

3L Public Interest Job Search Handbook



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"I am leaving this legacy to all of you ... to bring peace, justice, equality, love and a fulfillment of what our lives should be. Without vision, the people will perish, and without courage and inspiration, dreams will die." – Rosa Parks

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A. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. General Job Search Questions

Introduction

As you embark on the search for your first post-graduate job, you should take stock of the wealth of skills, knowledge, and experience that you have gained during your first two years of law school. As a soon-to-be graduate, the world needs your talents and commitment! This handbook is intended to assist you in your search for a terrific public service job.

Reading this handbook is only the first step, however. If you are interested in applying for government honors programs, you should also read the Government Honors and Internship Handbook, available at <http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm>. The username for the 2008-2009 Handbook is “graham” and the password is “cracker.” If you are interested in applying for fellowships or other public interest positions, you should go to www.pslawnet.org and do an “opportunities” search for fellowships and permanent post-graduate jobs.

We **STRONGLY URGE** you to make an appointment with Kristin Davis, Public Interest Law Advisor in the Office of Career Services. She will help you assess what jobs are the best fit for you, assist you in constructing an individual job search timetable, review your resume, cover letter and other application documents, conduct a mock interview, and generally help you in any way she can.

We look forward to working with you and helping you find a wonderful post-graduate job!

How do Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAP) work?

The University of Wisconsin Law School sponsors a Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP), which provides small grants to students who accept permanent public interest jobs after graduation. Since its inception in 2002, the LRAP has generally provided anywhere from two to six months of loan repayment in the form of a lump sum payment upon acceptance of a “qualifying position.” In 2008, “qualifying position” meant a legal position at a non-profit organization or government agency with an annual salary of \$43,000 or less. Applications for the LRAP are made available in late March of your 3L year and are typically due in mid-April before you graduate.

You do not need to have accepted a qualifying position at the time you apply for an LRAP! Instead, in order to qualify for an LRAP, you must have accepted a qualifying position by April 1 of the year following your graduation.

If you have any questions about the LRAP, please contact Kristin Davis at kristindavis@wisc.edu/608-262-6444.

Some states sponsor LRAPs for graduates accepting qualifying public interest positions within that state. For information on state LRAPs, see <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/sclaid/lrap/statelraps.html>. In addition, some Legal Services

Corporation grantee organizations have LRAPs. For information on these organizations, please visit: http://www.lri.lsc.gov/sitepages/management/management_lrap.htm. Finally, some federal agencies offer LRAPs. For more information, please visit <http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/studentloan/index.asp>, or contact the individual agencies directly.

What should be my first post-graduate job?

There is no simple answer to that question. We believe the best career advice is that there is no single path. Public interest careers tend to be more idiosyncratic than private sector ones; because the public interest field is still relatively new, you have more opportunity to create your own journey. Some people graduate, go to one organization, and stay there an entire career. Others switch jobs every few years, building skills and developing interests in one job that lead them to the next. Most law graduates can use their courses, clinics, and internships to construct multiple narratives that show they are qualified for a variety of jobs. As you think about where you would like to work, you should assess your individual skills, as well as your interests and goals, and think about what competencies you would like to develop in the first years of your career.

Fellowships are an excellent way of beginning a career in public interest law, but they are not the only way. Fellowships have become a prominent way to obtain entry-level jobs simply because many public interest organizations are not able to hire entry-level attorneys. But please do not get discouraged if you do not obtain a fellowship. A good number of public interest organizations do hire through regular job openings—although often not until the spring or summer of your third year.

You should also take comfort from the fact that one public interest job inevitably leads to another. We realize that the process (particularly the timing) of obtaining this first job is often anxiety-filled. But those who begin in law firms often have a challenging time transitioning out, while alumni in public interest are recruited for subsequent jobs, or find subsequent job searches more easy, because they have developed broader skills, knowledge, and contacts.

What is the timing of the public interest job search?

As you know, the public interest job search can be quite different from the private sector search. Public interest employers hire according to their own budgets and needs, so the timetable differs for each employer. Public interest students need to have patience and willingness to live with some anxiety, because they will not obtain a job until much later than those working in the private sector.

Generally, hiring begins in the fall for many fellowships, government positions (federal government honor programs, criminal prosecutors in major cities, and municipal law departments), and large public defender offices. Those employers continue hiring throughout the winter and spring. Beginning in late February through the late summer, direct services employers post entry-level jobs for new graduates. These job postings can be found at www.pslawnet.org and on the Symplicity Job Bank.

