence. I have joined the African Law Students Association, and am organizing a panel of guest speakers next semester, focusing on legal tools to eradicate the effects of violence on the individual. I also look forward to taking classes such as African Human Rights Systems in Comparative Perspective, Anthropology and the Law, Gender Justice and various health law classes. I also plan to participate in Columbia's Immigration Defense externship, and possibly an externship on the prosecution of domestic violence crimes.

My past experiences have provided me with skills that would serve me well as an intern at Tahirih Justice Center. Despite having to work for four years to pay for my tuition and housing, I was able to maintain a high GPA at University of Maryland, and was accepted into the Anthropology Honors Program. While pursuing my honors degree, I honed my research and writing skills through writing my thesis, *The Economic and Social Ramifications of Conflict on Youth in War-Torn Africa*. Through my work at the Giant Supermarket and Walgreens, I proved to be a dependable employee and was recognized for my hard work and exemplary customer service. These experiences also enabled me to learn to interact with different types of people with different needs, and would help me with client intake at your organization. Additionally, my cultural background and language skills would be an asset if I had the opportunity to work with African immigrant clients. Finally, while working as a research assistant, I led outreach efforts to Native American populations, which trained me well for any outreach I would need to perform as a summer intern with Tahirih Justice Center.

I would appreciate the chance to speak with you further about my application. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Abel Assefa Zenawi

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<sup>1</sup> An annotated version of this cover letter appears earlier in the *Toolkit*.

## ABEL ASSEFA ZENAWI

874 West 119th Street, #10B, New York, NY 10027 301-267-8514 • az5412@columbia.edu

### EDUCATION

**COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: African Law Students Association

**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**, College Park, MD

B.A., with honors, received May 2020

Major: Anthropology

Activities: Anthropology Student Association Semester Abroad in Jamaica

Thesis: *The Economic and Social Ramifications of Conflict on Youth in War-Torn Africa*

### EXPERIENCE

**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

College Park, MD

*Department of Anthropology, Research Assistant*

June 2020–Aug. 2020

Worked remotely to research topics pertaining to indigenous people's rights in Argentina for Dr. Judith Freidenberg. Led remote outreach efforts to Native American communities to develop new anthropological studies program.

**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

College Park, MD

*Admissions Assistant*

Sept. 2019–May 2020

Assisted staff in Office of Undergraduate Admissions with preparations for incoming freshman activities. Edited admissions materials for upcoming admissions cycle.

**GIANT SUPERMARKET<sup>1</sup>**

Silver Spring, MD

*Sales Clerk*

June 2018–Aug. 2019

Assisted customers with grocery checkout and bagging. Led efforts to educate management about African cuisine in effort to expand offerings in international ingredient aisle.

**WALGREENS**

College Park, MD

*Stockroom Clerk*

Aug. 2016–May 2018

Stocked store shelves and organized excess inventory in stockroom.

**LANGUAGE** Fluent in Amharic, Oromo

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<sup>1</sup> This 1L included his work experience at Giant Supermarket and Walgreens on his resume to reference skills he developed at these jobs, to demonstrate that he had to work to support himself, and to explain why he did not have any internships. As he starts gaining legal experience, he will take this off his resume. If and when you have more relevant work experience, you will leave positions like this off your resume.

## Sample Recent Graduate Pairing

**JASMINE HARRIS**

500 Park Avenue, #315 | Newark, NJ 07103  
jasharris@gmail.com | (973) 306-5603

American Civil Liberties Union  
125 Broad Street, 18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004

July 21, 2020

Dear Hiring Manager:

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for the Staff Attorney position with the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project. I have a strong commitment to a career fighting for women's rights, and would welcome the opportunity to work for the ACLU at the end of my U.S. District Court clerkship in early September.

Throughout my career I have sought opportunities to fight for civil rights, so I was excited to see this position posted on the national ACLU website. During law school I specifically sought opportunities to work on women's rights and related intersectional issues. I served on the *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, reviewing and editing student notes on various gender-related topics. As a research assistant to Professor Kent Greenawalt, I conducted research for his article on the *Hobby Lobby* decision, among other constitutional interpretation topics. I spent one week volunteering with the CARA Pro Bono Project at the family detention center in Dilley, Texas, where I conducted Spanish intake interviews to assist women and children seeking asylum and advocated for their release from detention. I worked full-time in the Educational Opportunities Section at the Department of Justice one semester, focusing on gender and religious discrimination, desegregation litigation, and ESL services access. My work at DOJ drew on all my prior experience and allowed me to integrate my desires to help individuals and bring about systemic change.

I pursued impact litigation opportunities while working Jenner & Block. Notably, I worked closely on *J.H. v. Dallas*, a case with the ACLU of Pennsylvania challenging the unlawful detention of and inadequate mental health treatment for individuals incompetent to stand trial. Based on my work developing the case and identifying expert witnesses as a summer associate, the ACLU of PA hired me to continue working on the case for the remainder of the summer. When I returned to the firm after graduation, I worked as lead associate on the case through status monitoring, further court proceedings, and negotiating a revised settlement agreement.

Prior to law school, I developed skills in legislative and regulatory advocacy that would also be useful when working with legislative, communications, and advocacy staff members on related projects. In Senator Lautenberg's DC office, I analyzed bills for potential sponsorship and conducted research that served as the basis for the Senator's introduction of the Access to Birth Control Act. At the Education Trust, I engaged in legislative and regulatory advocacy and coalition building across various nonprofit organizations. In these positions, I gained skills needed to effect large-scale reforms via the legislative process and advocacy campaigns.

I am committed to a career fighting for reproductive freedom, and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to continue this work with the ACLU. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jasmine Harris

## JASMINE HARRIS

500 Park Avenue, #65 | Newark, NJ 07103  
jasharris@gmail.com | (973) 306-5603

### EDUCATION

**Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

J.D., received May 2018

Honors: Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar

Activities: *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, Notes Editor

Empowering Women of Color, 3L Board Member

Education Law and Policy Society, Pro Bono Chair, 2016-2017

Research Assistant, Professor Kent Greenawalt, Fall 2018

Teaching Assistant for Public Sector Structural Reform in K-12 Education, Spring 2018

CARA Family Detention Pro Bono Project, Dilley, TX, August 2017

**George Washington University**, Washington, DC

B.A., *magna cum laude*, received May 2014

Major: Government

Activities: *The Hatchet*, Writer and Staff Editor

Study Abroad: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spring 2013

### EXPERIENCE

**United States District Court for New Jersey**, The Honorable Esther Salas, Newark, NJ

*Judicial Clerk*

Fall 2019-Present

**Jenner & Block, LLP**, Washington, DC

*Associate*

Fall 2018-Summer 2019

*Summer Associate*

Summer 2017

Drafted motion for preliminary injunction and brief in support on behalf of class members in forensic mental health treatment civil rights case; wrote brief for appeal of motion to intervene as of right on behalf of students defending affirmative action policies in the First Circuit. Researched and drafted reports on potential judicial nominees. Acted as lead associate in enforcement phase of prison conditions case; developed strategy for returning to court; participated in settlement negotiations and status monitoring; drafted settlement agreement. Drafted discovery correspondence and requests. Conducted research on substantive legal issues in civil rights and intellectual property law.

**Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights**, Washington, DC

*Summer Intern*

Researched and drafted memoranda on issues related to predatory lending and fair housing.

**U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division**, Washington, DC

*Educational Opportunities Section Intern*

Fall 2017

Wrote memoranda on topics including Title VI law and regulations and copyright law. Reviewed citizen reports of racial disparities, and analyzed discipline data for evidence of disparity.

**ACLU of Pennsylvania**, remote from Arlington, VA

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2017

Conducted legal research and drafted memoranda on topics in mental health, jails, and disabilities law.

Drafted portions of brief in pending school reform case.

**The Education Trust, Washington, DC**

*Legislative Affairs Assistant; Legislative Affairs Intern*

Winter 2014-Summer 2015

Researched and tracked education legislation. Prepared summary memoranda on education topics. Managed partnership outreach & relationships for the “I AM NOT A LOAN” campaign. Summarized legislative and judicial activity for organization websites.

**Office of U.S. Senator Frank R. Lautenberg, Washington, DC**

*Health and Education Policy Intern*

Summer 2013-Fall 2013

Drafted 3-5 memoranda per week on health and education policy topics. Drafted 5-10 constituent responses per week. Answered constituent calls, took comments, and explained ongoing policy work in the Senate.

*Intern, Newark NJ*

Summers 2011, 2012

Resolved nearly 300 constituent cases. Conducted research projects in health, business, and education.

**MEMBERSHIPS**

New Jersey State Bar, 2018; District of Columbia Bar

**LANGUAGES**

Proficient Spanish



## Sample Recent Graduate Pairing

Stephanie Montenegro  
202 W. 99th St., Apt. 105  
New York, NY 10024  
sjm@gmail.com, 202-228-2297

October 19, 2020

Morris Hastings, Esq.  
Office of the Assistant General Counsel  
Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Mr. Hastings:

I am a 2019 Columbia Law School graduate, admitted in New York and currently practicing at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (“New York Fed”) through a post-graduate fellowship. I am writing in response to your Attorney Advisor position listing (announcement number 12-DO-479X) on USAJobs.gov.