Hiring also depends on practice rules in each state. Some states – New York, Georgia, and Ohio are examples – permit graduates who are awaiting admission to appear in court if they take the

first bar exam after graduation. Others do not allow graduates to appear until they are admitted to the bar. Organizations in these states often will not hire until the fall after graduation, after applicants have passed the bar.

What should I be doing now?

The first step is making an appointment with Kristin Davis in the Career Services Office to construct a job search plan. Further steps you should take now are: 1) become familiar with PSLawNet's "opportunities" searches and sign up to receive Email Alerts (you can select by practice area, geography, job and organization type); 2) apply for fellowships and government honors programs; 3) interview with public interest and government employers that attend On Campus Interviewing; 4) consider attending the Equal Justice Works Career Fair in Washington, D.C., in October.

We suggest that you keep detailed records of your job search efforts. Some students find it helpful to construct a chart with four categories: 1) date of application; 2) group and position; 3) contact person; 4) result/notes.

What is the significance of grades to the public interest job search?

With some exceptions (federal government honors programs, law reform organizations, Skadden Fellowship) most public interest employers do not focus on grades. Instead, they look to see whether applicants have developed specific advocacy skills in litigation, investigation, negotiation, research, and writing, as well as a demonstrated commitment to public service.

What if I obtain a clerkship?

If you obtain a judicial clerkship, we suggest that next spring and summer you prepare for the job search process by becoming familiar with fellowship application procedures. Almost all fellowships encourage applications from "recent graduates." In fact, a number of fellowships prefer judicial clerks. If you are interested in applying for fellowships where you have to develop a project -- such as Skadden or Equal Justice Works -- during this year you can learn about the application process, identify sponsoring organizations, and begin the research and development of the fellowship project.

What is networking, and how is it done?

Very simply, networking is the process of using people connections to gain information about careers; it is valuable both in finding out about job openings and in securing a job. Some studies show that as many as 70% of jobs are obtained through networking. Informational interviewing can be valuable in exploring career options that are new to you; most people love to talk about themselves and their work, so you can usually finagle at least a brief phone conversation with even the most accomplished lawyers.

You can certainly network with people you do not know personally. This is especially important if you decide to look for jobs in a substantive or geographic area with which you are not familiar. It is, however, easier to approach people with whom you have some connection; your college or law school's alumni are a good place to start. The Office of Career Services maintains a list of

public interest alumni from Wisconsin and across the nation; it is available on the table outside Kristin Davis' office (Room 3221).

We recommend that you begin networking by emailing a short note with your resume attached so that the person knows about you; emailing is less intrusive than a phone call and allows the person to reply at their convenience. The email note might say something like "I am a third-year student at the University of Wisconsin Law School and I got your name from a list of public interest alumni maintained by the Office of Career Services. I am interested in _____ (area of law) and I was wondering if I could contact you to briefly discuss (the market for lawyers practicing in [area of law] in [city])/(how you obtained your position in [area of law])/(any advice you might have for me in my job search). Please let me know if you would be available in the next few weeks to talk with me on the phone. I have attached a copy of my resume just to give you an idea of my interests and background. Thank you for your time."

Don't forget to thank the people who have helped you. If you talk on the phone, a short thank you email is sufficient. However, if someone spends more than an hour with you in a networking meeting, it is best to send a handwritten note.

Bar associations: Becoming a student member of a bar association is an excellent way to increase your knowledge and make contacts. Membership entitles you to various benefits, including the opportunity to be appointed as a student member of a committee. The State Bar of Wisconsin offers a free Law Student Associate Program to students currently enrolled at the University of Wisconsin Law School. To join, you need to complete and submit a form, which you can obtain online at www.wisbar.org (click on "law students" on the left side bar). You can then join the Public Interest Section or any other section in which you have interest.

How wide should I cast my net and how many jobs should I apply for?

The best advice is to apply broadly. You should try for your "dream" job, but you should realize that your goals might be accomplished by being flexible and applying to jobs "outside the box" and in broad geographic areas. For example, if you are interested in environmental work, there are many government agencies that do such work that you may not have considered—such as the Department of Agriculture or the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (Note: a great resource for finding out about the practice areas of federal agencies is the Washington Information Directory, available for perusal in the Career Services Office). There is no limit on the number of jobs you may apply to and, unlike the judicial clerkship process, there is no stigma to being offered a job and declining it. Thus, we advise you to apply for ALL jobs that may interest you; you will thereby learn about more opportunities and you may be surprised to discover a job you did not know about. With creativity and persistence, you will find a job that you love!

What strategies should I use for a job search outside Wisconsin?

In addition to using PSLawNet.org, Idealist.org, and NLADA.org (National Legal Aid and Defender Association) to find out about job openings (see also Appendices 4 and 5 for web sites for job searches), it is advisable to take other steps to find out about potential job openings. Networking is especially important for a job search outside of Wisconsin. The Office of Career Services maintains a list of public interest alumni from across the country (located in hard copy

outside Kristin Davis' office). In addition, don't forget to ask professors and former supervisors if they have contacts where you're looking.

Because it is more difficult to find out about job openings in other cities, it is also advisable to write a "cold" letter to any organizations that interest you, asking if they have any openings and enclosing a resume. Another successful strategy is to look at websites for career fairs in other regions to see which employers are interviewing. PSLawNet, www.pslawnet.org, lists information about all public interest career fairs in the country.

If you would like to obtain reciprocity with a Career Services Office of a law school in another state, please fill out the form located at: <http://law.wisc.edu/career/reciproc.htm>. Reciprocity is usually most valuable after you graduate, when schools are often willing to give you access to their on-line job postings. If you obtain reciprocity as a student, you may only be able to access job postings if you actually visit the reciprocity-granting school in person.

How many bar exams should I take?

Obviously, if you plan to work in Wisconsin, or for a federal agency in any state, gaining admission to the Wisconsin Bar through the diploma privilege is all you probably need to consider. However, if you are thinking about practicing outside the federal agency realm in another state, you need to consider the bar exam for which you will sit.

If you are geographically flexible, you may want to consider taking two bar exams. For example, the New Jersey bar is coordinated with the New York bar so that you can take both in one three-day period. The downside is that each bar exam costs money. However, taking two bar exams is a particularly good option to consider if you think you will ever practice in two states, as it is much easier to take two bar exams at the same time than to take another one years later. The National Conference of Bar Examiners website has links to each of the state bar offices at www.ncbex.org/offices, which detail the reciprocity rules for that state. In addition, the ABA produces useful charts that compare bar admission rules of all states, www.abanet.org/legaled/publications/compguide2006/chart9.pdf.

2. Application Tips: Resume, Cover Letter, Interview

What should I include in a job application?

All applications should include a well-drafted cover letter and resume. It is also advisable to include a list of three references with contact information. Many employers request a writing sample at a later stage. If they ask for grades, or if your grades are good, you also should include an unofficial transcript.

Can a resume be more than one page?

Yes, a graduating public interest student's resume can be more than one page, particularly because in the "experience" section you should include clinics as well as internships. However, make sure that every word counts; edit your resume as tightly as possible because most employers will review it very quickly.

How long should a writing sample be?

The target length for a writing sample is approximately ten pages. If you are using an excerpt from a longer piece, it is helpful to write a short introduction explaining the context of the section you are submitting. It is important that the sample show your ability to analyze (not merely describe) a legal problem.

What should I say in my cover letter?

For a post-graduate job, a one page cover letter is often the most important part of the application—it is your "brief" for why you should be hired. Employers evaluate cover letters as the student's first writing sample. The goal of a cover letter is to do two things: communicate genuine enthusiasm for the job and explain why you have the **skills and knowledge** that a particular employer needs. The cover letter should not repeat the resume; instead, it should be a **narrative** of your skills and knowledge that makes it seem that you have been preparing for this job throughout law school so that the employer can conclude that you are a perfect fit. Most students can construct multiple narratives without being dishonest.

The first step in drafting a persuasive cover letter is to analyze the qualifications an employer is seeking. This can be done by reviewing the "Qualifications Sought" section of a job posting. Employers often specify that they want various skills, including research and writing, oral advocacy, organizing, a second language, ability to work as a team, sense of humor, etc. Your cover letter should state that you have the skills this employer is looking for, citing to the various experiences on your resume to demonstrate that you have a particular skill.