As you will see from my enclosed resume, I am committed to a career in government service. During my time at the New York Fed, I have been predominantly focused on bank supervision and regulatory matters, giving me a broad understanding of the shifting legal landscape in the field. I have closely followed Dodd-Frank rule developments at the Federal Reserve Bank, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, reviewed and summarized new and proposed legislation, served as the legal observer for Treasury auctions, fielded inquiries from foreign regulators, and even drafted language for state housing finance reform. I believe these experiences would make me a strong addition to the Department of the Treasury’s Office of the Assistant General Counsel.

During law school I spent my summers working on a variety of government enforcement actions and policy initiatives at the Federal Trade Commission and the North Carolina Department of Justice. My responsibilities required me to coordinate with staff in other agencies and to analyze large amounts of data in order to brief supervisory attorneys. These skills would be highly relevant to the responsibilities and tasks of the Attorney Advisor position in your office.

After several years in New York, I look forward to returning to Washington. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie Montenegro

## STEPHANIE MONTENEGRO

202 West 99<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10024  
sjm@gmail.com • 202-228-2297

### EDUCATION

#### COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, New York, NY

J.D., received May 2019

Honors: Kent Scholar 2018-2019 (for outstanding academic achievement)  
Stone Scholar 2017-2018 (for superior academic achievement)  
Hamilton Fellowship (merit-based full tuition scholarship)

Activities: *Columbia Journal of European Law* (member of editorial board)  
Student Senate (Graduation Co-chair)  
Empowering Women of Color

#### GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, Washington, DC

B.A., *magna cum laude*, in History, received May 2016

Honors: Phi Alpha Theta, National History Honors Society

Activities: *The Georgetown Voice* (staff writer)

### EXPERIENCE

#### FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF NEW YORK

New York, NY

*Law School Post-Graduate Fellowship*

Sept. 2019-Present

Brief senior staff in preparation for congressional hearing; analyze Dodd-Frank rule proposals; assist in the implementation of transparency initiatives; help craft legislative proposals for aiding underwater mortgage holders.

#### FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Washington, DC

*Law Clerk, Bureau of Consumer Protection*

Summer 2018

Surveyed state law on fair hiring practices; prepared training memo on the Commission's consumer protection jurisdictional constraints; surveyed emerging legal concerns with social networking websites.

#### NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT

New York, NY

*Extern, Administrative Law Division*

Spring 2018

Wrote answers to Article 78 petitions for the NYPD Licensing Division and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; researched a variety of agency practices; prepared documents for court submission.

#### NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Raleigh, NC

*Legal Intern, Consumer Protection Division*

Summer 2017

Interviewed consumers and wrote declarations; drafted CIDs; participated in e-discovery; prepared legal memoranda on issues of federal law; filed consent decrees at state courthouse; wrote criminal appellate brief regarding plea bargaining.

### BAR ADMISSIONS

Admitted in New York State and Southern District of New York.

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## Attachment Checklist

### *Transcript, Writing Sample, and References*

A standard application contains a resume and cover letter. Some employers may also request a transcript, references, or a writing sample. Do not provide these items unless they are requested.

#### **TRANSCRIPTS**

- ✓ Official transcripts can be obtained at University Registration Services, located in Kent Hall
- ✓ Unofficial transcripts (which usually suffice) are available on LawNet

#### **REFERENCES**

- ✓ Before giving out names, make sure your references are willing to serve as (and will be good) references
- ✓ A mix of past employers who know your work (including summer employers and pro bono supervisors) and law school professors (or legal writing instructors for 1Ls) who know you is usually best
- ✓ Provide references with a copy of your resume. In writing, remind them of the work you did for them, and prepare key points that you would like them to highlight
- ✓ Prepare a list of 2-4 references to give employers. (See sample reference list on next page)
- ✓ If you need written references, make sure to give clear instructions about where and when the letters should be sent. Give plenty of lead time—do not wait until the last minute. Some references will ask you to draft a letter that they will edit. This is a common practice and you should agree to do it
- ✓ Your name and contact information should appear at the top of the page and should be formatted as it is in your resume. As a whole, the document's formatting should be identical to that of your resume.

#### **WRITING SAMPLE**

- ✓ The sample should be 5-10 pages, and preferably on a topic that will interest the employer
- ✓ Legal writing for law school or a job (memo, moot court brief, etc.) almost always is preferable. Choose something that shows your best writing.
- ✓ The writing sample must be your own and not something that has been edited. Be sure NOT to submit a sample with comments or edits on it (this really happens!).
- ✓ You can attach a cover sheet (see sample), explaining what the writing sample is (for example, by including a short description of the case, question or assignment that the writing sample was for). If you use an excerpt, make sure it can stand alone (and explain in the cover sheet that it is an excerpt). Your name and contact information should appear at the top of the cover sheet. the formatting should be identical to that of you resume.
- ✓ If your writing sample is from a previous job, you must obtain permission from the employer and redact any confidential information
- ✓ Make sure that your writing is clear and persuasive, and that citations (if included) are correct. No typos!
- ✓ Be ready to discuss your writing sample during the interview

## *Sample Reference List*

### **KATHERINE DODD**

554 West 116th Street, #30A, New York, NY 10027  
(917) 521-3691 | [sja1234@columbia.edu](mailto:sja1234@columbia.edu) | Skype: +0012424543327

### **REFERENCES**

#### **Catherine Warren**

Intern Coordinator  
Advocates for Children  
8844 Broadway  
New York, NY 28078  
(212) 555-7777  
[catherine.warren@AFC.org](mailto:catherine.warren@AFC.org)

**Supervisor during 2020 internship**

#### **Dr. C. Maurice Balik**

Director of Undergraduate Programs  
School of Study  
State University, Box 7907  
Hopper, IL 27695  
(584) 515-2222  
[balik@sssu.edu](mailto:balik@sssu.edu)  
Skype: maurice.balik82

**Academic and thesis adviser**

#### **Andreas Valej**

Writing Instructor  
Columbia University School of Law  
435 West 116th Street  
New York, NY 10027  
(347) 555-8888  
[andreas.valej@law.columbia.edu](mailto:andreas.valej@law.columbia.edu)

**Legal Writing section instructor**

## *Writing Sample Cover Page*

### **Madison Johnson**

33 West 112th Street, #2E, New York, NY 10027  
madison.johnson@columbia.edu • (917) 555-5555

The following writing sample is an excerpt from a draft Fifth Circuit response brief that I wrote as a summer intern. The case arose out of an anti-immigrant ordinance passed in the city of Farmers Branch, Texas. The law required proof of lawful immigration status in order to rent housing in the city. The ACLU prevailed at summary judgment before the District Court on its preemption claim, demonstrating that the law constituted an unconstitutional regulation of immigration that infringed on the federal government's exclusive regulatory authority over immigration matters.

The excerpted portion of the brief presents our argument that, through passage of this law (Ordinance 2952), the city of Farmers Branch is seeking to regulate immigration by controlling who can stay and who must leave the city's borders. In sections not included here, the brief goes on to argue that the law is also conflict-preempted and field-preempted. I will provide the full brief upon request.

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## Applying for Jobs: Putting the Application Together

Generally, an application for a summer internship or postgraduate position will include a resume and cover letter (unless you are responding to a specific job announcement that indicates otherwise). Some employers may ask for a writing sample or reference list later.

Most employers will accept applications via email. Before emailing your application, we suggest that you put your resume and cover letter in “pdf” format, and then attach them to a short email which states your intention to apply for a position with that organization. Do not use your cover letter as your email text; it should be a separate attachment.

### **Sample Application Email:**

Sent: December 5, 2020  
To: Jose Rivera  
Subject: Application for Summer Internship

Dear Mr. Rivera:

Enclosed please find my application for a summer internship with Montana Legal Services Association. I have attached my resume and cover letter. Please let me know if you would like me to provide a reference list and/or writing sample.

I would welcome the opportunity to intern with you this summer, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,  
Marty Plum

## Job Tracking Chart

It is most helpful to keep track of dates and correspondence with employers when applying to multiple positions. A chart like the one below can be an invaluable tool. Fill in as necessary and note any dates to follow up with employers after you have submitted your applications.