The tone of a cover letter is also crucial. You should strive to be unpretentious but confident. For example, instead of saying, "I am the candidate you have been looking for," you might say, "I believe that I have developed skills that will enable me to contribute to the work of your organization." It is important to emphasize what you can **contribute**, rather than why the job is perfect for you.

How should I prepare for a post-graduate job interview and what questions can I expect?

You should prepare for a job interview by learning as much about the organization, its work, and its attorneys as possible. Employers want to hire applicants who are enthusiastic about working for them, and genuine enthusiasm comes from knowledge. This is **not** the time to communicate that you are keeping your options open; instead some career counselors say that the person who gets the job is the one who communicates that it is his or her dream job.

In researching an organization, you should read its web site, do a Westlaw/Lexis search for cases, and a Nexis search for recent news articles. It is wise to ask the names of the people who will interview you so that you can research them also.

Prepare a strong answer to the question, “Why do you want this job?” If you are applying to several offices that do similar work, they may ask you to rank your preferences. For example, the Bronx DA may ask what you would do if you were offered a job by both Manhattan and the Bronx. It is always best to answer honestly, but it is permissible to be indirect. A good answer to that question is that it would be a privilege to work as a DA in New York City, and then tell them what you like about the Bronx. If a job is your first choice, be sure to make that clear!

Interviews can be demanding, so prepare for hypotheticals and substantive questions about the work the organization does. Also be prepared for hypotheticals that require you to use your knowledge of the broad range of lawyering strategies; litigation, legislation (local, state, and federal); regulatory; public education; community organizing, etc. For example, an interviewer may describe a problem and ask you to outline how you would approach it. Most times, there is no one “right” answer; employers are evaluating your analysis, judgment, and ability to spot issues.

Another favorite question of interviewers is, “What do you expect to be doing in 5-10 years?” It is best if your answer to this question relates in some way to the job you are applying for.

We suggest that you prepare for an interview in the same way lawyers prepare for oral arguments:

- 1) analyze the issues (the job description and the qualifications sought);
- 2) decide what two to three points you most want to get across about yourself so that you can weave these into your answers;
- 3) write a list of what questions you can expect based on the organization and its work, and outline your answers in writing;
- 4) think of questions for the employer (ones not answered on the website).

If you prepare in this way, your answers are guaranteed to be more organized and concise than if you “wing it.” Last but not least, be prepared to address any perceived weaknesses in your background that the employer may raise.

What is a behavioral interview?

A behavioral interview is increasingly being used by public interest employers. It is based on the belief that the best predictor of future performance is past behavior. Behavioral interview questions often begin with phrases such as “Tell me about a time . . .” or “Describe a situation when . . .” These questions are looking for specific examples of behavior that demonstrate the qualities applicants claim to have. For example, if you describe yourself as “hardworking,” a behavioral interview question will ask for a specific example. The best way to prepare for this type of interview is to think of **examples** of the concrete challenges you have faced and successes you have had in previous jobs, internships, and clinics. A two page article about this interview technique is set forth in Appendix 6.

How should I dress, sit and use my hands in an interview?

A suit is favored, or at least dark business attire. You want the interviewer to focus on your answers, not on your appearance.

Your body posture also sends a message. Thus, we recommend that you do not have a “laid back” posture. It is best to sit with the small of your back against the back of the chair, legs in front of you (not crossed). Keep your arms free so that you can gesture, because gestures often make speech seem more vibrant.

What are special tips for a telephone interview?

For telephone interviews, a good technique is to stand up because your voice will project more energy and enthusiasm. Also, be sure to smile as you speak, as it will make your voice sound friendlier.

Should I ask about salary, hours, and benefits in an interview?

No. An interview is not the time to bring up these issues. They should be discussed AFTER an employer makes you an offer.

Should I send a thank you letter?

YES, you should send a thank you letter immediately (within 24 hours) after an interview. A thank you letter provides an opportunity to reinforce your enthusiasm, skills, and knowledge, as well as to address any problem areas or issues that were not adequately addressed in the interview. For example, you might begin a sentence with, “I’m not sure I explained/emphasized well enough [my litigation experience].” It is best to send individual thank you notes to everyone you met, so be sure to ask for everyone’s business cards. If you met with a large number of people (more than 4 or 5), you can also send one letter to the person most responsible for the interview process, and ask that person to thank the others who were involved. You can also send a thank you via email; it is speedy and can be forwarded easily around an office, which is especially helpful in large offices. However, please be aware that some people might still find that approach unprofessional.