Employers	Res, Cover Letter Sent	Writing Sample	Transcript	Refs & Recs	Follow-Up Calls	1st Interview	Thank You Sent	2nd Interview	Thank You Sent	Offer/ Reject
<b>Earthjustice</b> Matthew Spaulding VP 180 Montgomery St. Ste. 1400 San Fran, CA 94104 415-627-6700	11/2	11/2	Not requested	Not until requested		Matthew Spaulding 12/18	12/18			Rejection 1/12
<b>Rainforest Action Network</b> Adrienne L. Blum Intern Coord. 221 Pine St., Ste. 500 San Fran, CA 94104 415-398-4404	11/25	11/25	11/25	11/25	12/15 Asked if they rec'd material, offered to meet over break. Yes.	Delaine McCullough 1/5	1/5	Robert Green, Suzanne Hughes 1/9	1/9	Offer 1/9
<b>NRDC</b> 111 Sutter St, Fl 21 San Fran, CA 94104 415-875-6100	11/27	11/27	Not requested	Three references						Withdraw



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## Following Up and Sample Email

After applying for a summer internship or job, you should follow up in a few weeks to make sure your application was received. In addition to giving you an opportunity to re-express your interest in the position, your outreach may prompt the employer to give your application another look or provide information about where they are in the decision-making process.

You can talk to your SJI adviser about how to time your follow-up email. In general, you want to give an employer two to three weeks after you send your application (or after the application deadline, if there is one) before you follow up. If you are sending your application for a 1L summer internship after December 1, you may want to wait until after the holidays to follow up. You can send a second follow-up email a few weeks later if needed, but do not send any more after that (you do not want to harass the employer).

### Sample Follow-up Email:

Sent: January 10, 2020  
To: Juhu Thukral  
Subject: Application for Summer Internship

Dear Ms. Thukral,

I recently submitted my resume and cover letter for the Summer 2020 internship position at the Opportunity Agenda. I would like to confirm your receipt of my application materials and inquire as to whether I am still being considered for an internship position.

I am still very interested in interning at your organization. I believe my enthusiasm, research skills, and commitment to eliminating barriers to opportunity in the U.S. would make me an ideal fit for your organization.

If you have any further questions, or would like to schedule an interview, I can be reached at (917) 222-2222 or [Milo.Levinson@law.columbia.edu](mailto:Milo.Levinson@law.columbia.edu). I look forward to hearing from you.  
Best wishes,

Milo Levinson

# GUIDE TO PUBLIC INTEREST INTERVIEWING

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The interview is very important. Public interest employers give great weight to the interview, especially for the 2L summer internship and postgraduate positions. The purpose of a public interest interview is to determine whether you and the employer are a “good match.” It is a mutual fact-finding mission. Your goal is to get the right job for you—not just any job, but one that will let you put your talents, energy, and skills to work for a cause you believe in, using skills and strategies you like, and in collaboration with compatible people. The employer is looking to hire someone who has the outlook, knowledge, passion, skills, and personality that suit the organization’s goals and style. The employer will assess your commitment to the issues and your past experience, as well as how well you would fit in their office.

There is no standard format for a public interest interview. An interview can be one-on-one (by itself, or with a half or full day of interviews back-to-back), or a group interview. It can be in-person, by phone, or by video (see below). You might have more than one round of interviews (for example, DA’s offices often have three or four rounds for permanent positions).

Your mission is to “wow” them and really sell yourself (without seeming arrogant), even though this may feel uncomfortable.

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## Getting Prepared

### **Research the employer.**

Read the employer’s website thoroughly, focusing on familiarizing yourself with the organization’s mission and looking at its recent cases and press releases. Search the organization on the internet and check out their social media pages, such as their Instagram and Facebook accounts. Talk to people (such as former interns, professors, or SJI staff), and read about the employer’s work in Lexis/Nexis or other databases. If student evaluations of the employer are available, read them on [Syplicity](#). (Evaluations from internships prior to 2018 can be found on [LawNet](#)). If you know who is interviewing you, research that person too.

### **Develop your narrative.**

Think about and practice your answers to the following questions:

- Why this organization?
- Why these legal issues?
- Why this advocacy approach?
- Why these clients/communities?
- Why this location?
- Why am I a good fit for the job?
- How would this job fit with my background, goals, and personality?

You want to be thoughtful and reasoned in your answers. The more you have thought about this, the more confident and enthusiastic you will sound. Convince the employer this is your dream job (without sounding cheesy or making it sound like all you care about is furthering your career goals).

**Stay abreast of developments in the field.**

Reading about current events and advocacy efforts/campaigns.

**Know everything on your resume and cover letter...**

...and be prepared to talk about your experiences in detail. Know your dates of employment and the substance of your work, and be ready to make connections between your previous work and the job you are seeking, especially if it isn't readily apparent. Be prepared to explain gaps. Expect to talk about issues such as relevant current events or case developments related to the work you did.

**Identify two to three facts that you want the interviewer to know about you.**

And think of ways to incorporate them in your answers or questions.

**Prepare two to four questions to ask the employer.**

See below for more detail.

**Schedule a mock interview with SJI.**

These can be done on short notice, by phone if necessary. You can also go over interview questions (see the next section) with friends or on your own. Practice, practice, practice. You don't want to sound too rehearsed, but you want to be confident in your answers.

**Prepare explanations for any inappropriate content...**

...that you have not deleted on your online profile/Facebook. You also can adjust your privacy settings to prevent your accounts from appearing in an online search.

**Become familiar with the basic law in the employer's area of practice.**

This is especially important for employers that focus on specific statutes or constitutional provisions (sometimes this is on their website). Research the leading cases in the employer's area of interest—including those the employer has litigated. This is likely to be more important for permanent jobs than summer jobs; however, employers' expectations vary, and it cannot hurt to be prepared.

**Alert references** so they expect to be contacted after the interview.

**Obtain information about the interview ahead of time.**

It is ok to ask about the interview when you are invited, so that you have an idea of what to expect (i.e., the number and names of the interviewers or the interview's length). Gather other information ahead of time as well, such as where the interview will take place and how you will get there.

**Prepare a packet of materials to bring.**

Include your resume and cover letter, as well as a writing sample, list of references, and copy of your transcript, if applicable.

**Pick your attire carefully.**

Business attire is best, even if your interviewer dresses more casually. Suits are recommended for job fairs and postgraduate job interviews; dress for summer jobs can be slightly less formal (a blazer and pants, dress, or skirt), but still professional. Get plenty of rest the day before the interview.

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## The Interview

### Logistics

For in-person interviews, arrive at least ten minutes early. Be polite to everyone. (At public interest organizations, the receptionist is as important to your success as the legal director.) Do not carry notes into the interview. If your interview is by phone or video, see below.

### General Interviewing Tips

Begin by introducing yourself. Offer a warm greeting and a confident handshake. Remember to listen as well as speak. Be focused and concise, but make sure to give complete answers. It is OK to pause for a few seconds to prepare your answer. Try not to babble or fidget. Make sure to have direct eye contact (with everyone in the room, if it is a group interview). Be enthusiastic but professional. Read body language. If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification. Do not get ruffled if interviewers are silent, rude, or ask hard questions. If they ask illegal or offensive questions, you do not need to answer—explain that you are not prepared to answer questions you find offensive or inappropriate. Try to avoid annoying speech patterns (like saying “you know” at the end of every sentence) or nervous laughter. Weave in important relevant points. Give examples from previous experiences. Avoid being negative, or being seen as complaining, about past work experiences. In discussing an experience that was less than ideal, try to frame in positive way. For example, instead of saying that you hated doing solitary research, or felt neglected, you might say you got good research experience but learned you prefer working with clients. Be engaged and interesting. Do not take or refer to notes during the interview.

### Phone Interviews

When interviewing by phone, make sure to find a quiet location where no one will interrupt. Do not rustle paper or make other noises. Try to sound enthusiastic but focused. Instead of body language, read verbal cues. Some students find it helpful to stand during phone interviews to maintain alertness and formality. If it is a group interview, try not to be frustrated if you cannot tell who is asking the question, or if the group has conversations among themselves.

### Video Interviews

When interviewing via video using Skype, Zoom, or FaceTime, make sure your application is working properly and your Skype address or Zoom name is appropriate. Wear professional attire. Choose a location that is quiet and office-like (or at least not messy). Make sure the lighting does not cast shadows on your face. Look at the camera. Try not to get frustrated or distracted by the time lag or by interviewers’ off-screen conversations. Remember that everything you do can be seen on their screen, so general interviewing tips apply. SJI can help you find an interview location at the Law School.

## *Six Common Areas of Questioning*

Every organization has a different interviewing style, but in general, public interest interviews often cover the following subject areas.

### **1) Questions Assessing Commitment to Issue Area**

Often the interview will start with questions such as:

- Why do you want to work here?
- Why do you want to work in this office as opposed to other offices that do similar work?
- What makes you a qualified candidate?
- How are you different from other applicants?
- Where do you see yourself in five (or 10) years?
- Which of our legal practice areas/areas of advocacy are you most interested in and why?