Can I hold a private firm offer open pending a public interest job search?

Some students have private firm offers that “expire” before the public interest job search is complete. According to NALP’s “General Standards for the Timing of Offers and Decisions,” students may extend one offer’s deadline until as late as April 1 – with the consent of the employer – if the student is actively pursuing a position with public interest or government organizations. Students exploring public interest positions have sometimes been successful negotiating extensions with private sector employers to allow them to conduct a full public interest job search and to participate in fellowship competitions.

3. How Different Public Interest Employers Hire

a. Government

How does the federal government hire and what are resources for government jobs?

The federal government generally hires entry-level attorneys through government honors programs. To obtain a complete list of government honors programs, use **The Government Honors Handbook**, which lists federal, state, and local government honors programs. Because it is continually updated, it is best to use it online at www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm. The username for the 2008-2009 Handbook is “graham” and the password is “cracker.” Table 1 of the Handbook is a valuable listing of government application deadlines, sorted by deadline date.

If you are interested in non-litigation programs in the federal government, consider applying for the **Presidential Management Fellowship Program**, www.pmf.opm.gov. This program is highly selective. Fellows are chosen in an all-day interview process and then are appointed to two year terms. These appointments can be converted to either career or permanent, excepted service jobs at the end of the fellowship. Candidates must have a graduate degree and be nominated by their school. Kristin Davis in the Career Services Office is the nomination coordinator. Carefully review the “How to Apply” pages in the website, including the Program Overview & Frequently Asked Questions.

Other resources for federal government jobs are:

- USAJobs, www.usajobs.opm.gov, a website run by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, is an excellent source of online information for federal job opportunities.
- NALP’s Federal Employment Opportunities Guide provides comprehensive information on federal departments and agencies, as well as the federal government hiring process. The Guide is available at http://www.nalp.org/assets/522_0607fedlegalempguide.pdf.
- The United States Government Manual provides a brief description of every agency, its organization, mission, and locations. To download a free copy from the National Archives and Records Administration, go to www.nara.gov.

What jobs are available in state and city government?

State Attorneys General do a broad array of work, from environmental to education to consumer and anti-trust. It is difficult to make broad generalizations, as the jurisdiction, size, work, and hiring practices of state attorneys general varies significantly. Some offices, such as New Jersey, hire many entry level attorneys each year; others, such as New York, only hire entry level attorneys through honors programs. The Wisconsin Department of Justice hires entry level attorneys infrequently.

City Law Departments represent municipalities in all civil litigation and often hire entry-level attorneys who work in a variety of subject areas, from defending the city in slip-and-fall cases, to bringing affirmative litigation on behalf of the city. The City of Chicago Department of Law often interviews 3Ls during the On-Campus Interview program.

Agency Attorneys provide general counsel for various city agencies such as the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

b. Prosecutors

How and when do County Prosecuting Attorney's Offices hire?

Prosecutors, especially in large cities, regularly hire an entering class and often begin interviewing in the fall for the following year. Thus, you should not wait for a job posting, but either interview on-/off-campus or apply in the fall to the offices in which you are interested. Be aware that hiring may depend on budget approvals and may not be finalized until the summer after you graduate.

Prosecutor's offices have a three or four stage interview process, during which they may ask hypotheticals or ask you to do a simulated court argument. An example of a common hypothetical question asked by prosecutors is what to do with the "uncooperative domestic violence victim." **A good source listing county prosecutors is www.prosecutor.info.**

What qualities do prosecutors look for in hiring?

All offices want to know why an applicant is interested in being a prosecutor, and determining if an applicant understands that the role of a prosecutor is to do justice (not to accumulate convictions). Because prosecutors are given so much responsibility for decision-making and must work with not only opposing lawyers and judges but also police officers and distraught victims, the most important qualities are exceptional interpersonal skills, integrity, judgment, maturity, and ethics. Although prosecutors expect students to have performed well in Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, and Evidence, academic performance is seen to be only one indicator of an applicant's potential. As much or more attention is given to practical experience where candidates have had to "think on their feet," such as clinics, internships, moot court, extracurriculars (e.g. student government, BALSAs, etc.) and even theatre. Prior leadership experience and a demonstrated commitment to public service are also important. Working in a prosecutor's office is a terrific way to obtain trial experience, and might be especially attractive to people who are interested in specific issues, such as domestic violence or child abuse.