*These are the hardest questions to answer, but are usually the most important. You need to ace these. To answer these questions well, you need to understand what the organization does and what their mission is. You also need to have thought about what you bring to the table and why you are hoping to work at that particular organization. You need to be confident and thoughtful but not arrogant. Listen as well as speak.*

Other questions you might be asked (more likely in an interview for a permanent position than for a summer job):

- “What do you think is the most pressing issue in our field today [such as international human rights, environment, civil rights, poverty law, etc.], and how would you resolve it?”
- “Do you think we should continue to emphasize our priority issues, or should we revamp our approach?” (Be careful!)
- “We are finding that impact litigation is not succeeding given the current constitution of the courts; what new legal approaches should we adopt to address our issues?”
- “Most of our work is done with diverse communities. How are you prepared to work with clients/partners who are different from you? What do you see as your greatest challenge?”
- “If you could restructure our agency/organization, how would you do it?” (Careful again!)
- If you are interviewing at an organization with a holistic approach, expect questions assessing your commitment to their approach, experience with diverse communities, or interest in doing work that is not traditional lawyer work.
- There may be questions that probe how you feel about controversial topics related to their work (such as a public defender organization asking how you feel about representing alleged child abusers, the ACLU asking how you feel when defense of the First Amendment conflicts with other rights, an environmental organization asking about your position on, and proposed legal response to, global warming, or international justice organizations asking how you feel about accountability versus reconciliation).

### **2) Questions About Your Resume**

These are designed to make the interviewee relax a bit, but don't let down your guard too much—you want to be accurate and careful about everything you say. Be prepared for questions that relate to the organization's work or about unusual things on your resume. Be ready to answer questions

about your law school experience—e.g., your extracurricular activities or what your clinic experience was like. The interviewer may also ask about things that happened after you left a previous job—e.g., developments in a case you worked on or current events affecting the issue area. Also be prepared to eloquently and accurately discuss any writing (thesis, note, publication) that you mention on your resume. Be ready to explain gaps—either gaps in the chronology of work experience, or other gaps (such as not participating in any activities in law school). If your resume lacks public interest experience, expect questions about why you are now interested in public interest issues. If you are switching from the private sector, expect questions about that.

Listen for names mentioned at your prior employer or school that the interviewers know. They may be contacted about you whether or not you list them as references, so you should contact them after the interview to advise them or to ask them to contact the employer.

### 3) Questions Assessing You as a Person

Interviewers do not have much time to get to know you, so they are likely to ask some questions that may reveal what kind of person you are. These might include:

- What do you like most/least about law school?
- What is your favorite class?
- Who is your hero?
- Describe a stressful situation at a job and how you handled it
- Describe your work style—are you a team player, or do you work best independently?
- What is your biggest accomplishment?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- How do you deal with pressure?
- Give an example of your on-the-job creativity
- What would be the biggest challenge you would face if you worked here?
- How would others [a colleague or a friend] describe you?
- What was the biggest risk you took, and what did you learn from it?
- If you are a graduate who is currently employed, expect questions about why you want to leave your current job (do not be too critical of your current employer or reveal internal matters such as finances).
- Although most public interest organizations care less about grades than other employers, you may encounter questions such as “What were your grades this semester?” or “Why did your grades decline this semester?”
- “Where else have you applied for a job?” is sometimes asked to assess your commitment to their issues or the consistency of organizations to which you have applied. You may answer this question even if it makes you uncomfortable. Try to avoid questions about how you rank them by saying you will not know until you have completed your interview.
- There may also be questions that pose scenarios and ask how you would deal with them (such as conflict with another attorney in the office) or ethical dilemmas (see below).
- There may also be questions about the economic realities of being a social justice lawyer, such as how you feel about making a very low wage or having little support staff or a low travel budget.



#### 4) Questions Assessing Your Legal Mind

The employer also wants insights into how you think like a lawyer, and may ask questions like:

- Tell me about your writing sample
- Tell me about a legal memo you wrote this year
- Tell me about a case that came up in one of your classes, explain the facts and holding, then tell me whether you agree or disagree with the legal reasoning
- Tell me about a thorny legal issue that relates to our work
- If you were a court, how would you rule on the following issue...”
- “Please answer the following hypothetical...”

This last question is quite rare for summer job interviews and is more likely to occur in interviews for permanent positions; for example, at DA’s offices, city law departments, public defender offices, or impact litigation organizations. To prepare for this question, have a basic familiarity with the main constitutional principles, statutes, and cases that the organization focuses on. Remember that there is not necessarily a “right” answer; more often, they want to hear how you approach legal or factual analysis, whether you have a basic familiarity with the law that applies, and whether you stand your ground when challenged.

#### 5) Questions Assessing Ethics

Certain legal organizations (like prosecutor’s offices and public defender’s offices) are quite concerned with a candidate’s ethical code and will pose interview questions (usually hypotheticals) that test a candidate’s ability to weigh their obligations to the client or office against other concerns. Reviewing the state’s code of professional responsibility can help prepare a candidate for these types of questions, although some questions will rely simply on the candidate’s judgment and ability to discern right from wrong.

#### 6) Other Questions You May Encounter

- If you are applying to a city or geographic area where you don’t have any ties, expect questions about why you want to work in that region
- If you worked in a different field prior to law, expect questions as to why you want to switch fields
- Language: if you have indicated language ability on your resume, you may be interviewed in that language or asked questions about it

### YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

You should have two to four questions prepared for the interview. Be ready to ask them (and any follow-up questions) at any point in the interview—not all interviewers wait until the end to ask if you have questions. You do not need to ask all your questions, but you want to prepare enough questions so that if the employer answers some of them during the course of your discussion, you are not left empty-handed. You should know everything on the organization’s website, so do not ask basic questions that make you look ill-informed.

You can ask questions such as:

- How do you choose your cases/projects/clients/priorities/advocacy agenda/communities served/legal mechanisms? How do you staff your cases/projects/advocacy efforts? Is the work

- done in teams? Does the same staff member stay with a project from start-to-finish?
- How does your organization work with others in the field?
- How do your different departments work together? Is there coordination among your various advocacy efforts?
- How have your priorities changed over time? Why?

Also, ask about:

- Specific legal issues or policies related to the work they do
- The effects of a recent Supreme Court ruling (or a federal or state court ruling, recent legislation, or a current event) on the work they do or on their future agenda
- The balance between litigation and policy work (or other advocacy mechanisms that they employ)

These examples may not all fit your potential employer, but they should give you an idea of the kinds of questions you should be thinking about.

Questions about the summer program are fine if they have not been covered in the interview. For example, does a summer intern work with one supervisor or multiple supervisors? How does a summer intern get assigned work? Questions about supervision, training, and expectations are fair, but also ask probing questions that show you have given thought to the organization and their work. Ask about the hiring timeline if they don't mention it (this does not count as one of your two to four questions).

Your questions are very important and will give the employer great insight into your preparedness for the interview, your knowledge about the organization, and your commitment to the issues.

**Do not ask** any questions about the organization's finances, turnover rates, salaries, work hours, vacation policies, or internal politics. These can wait until after you have an offer. Do not ask questions that are answered on their website or that make you sound unfamiliar with their work, like "What are some current cases you are working on?" (You should know this already.) Also, be careful with personal questions. While some interviewers like to talk about themselves, others consider questions such as "What do you like and dislike about this job?" to be inappropriate.

### INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

If you are asked questions that make you uncomfortable, you do not need to answer them. These might include personal questions and questions about previous salaries, your politics or religion, and so forth. Just politely explain that you are not comfortable discussing that particular issue and ask if there is another issue they would like to discuss. Do not get angry or emotional. You can reach out to an SJI adviser after the interview to discuss any additional action.

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## After the Interview

### Send a Thank You Note

Opinions vary as to whether or not you should send these for every internship interview, but our general advice is to do so. The protocol for postgraduate positions is clearer: you should definitely send a thank you note. A handwritten note is not expected; indeed, email is best, but assume it will be forwarded to everyone who participated in the interview. Either send one email addressed to all your interviewers (especially if it was a group interview) or send separate emails, making sure they are not form letters and are directed to that specific person (see the samples in this guide). Send the thank you note within 24 hours. Check for typos and errors. Do not try to correct any mistakes you made at the interview. You may refer to discussions that took place during the interview to personalize the email.

If something has come to your attention since the interview that you think will interest them (like a news article), attach it to the email and mention it in the text.

### Maintain a Professional Relationship

Do not “friend” your interviewers, invite them to join LinkedIn, or send photos or tweets.

### Follow Up

If you have not heard from the employer within the response time they specified, follow up by email or phone. If they were not sure when they would get back to you or didn’t indicate a time frame, feel free to contact them in two weeks. If information relevant to your application becomes available, send it. If you receive another offer, contact the organization immediately, explain the situation, and ask when they will make a decision (see the “Negotiating Offers” section for more information).

### After Accepting an Offer...

Once you accept an offer, you must withdraw your applications from consideration by all of the other organizations to which you have applied.

### Let Your References Know When You Get a Job

They will be pleased to have been of help. Letting them know how the job is going in a month or so is another way to reward them and keep in touch.

### Tip: Use a Tracking Chart

Using a tracking chart like the one included in this toolkit can be invaluable for tracking your different job applications. You can find a blank chart template later in this document.

### GRAD TIP

Opinions regarding thank you notes from practicing lawyers who interview for jobs do not vary. Always follow up with a thank you email within 24 hours. Even if your interviewers do not expect a thank you note, if other applicants send one, you will look bad.

## *Sample Thank You Notes*

### **Joint Email to All Interviewers**

To: Margie Howardson; Dee Dee Weber  
Date: March 5, 2020  
Subject: My Interview

Thank you again for meeting with me earlier today. I enjoyed learning more about the work of the International Justice Program at Human Rights Watch and meeting your dynamic staff. The work of HRW is incredibly important, and I am especially interested in the new direction your work will be taking with the indictments of Congolese warlords by the International Criminal Court. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you this summer—especially, but not only, on your report regarding the responsibility to protect. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,  
Rosa Garcia  
rg4455@columbia.edu  
(212) 454-4554 (home)  
(917) 692-6685 (cell)

### **Separate Emails Sent to Two Different Interviewers in the Same Office**

#### **Email #1**

To: Jane Sykes  
Date: March 5, 2020  
Subject: Thank You

Dear Ms. Sykes,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday. After speaking with you and the Transgender Law Center (TLC) staff, I think the Policy Advocate position is the right fit for me on both a professional and personal level. I would be thrilled to contribute to TLC's legal and policy initiatives, as well as promote your legal education efforts. On a more personal level, I embrace your long-term goals of ensuring authenticity, equality and trust. You have a great, passionate team, and if given the opportunity, I will work hard to meet their high standards.

Again, thank you for speaking with me.

All the best,  
Leslie Schorr

**Email #2**

To: Clarence Wood  
Date: March 5, 2020  
Subject: Thank You

Dear Mr. Wood,

Thank you again for meeting with me yesterday. I enjoyed speaking with you and the Transgender Law Center (TLC) staff, and learning more about your cutting edge work changing laws, policies and attitudes to safeguard the rights of your transgender clients and their families (and all transgender people in the U.S.). I think that I would be an asset to the team in terms of my skills and experience, and that my work at LDF for the past four years has been great preparation for the Policy Advocate position. TLC would be a welcome transition for me, both professionally and personally.

Thanks again, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

All the best,  
Leslie Schorr

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## Negotiating Offers

### *What If I Get Multiple Offers? Or My Second Choice Makes Me an Offer Before My First?*

Employers usually assume that students have applied to several organizations for the summer and that their organization may not be the student's first choice. That being said, you need to respect the organizations you apply to and handle all negotiations with them in a professional manner. You should always respond to a prospective employer's email within 24 hours (although if you can respond in less time, the employer will likely appreciate it).

If you get an offer from a public interest organization that is not your first choice, your response should first include words of appreciation. If they have not set a firm deadline, you may then ask the organization for one or two weeks to give them your answer. (They do not have to give you this amount of time, but they might be willing.) See the sample email below to guide you.

Then contact the organizations in which you have greater interest, explain that you have another offer but that their organization is your first choice, and ask them when they will make a decision.

Remember to get back to the first organization within the timeframe you have identified—do not ask for additional time! If you apply to corporate law firms for summer positions, you are likely to receive an offer from one or more of the firms before you hear from public interest employers. If you are actively pursuing positions with public interest or government employers, you may request a firm to extend its offer acceptance deadline until as late as April 1. Firms are not obligated to grant an extension. Please note: you may hold open only one law firm offer in such circumstances. See an OCS and an SJI adviser for further guidance.

### *What If I Want to Change My Mind After Accepting an Offer?*

Once you have accepted an offer, you should not change your mind. If you get an offer from your “dream job” after accepting another offer, you should, in most cases, not change your mind—but come speak to an SJI adviser about it. Please remember that the legal marketplace is a small world. Public interest employers speak to each other, and the public interest and the private sector are not as separate as you might think—so you do not want to burn any bridges. Additionally, poor behavior on your part may hurt the chances of other Columbia Law students to be considered for employment with that organization in the future. If you have any questions, please see an SJI adviser.

**GRAD TIP** SJI encourages graduates, especially women and people of color, to negotiate their salaries from a place of knowledge about the job market. To that end, SJI has collected data from graduates who report their salaries from public interest, government, and international nongovernmental jobs. The data includes class years, geographic regions, employer descriptions, salaries, benefits, and links to select employers' salary schedules. Find the report on the Financing Your Public Interest/Public Service Career page, under Planning Resources. Questions? Contact Tory Messina at [tmessina@law.columbia.edu](mailto:tmessina@law.columbia.edu).

### *Sample Email to an Organization About Negotiating an Offer*

To: Mark Farrell  
 Date: February 1, 2020  
 Subject: Summer Internship Offer

Dear Mr. Farrell:

Thank you so much for your offer to work as a legal intern at the Guggenheim Museum this summer. As you know, I am passionate about the intersection of art and intellectual property issues, and am also eager to learn about the legal issues that arise in running a nonprofit.

I would like to request a week to think about your offer. Unless I hear otherwise from you, I will plan to contact you by the end of next week with my decision. I hope this will not create any inconvenience for you.

Best Regards,  
 Kaori Lim

### *Sample Email to Follow Up on Your Outstanding Application When You Have an Offer from Another Organization*

Note: Send only one email like this to a first-choice employer, and do not state that an office is your first choice if it is not. Also, it may be better to speak by phone. Consult with SJI.

To: Paula Williams  
 Date: November 10, 2020  
 Subject: Summer Internship Application

Dear Ms. Williams,

I am a second-year student at Columbia Law School who recently applied for a summer internship with your office. I am writing because I have been offered another position and have been asked to respond by December 15th.

I am most interested in spending my summer as an intern with the U.S. Attorney's Office, and your office is my top choice. I am hoping you might be able to provide me with a status update for my application. If possible, I would very much appreciate the opportunity to interview with your office before mid-December.

I have attached my application materials for your reference. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
 Elliot Green



### *How Do I Politely Decline an Offer? What If I Hope to Work with the Employer in the Future?*

Again, there is no stigma to being offered a job and declining, as long as you decline in a polite and timely manner. This is true even if you hope to work with the employer in the future. For instance, you may decline an offer to work with a particular organization for a summer but still hope to work with them in the future, either during your next summer or following graduation. In that case, you will want to take extra care to give the employer your reason for not taking the offer and be clear about your hope to maintain a relationship with them and possibly work with them in the future. Reasons for declining an offer from an organization that you remain interested in can range from geographical considerations to strategic considerations, such as wanting to diversify your range of experiences (for instance, turning down a policy job in favor of working in direct services first). If you have questions about how to phrase a response to an employer, please speak to an SJI adviser.

#### *Sample Email to Decline an Offer*

To: Jennifer Alvarez  
Date: March 3, 2020  
Subject: Summer Internship Offer

Dear Ms. Alvarez,

Thank you for your offer to work as an intern in your office this summer. I have decided to pursue another opportunity, but I greatly appreciate you taking the time to meet with me.

Best,  
John Lee

#### *Sample Email to Decline an Offer with the Hope to Work with the Organization in the Future*

To: David Blake  
Date: February 18, 2020  
Subject: Summer Internship

Dear Mr. Blake,

Thank you very much for your offer to work at the New York Civil Liberties Union this summer. I greatly enjoyed meeting you and your team and I am inspired by the work that you do. Due to family circumstances, I need to spend this summer in California and cannot accept your offer. I plan to spend next summer in New York and remain in New York after graduation, so I sincerely hope to have another opportunity to work at the NYCLU in the future.

Sincerely,  
Jasmine Butler

# GUIDE TO NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

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Networking is a very important tool for finding a public interest job, internship, or fellowship sponsor, as well as for learning about fields of practice and finding the right one for you. Yet, it is something that students and graduates often forget about or try to avoid. We encourage you to embrace it! It is an essential part of your public interest journey.

Statistics show that a tremendous number of successful job applicants learn about job openings through contacts, or “word-of-mouth.” These contacts are often gained through networking. Networking can give an applicant an early “foot in the door,” either by letting the applicant know that a job will be posted or by putting the applicant in a more favorable position because they have already met with the employer in an informal meeting prior to the job posting. Networking and informational interviews also give the applicant invaluable information about the organization, its place within the legal field, and relevant issues—information that is valuable in preparing for an interview and deciding whether to accept an offer.

Networking is also a key part of your learning process. Networking introduces you to legal practice areas, current issues, and lawyers who work on those issues. You can learn about what it is like to work in a particular field, office, or geographic area and what other organizations are engaged in work of interest. You might also gather ideas for how to make the most of your law school years. Also, it is fun and inspiring to meet people doing the work you want to do.

Networking is not a job interview, and you should not expect it to lead immediately to a job interview. Rather, it is a conversation (spontaneous or planned) in which you seek information and may find out about other people you might speak to. In the public interest world, networking often consists of having a conversation with someone who is interested in the same issues you are and is working in a field or office you want to explore.

## *How Do You Network?*

The easiest way to network is to talk to contacts you already have (such as other law students, professors, SJI staff, family members, and former employers) about your interests and professional goals. In turn, those individuals may be able to give you job leads, offer you advice and information about a particular organization or position, and/or introduce you to individuals at that organization or in the field, which will allow you to expand your network. Take advantage of SJI, Columbia alumni, fellow students, professors, internship and pro bono supervisors, and speakers who come to campus.

Doing informational interviews is probably the most important part of networking. Although it may feel awkward, the process is quite straightforward: it simply requires making contact (usually via email) with individuals at organizations or in fields of interest and asking to meet with them

informally to learn more about their work. You can suggest meeting at their office or over coffee or lunch, or you can ask what they prefer. Some individuals may only be willing to speak via telephone. Even though this is not ideal (because it is harder to establish rapport and get to know each other), it can still be a helpful means of obtaining information and introducing yourself.

You can contact people who you do not know, either people that you have heard about through your networking (and make sure to mention your mutual acquaintance) or have met in an informal setting or at a meeting; you can contact Columbia graduates; or you can even cold-call someone with whom you have no direct tie, such as an employee of an organization that interests you. They may be willing to take the time to meet with you because of your interests, and if they are not, there was no harm in trying. Public interest lawyers do want talented and thoughtful law students to become excellent lawyers and join their efforts!

Remember that the purpose of an informational interview is to obtain information, not to get a job. Make sure the person you are contacting knows that you understand this. They may be more willing to meet with you, especially if there are no jobs currently available at their organization.

#### **GRAD TIP**

Networking is the cornerstone of postgraduate job hunting. SJI can help you connect with fellow Columbia Law School graduates. Don't hesitate to reach out to us for assistance building your network.

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## Setting Up an Informational Interview

Most often you will send an email to request an informational interview. Look at the samples in this publication, but remember: you should frame yours so that it reflects who you are. There is not one “right” way to draft your request; however, you should follow some simple guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and clearly state the purpose of your email.
- If applicable, mention any person who referred you, or mutual acquaintance. Or, if you met them briefly (such as at a Bar Association meeting or law school panel), include the context in which you met them.
- Personalize the letter so it does not seem like a form letter—for example, include the name of the organization or area of law they work in, so they know you wrote the letter specifically for them; or include the topics that you discussed when you met them; or mention shared interests.
- Convey your background in the field and your interest in their organization.
- Identify what you would like them to do (meet with you, accept your call, provide further information, etc.)
- Make clear that you are not looking for job or job interview, but for advice/guidance or information.
- Identify next steps (for example, tell them that you will call them in a few days).
- Remember to attach your resume to the letter so they have more information about your background—unless your email provides the relevant information about your background and you want to set a more informal tone.

Make sure to follow up via telephone within a few days of sending your request for the informational interview.

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## Preparing for an Informational Interview

Some networking opportunities arise unexpectedly in situations like cocktail parties, reunions, meetings, etc., and you should take advantage of these. Much of your networking, however, will be done through informational interviews, so make sure to prepare ahead of time.

Informational interviews are different than regular interviews. They tend to be shorter (15-20 minutes, usually), more relaxed and conversational, and are often driven by the person seeking the meeting (you). Therefore, you should enter the meeting with a list of questions to ask. It is advisable to bring the questions with you, as well as a pad or tablet to jot down notes. (It is polite to first to ask for permission to take notes.) Remember to limit your notetaking and focus your attention on the interviewer; your goal is to have an engaged conversation.

Aim to impress contacts with your knowledge of the area of law and/or of their organization's work, as well as the individual person's work, if possible. Do background preparation. Be ready to answer questions about your interest in the area of law or their organization and about your background and goals. The contact will be assessing you in addition to providing you with information.

### *Types of Questions to Ask (Don't Ask Anything That Is on the Website!)*

- Can you tell me about your job, your primary responsibilities, and the role you play at the organization?
- How did you get this job? What is your background? (Some find this question intrusive.)
- What issues do you focus on? What legal strategies do you employ?
- Does your organization work with other organizations in the field? Who? How?
- What are the cutting edge issues in your field?
- How has this field changed in recent years? What changes do you anticipate in the future?
- What can I do to be marketable in your field (internships, classes, membership in professional organizations, training, language skills, volunteer and pro bono work, etc.)?
- What skills does one need to work at an organization like this?
- Do you know of any organizations that will be hiring?
- As long as you proceed cautiously, it is okay to ask about "work culture" and "quality of life" during informational interviews.
- Do you know anyone else I can talk to? Do you have any job search strategies for me?

### *After the Interview*

At the meeting's close, ask for a business card so that you can follow up. People expect to be asked. Send a short thank you (email is fine) immediately after the interview. (See the samples in this guide.) Keep in contact without being imposing or invasive. Build on the interview—for example, reach out to contacts the interviewee provided or follow their suggested tips. If the interview leads to a job or something else significant, let them know and thank them again.

Be organized about your networking. Keep a list or chart of contacts, dates of communication, and the substance of your conversation. Keep copies of correspondence.

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## Responding to Introductory Emails

As you network and search for jobs, you may be introduced to an employer through a mutual contact, either a professor or adviser at the law school or through one of your previous employers. Often these introductions take the form of your mutual connection emailing you and the prospective employer together to make the introduction. To show your interest, you should always take the initiative to respond to these emails in a timely manner (i.e., 24 hours or less), and ideally before the prospective employer that you are being introduced to responds. When responding you should also be sure to include your mutual connection so that they know you have responded. The best practice to keep your mutual connection in the loop is to move them to the BCC line, and note this in the body of your response. (This ensures they will not be included in future correspondence but will know their connection is being acted upon).

### *Sample Response to an Introductory Email*

To: Jacob Varna  
Date: December 19, 2020  
Subject: Connecting about Housing Work

Thank you for the introduction, Professor Yang. I am now moving you to BCC.

Mr. Varna,

I am grateful to Professor Yang for introducing us, as I am greatly interested in pursuing work in housing advocacy after graduation. I would love to have a chance to hear more about your organization and discuss your work. Is there a time in the next few weeks when I might be able to give you a call?

Best,  
Shannon Brown

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## Other Tips

Remember that Columbia events can be turned into networking opportunities. If you attend a panel with an interesting speaker, approach the speaker at the end, introduce yourself, and network. Ask for a business card. Attend meetings on interesting subjects and network with attendees (for example, at professional organizations like bar association meetings). Stay in touch with contacts you make through internships/externships. Check websites or get on the email list of interesting organizations. Attend their events and network.

Be creative and confident—but do not be pushy or inappropriate.

If you have a summer job in a city or country that you might return to after graduation, set up informational interviews while there. These could turn into great leads for jobs or fellowship sponsors and will help you gather information about the location's job market. People are often more willing to meet if your time in their location is limited but you have a serious interest in returning.

### *Sample Request for Informational Interview*

To: Miranda Hayes  
Date: April 1, 2020  
Subject: Meeting this summer

Dear Ms. Hayes,

I am a second-year law student at Columbia Law School interested in legal advocacy on behalf of veterans. As a former Marine, and through my work at the Veterans Justice Project at Legal Services NYC this past summer, I am aware that veterans lack access to information and are often unable to enforce their legal rights. I will be in Douglasville this summer while working at the Veterans Law Center. Darlene Atkins suggested that I contact you to learn more about your work while I am in Georgia.

I would appreciate the opportunity to hear more about the Georgia State Bar Association's Military Legal Assistance Program and its work helping veterans. I hope to return to Georgia to work on issues concerning veterans after I graduate. Any advice and insights you have about your work and the Georgia job market in general would be greatly appreciated.

I will be in Douglasville from May 15th to August 1st and would be available to come to Atlanta during that time. I will call your office next week to see if we can arrange a mutually convenient time. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,  
Lester Aboye



### *Sample Email from a Student to a Recent Graduate*

To: Emily Brown  
Date: September 14, 2020  
Subject: Referred by SJI  
Dear Emily,

I am a third-year student at Columbia Law School and am currently applying for public defender positions. My SJI adviser, Maddie Kurtz, suggested I reach out to you. I have been invited to interview with the Philadelphia Defenders Association in two weeks and would love to talk with you about your experience there. I would be grateful for any time you might have.

Please let me know what might work for you. I have attached my resume. Thank you very much.

Rosa

### *Sample Networking Email*

To: Hon. Claudia Damasceno  
Date: November 4, 2020  
Subject: Follow-up to our conversation

I enjoyed meeting you today at the New York State Bar Association Committee on Women in the Law meeting. I appreciated your offer to brainstorm with me about new career directions and would like to set up a time to do so. Please let me know if you are available to meet in the next week or two for a quick coffee. In the meantime, I will contact Professor Kirby at Columbia, as you suggested, for any contacts she may have, as well as Lynn Hecht Schafran at Legal Momentum to learn more about the National Judicial Education Program and the intersection between the courts and women's rights advocacy.

I have attached my resume for your reference. I hope to hear from you soon.

Thanks again,  
Patricia Simmons  
pas@gmail.com  
(301) 444-4444

## *Sample Networking Email 2*

To: Anne Finder  
Date: May 29, 2020  
Subject: Legislative Affairs/Advocacy

Ms. Finder,

I am a 2017 joint law/theology graduate from Columbia Law School. Dennis Choi gave me your name as someone to connect with in the Chicago area regarding work in policy advocacy. I remember meeting you when I was a 1L, when you were working with the Chicago Democratic Party. I am now a third-year associate at Sherman Sterling and have realized that firm life is not for me. I recently had an interview with Pew Charitable Trusts for a position working with criminal justice policy. The feedback I received was that I had a strong resume, but that they are looking for someone with more direct political experience, i.e., a legislative aide or someone with political or legislative advocacy experience. I am searching for ways to get this experience, either in Chicago or New York. I was hoping that you would be willing to talk with me about organizations or government agencies in Chicago and give me advice about whom to contact. I am willing to volunteer or to take any entry- or mid-level positions that will get me on this career track. I am available to meet in person next month or speak by phone if you prefer. I have attached my resume. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,  
Igor Klovkov

## *Sample Networking Email to a Columbia Graduate*

To: William Mwangi  
Date: September 7, 2020  
Subject: Columbia alum interested in immigration advocacy

Dear William,

Tory Messina in the SJI office at Columbia Law School recommended that I reach out to you. I graduated from Columbia Law School in 2016, in the class behind yours. I am currently an associate at Davis Polk, where I have focused my pro bono work intensively on immigration and immigrant rights. Most recently, I supervised the work of twelve associates doing immigration advocacy at JFK in January 2020. This experience solidified my passion for, and commitment to, public interest work as a full-time career.

I am hoping you might have 15 minutes for a phone call in the next two weeks to talk about the Legal Aid Society Immigration Law Unit's innovative work in this field. I understand you focus on immigrants held in detention, an area of particular interest to me. I welcome the opportunity to connect with you.

Warmest regards,  
Cynthia

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## Tips for Table Talks

The informational tables at various public interest legal career fairs (“table talks”) provide an opportunity to learn about organizations and agencies and to lay groundwork for a future application. Sometimes, the table talks can result in internship offers, so take advantage of the opportunity.

### *Preparing for Table Talk at a Public Interest Job Fair*

**MAKE A PLAN:** Come to the fair with a list of employers that interest you the most

- REVIEW the list of employers attending the Fair, identify the employers that interest you, and check the days they will be at table talks
- PRIORITIZE—select eight to twelve employers to target and bring your list to the fair
- PLAN on visiting any employer with whom you did not get an interview—employers usually pick students to interview by lottery, so do not view it as a rejection

**DO YOUR RESEARCH:** Read about each employer.

- RESEARCH the employer, using the job fair listings and the employer’s own websites
- LEARN about its mission and work
- CONSIDER which of the employer’s divisions, units, or projects, are of particular interest to you

**HAVE AN APPROACH:** Prepare your opening lines and the initial points you want to make.

- CREATE an outline of what you will say and practice it with someone
- “My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am a 1L/2L/3L/LL.M. at Columbia Law School seeking an [internship] for next [summer, fall, spring]. I am particularly interested in your organization because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- BRING plenty of copies of your resume
- BE PREPARED to discuss anything on your resume but also to highlight three experiences/skills that are your most attractive credentials
- CRAFT four questions to ask that demonstrate your interest in and knowledge of the organization
- ASK the interviewer about their work and career
- DRAFT an individualized cover letter for your top-choice employers
- GET THE BUSINESS CARDS/CONTACT INFORMATION of the people you met

**ARRIVE EARLY AND BE FLEXIBLE.**

- VISIT tables when you see they are free, not necessarily in order of your priorities
- CREATE an inclusive conversation. When an organization representative has engaged several students at once (rather than a one-on-one), creating an inclusive conversation shows your leadership and ability to work with others

## *Taking the Lead in a Table Talk*

### **Create the interview**

Initiate a conversation that will engage the representative at the table.

### **Be the interviewer**

Introduce yourself, shake hands firmly, make eye contact, and state your interest in the organization in such a way as to show that you know and value its work. Ask your initial questions, mindful that you are in control (so far) and that it is your responsibility to make the representative comfortable and get them to talk.

### **Be interested and enthusiastic**

The organization's representative is likely to share more about their work when a student makes clear they are interested in the area.

### **Talk about yourself in relationship to the organization's work**

Try to focus the conversation on the organization's work, the relationship of your experience or interests to that work, and your dedication to addressing its core issues.

### **Be responsive to the interviewer**

If and when the representative moves to their own agenda in the interview, give the lead back. Be responsive to the questions. Feel comfortable about returning to your questions or points again when that seems like the best way to move things forward.

### **Wrap it up**

The employer is there to talk to many students, so be aware of the time limitations. If you initiate the wrap-up, do not be shy about reiterating your interest, asking if you may leave a resume, and inquiring about the process you should follow if you wish to submit a formal application. Make sure you have all the information you need: the hiring attorney's name and contact information, the materials required, and the timeframe. Then ask for their card, shake the representative's hand firmly, smile, look them in the eye, and thank them for their time.

### **Follow up**

Make a simple chart where you can track or log your follow-up. Your follow-up will depend upon the substance of your conversation (e.g., a cover letter and resume to "formally" apply, a thank you letter if the informal interview at the table was considered "the" interview, a letter to forward the documents requested, etc.). It is appropriate to make a follow-up call a week or two after you expected a response from the organization. If you do not receive a response, move on. You have done all you can.

# APPENDIX

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## *An Overview of Public Interest Work*

This is a broad overview of public interest, government, and human rights work. Please make sure to consult the SJI website and with additional SJI resources for more information.

Public interest work is done in a wide variety of practice settings. Lawyers also use different advocacy approaches. Different organizations focus on different issue areas or areas of practice. You will want to think about what practice settings you prefer, what advocacy approaches appeal to you, and what issues engage you.

To assist you in this process, we identify the most common practice settings, with descriptions of work types and examples of issue areas identified for each one, in the next section. (Be aware, though, that in many organizations these categories will overlap and blend together.) In the following section, we provide a general list of public interest issues areas.

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## Practice Settings and Advocacy Approaches

### *Nonprofit Legal Services Organizations*

Civil legal services organizations (referred to as “legal services” or “legal aid” in some jurisdictions) provide services directly to individual low-income clients, at no cost or on a sliding scale. This work is often referred to as “direct service work” or “direct legal services” because the lawyers work directly for their clients, on their individual legal needs. Areas of practice include, but are not limited to, housing, family, domestic violence, consumer, government benefits, employment, health, and education. Most legal services offices focus on a range of practice areas, although some specialize in one area or one specific population.

Legal services providers have substantial contact with clients. Lawyers do significant client interviewing and counseling, investigation, meeting with witnesses, case preparation, out of court advocacy, negotiation, and litigation. Legal services lawyers appear in housing court, family court, and civil court and before administrative agencies. In some offices, lawyers are involved in related law reform efforts and self-help and community education.

### *Nonprofit Law Reform Organizations*

Law reform organizations focus on efforts to bring about social change that will impact more than one person. Generally, they focus on a particular issue area or on a particular group of people. Lawyers in these organizations tend to use a variety of advocacy tools, including “impact litigation” (which is litigation on behalf of selected clients, aimed at changing the law for many people rather than an individual client), “legislative advocacy” (which is geared at influencing lawmaking bodies

to enact or reform the law or at helping lobbyists and other advocates in their work), investigative reporting and media work (to publicize a legal problem or reform efforts), “policy advocacy” (which can take many forms, but is generally geared at identifying legal problems and advocating for solutions such as legislative change or legal reform), and legal education (usually focusing on helping individuals learn their legal rights and how to exercise them).

Lawyers in law reform organizations generally do significant amounts of legal research, writing and analysis. Many are involved in large scale litigation. They tend to become specialized in a particular subject area. Law reform organizations focus on a wide range of issues (such as immigration, environmental, women, First Amendment, voting or other constitutional issues, civil rights, human rights, and so forth) and can work on both domestic and international platforms. See more about international public interest work below.

### *Government Practice*

There is an extraordinary array of legal jobs in all branches and at all levels of government. As a general rule, government legal jobs offer attorneys the opportunity to work on interesting and novel legal problems that impact the public. Even relatively junior attorneys frequently are able to assume great responsibility quickly and, in most cases, enjoy job stability. Government attorneys have the chance to serve the public while maintaining (with some notable exceptions) a satisfying work/life balance.

Lawyers work at all levels of government: local, state, federal and multinational. In fact, the United States is the largest legal employer in the world. The Department of Justice serves as the nation’s law firm, employing more than 10,000 attorneys nationwide in a variety of areas including litigation, policy and rulemaking. In most states, the Office of the Attorney General serves a similar function—representing the state and its officials in many civil and criminal proceedings. Of course, types of practice and areas of jurisdiction vary state to state. Local law departments and municipal agencies also provide important legal services on behalf of the public. If you are interested in a particular state or municipality, you should research the practice of the offices in that area to understand the function of the office.

Government agencies at the local, state, and federal level employ attorneys in many different capacities. For example, many agencies have departments that engage in the following types of practice: litigation, rulemaking, law enforcement, and coordinating legislative and regulatory priorities. At a general counsel’s office, an attorney may focus on litigation, ethics, labor and employment, procurement or serve as a general legal advisor to the agency and its principal. Government agencies focus on an enormous array of subject areas, from both the affirmative and defensive sides—including environment, labor, housing and urban development, civil rights, and international issues. They also do “corporate” work, such as real estate, contracts, and defense against tort actions.

The legislative branches of local, state, and federal governments also have lawyers who advise on legislation and other legal issues, formulate public policy, and represent lawmaker or institutional interests on committees or in other forums.

While legal jobs in the judicial branch are most often thought of as short-term clerkships, there are

opportunities for lawyers to serve as staff attorneys or career clerks or in judicial administration.

The government legal world is vast and can be difficult to navigate. Students interested in government should consult with SJI advisers and relevant SJI publications to determine the best path.

## *Criminal Law: Defense and Prosecution*

### **Public Defenders**

Funded by the government, privately as nonprofits, or through a combination, these offices provide defense attorneys for indigent defendants in criminal cases. Some offices will have attorneys handling appellate work, or providing legal assistance for the civil consequences of criminal cases (for example, housing, immigration, and family issues). A public defender often has a varied caseload that can include homicides, narcotics, fraud, identity theft, cybercrime, hate crimes, violent crimes, domestic violence, sex crimes, larceny, child abuse, weapons possession, and more.

As a general matter, lawyers—including new lawyers—are responsible for all phases of representation, including interviewing clients, investigating charges, interviewing witnesses, motion practice, legal research and writing, trial strategy, negotiation and plea bargaining, and preparing for and conducting hearings and trials. Some defense organizations employ an interdisciplinary approach and include social workers or other non-lawyers as part of the team helping each client.

Federal defenders defend indigent defendants in federal courts. These include financial fraud, national security, weapons-dealing, organized crime, illegal entry to the United States, and many other areas. Federal defenders do not hire directly out of law school, but rather hire attorneys who have practiced for several years as defense lawyers in government or private practice.

### **Prosecution**

There are local, state, and federal government offices that prosecute criminal cases. Prosecutors enforce criminal laws of the local, state, or federal jurisdiction they serve (some offices that are traditionally involved primarily in criminal prosecution also undertake certain civil work on behalf of the jurisdiction). Unlike criminal defense attorneys, prosecutors do not have individual clients.

At the local level, the district attorney's (DA) offices prosecute criminal cases and enforce the criminal laws of their jurisdiction. A notable exception to this general rule is Washington, DC, where general crimes are prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office. DA's offices are organized by county. Junior attorneys at a DA's office generally assume significant responsibility from the outset. Depending on the structure of an individual district attorney's office, an assistant district attorney is responsible for some or all phases of a criminal case, including the complaint, plea negotiations, arraignment, presentation to a grand jury, investigation, interviewing of witnesses, issuing of subpoenas, conduct of hearings, questioning of defendants, cross-examination of defense witnesses and, ultimately, trying of a case. An assistant district attorney often has a varied caseload that may include homicides, narcotics, fraud, identity theft, cybercrime, hate crimes, violent crimes, domestic violence, sex crimes, larceny, child abuse, weapons possession, and more.

State attorney general's offices will usually have a criminal division that investigates and prosecutes cases of statewide significance. Depending on the state, a state attorney general's office may focus on



any number of issues, such as insurance fraud, public integrity issues, organized crime, or tax fraud. Students should consult the National State Attorneys General Program, a center that focuses on the jurisprudence of attorneys general across the country, based at Columbia Law School, as well as SJI advisers and publications for more information.

U.S. attorney's offices prosecute federal crimes in federal courts. These include financial fraud, national security, weapons dealing, organized crime, and illegal entry to the United States. Caseloads of U.S. attorneys are often lighter than at the local level; however, the cases tend to involve longer and more complex investigations and trials. U.S. attorney's offices usually do not hire directly out of law school, but hire attorneys who have several years in government or private practice.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) shares responsibility for the prosecution of federal crimes. The Criminal Division of the DOJ has specialized sections in areas that include fraud, narcotics, organized crime, and terrorism. In addition, lawyers at the DOJ provide policy and logistical support to U.S. Attorney's offices.

### *International Public Interest Work*

The types of international public service work vary widely, as do the settings in which attorneys practice. See the "International Public Interest Job Search Toolkit Supplement" at [law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications](http://law.columbia.edu/SJI-publications) for a more detailed overview. International public interest practice can include human rights and public law work. Settings include U.S. government agencies working on international issues (such as the Department of State or the Department of Commerce); intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) (such as the United Nations, the World Bank, or the Organization of American States), international tribunals (such as the African Court of Human and People's Rights or the International Criminal Court); nonprofit organizations in the U.S. (such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International); and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) abroad (focusing on such areas as sustainable development, human rights, or transitional justice).

Again, the type of work varies greatly, though international employers generally require proficiency in at least one foreign language and demonstration of an ability to live and work within different cultures. It is important to take steps to define the area of international work that you are interested in: location (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America/the Caribbean, Middle East, United States/Canada), type of organization, and area of law. Often—for a summer internship—you will be able to draw on experiences you had prior to law school.

### *Private Public Interest Law Firms*

Private public interest law firms tend to be small and specialize in one or more public interest issue area (for example, employment discrimination, civil rights, labor law, police brutality, or immigration) or work with underrepresented groups. Often, firms will charge fees on a sliding scale and/or maintain a traditional private practice in order to cover the costs associated with the public interest work, and/or will only take cases under certain federal statutes that provide fees. Some private public interest firms specialize in "class actions" (which are lawsuits on behalf of a group of similarly situated plaintiffs, aimed at bringing redress to them as well as potentially changing the law, de-

pending on the particular case). Our [Job Search Tools page](#) includes a “Public Interest/Civil Rights Law Firms Information Sheet” and a list of such firms throughout the country, along with the names of alumni who are happy to speak with you about their experience.

### *Alternative Public Interest Lawyering*

A number of public interest organizations emphasize nontraditional approaches to law reform. By this, we refer to nonprofits that deemphasize litigation in favor of such strategies as community organizing, coalition-building, media, education, and developing alternatives to litigation. While public interest organizations invariably use a variety of strategies to advance their work and the interests of the clients and communities they represent, some are designed to specifically favor such nontraditional approaches.

For organizations that do community organizing and education, and that collaborate with community groups, lawyers work closely and frequently with community members. Other organizations may focus on project development, in which case research, collaboration with stakeholders, writing, and coalition-building would comprise much of the work. Another example of alternative public interest lawyering is serving as in-house counsel to nonprofits, such as hospitals, universities or advocacy organizations. Serving as in-house counsel in this capacity would entail mostly transactional work in a range of areas impacting the organization—employment, tax, contracts, etc.

### *Alternatives (Altogether) to Traditional Public Interest Lawyering*

Of course, lawyers can and do work in many areas and organizations and not practice law at all. Legal training and skills can be desirable and useful in a range of positions that may not require a law degree—such as policy analysis, journalism, nonprofit management, foundation work, economic development, and alternative dispute resolution or mediation. Other skills and expertise would be important as well: for example, skills such as writing, program management, languages, or mediation, and expertise in financial or other technical areas. In almost all situations, however, we would encourage you to do legal work for at least your first summer, and—if you are so inclined—pursue non-legal positions later on. Legal internships can be found in a range of organizations that would expose you to non-legal work as well. Only employment that makes full-time use of a law degree qualifies for LRAP.

### *Courts*

Working for the courts—such as clerking for a judge or serving as a court staff attorney, or eventually serving in the judiciary—is another potential legal path. For information, please contact Andrea C. Saavedra, Assistant Dean of Judicial Clerkships.

### *Academia*

Teaching at a law school is another law career option. For more information, visit Columbia’s Careers in Law Teaching Program site, [law.columbia.edu/careers/academic-careers/careers-law-teaching](http://law.columbia.edu/careers/academic-careers/careers-law-teaching).

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## Legal Issues

There is a vast array of legal topics and legal subject areas that you can pursue with your law degree. Below are some examples of these issues:

AIDS/HIV  
Animal Rights  
Arts  
Bankruptcy  
Children/Youth  
Civil Rights  
Community Development  
Consumer  
Criminal (Prosecution, Defense, Death Penalty, Prisoners' Rights)  
Disability  
Domestic Violence  
Economic Justice  
Education  
Elder Law  
Employment/Labor  
Environment/Energy/Environmental Justice  
Family Law  
Farmworker  
Financial Regulation  
First Amendment  
Gender Rights  
Government Accountability  
Health  
Housing/Foreclosure  
Human Rights  
Immigration/Refugee  
LGBTQI  
National Security  
Native American Rights  
Nonprofit Law  
Poverty  
Racial Justice  
Reproductive Rights  
Transitional Justice  
Transportation  
Voting/Campaign Finance  
Women's Rights