How do U.S. Attorney's offices hire?

Many U.S. Attorney's offices do not regularly hire graduating students, but prefer lawyers with two or more years of litigation experience. However, some U.S. Attorney's offices may hire after a clerkship. In general, these offices prefer applicants who have clerked for federal judges in the district where one seeks to work. In addition, U.S. Attorney's offices in Massachusetts, and the Central and Southern Districts of California, hire new graduates through the DOJ Honors Program.

U.S. Attorney's offices seek experience in both writing AND arguing in court. They hire from a variety of backgrounds: large and small firms, as well as local prosecutor's offices. The key is that you need to develop both written and oral advocacy skills. Hence, if you work in a local prosecutor's office where there is a lot of in-court experience to be had, but generally not a lot of writing, you should look for outlets to hone your writing skills. The reverse is the big-firm attorney who writes a lot and probably well but has little opportunity for oral advocacy. Those applicants may need to do a pro bono case to obtain oral advocacy experience.

c. Public Defenders: How and when do they hire?

One of the largest job categories for public interest graduates is public defender offices, many of which hire a group of entry-level attorneys annually, because Gideon v. Wainwright, 372 U.S. 335 (1963), guaranteed the right to counsel in felony cases. **The National Legal Aid and Defender Association, www.nlada.org, is an excellent source for finding public defender offices throughout the country.** A good number of public defenders interview at the Equal Justice Works Career Fair in D.C. in October.

Large public defender offices follow a set hiring procedure, often consisting of two or more interviews. For example, the procedure at the Public Defender Service of Washington, D.C., is as follows:

We have a three tier process: the first step is either the on-campus interview or a telephone interview for folks who apply directly. The on-campus has one to three hypos that may or may not include a small role play, and general conversation to determine why the candidate is interested in PDS and being a public defender, etc. The interview is not very substantive; there is no law and even the hypos are designed more to learn about the candidate's thought process and problem-solving skills.

If a candidate is asked to move to the callback stage, s/he needs to complete the application packet (two essays on the website) and mail that in by mid October. Callbacks are 1/2 hour and consist of a similar interview with more complex hypos and perhaps role playing.

If a candidate is called to the third and final interview, s/he will meet with our director, deputy director, trial chief, and general counsel. This interview lasts between 1 and 1.5 hours. This interview builds on the first two and is a continuing exploration of the candidate's thought processes, etc. In addition, the candidate will receive in advance of the interview an opening statement exercise; they have to stand and give the opening during the final interview.

What qualities do public defenders look for in hiring?

Like prosecutors, public defenders look for students who have taken Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, and Evidence; have strong interpersonal skills, and have gained significant oral advocacy experience through clinics, internships, moot court, etc. In addition, defender offices look for people who are: (1) zealously client-protective and willing to do all that they can, within the bounds of the rules of ethics, to produce the best result for the client; (2) very respectful of the client's decision-making prerogatives, certainly with regard to decisions that the rules of ethics allocate to the client (whether to take a guilty plea; whether to take the witness stand; what

sentence to seek), but also with regard to matters that are technically assigned to counsel for determination (the selection of the theory of the case, for example) but on which the client might have a strong view; and (3) attuned to the goal of treating the client as a partner in the enterprise and thereby empowering the client. In preparing for public defender interviews, it is helpful to be reflective about why you want to be a public defender.

d. Direct Services: How and when do direct services providers hire and what qualities do they look for?

Direct service providers include legal services offices which work on a broad range of issues as well as single issue organizations that focus on one issue or population, such as advocacy on behalf of children or immigrants. With some exceptions (large offices in large cities), these organizations generally do not have the budget to hire entry-level “classes” of attorneys in the same way that prosecutors and public defenders do. Thus, they only hire when openings become available; openings are advertised from about February through summer for post-graduate positions. **The National Legal Aid and Defender Association, www.nlada.org, is an excellent source for finding direct services offices throughout the country; also check www.pslawnet.org and the Symplicity Job Bank for job openings.**

Because the mission of direct service providers is to serve many low-income individuals, the work involves close client contact and substantial casework. Casework involves a variety of tasks, from writing a demand letter to conducting an administrative hearing before a government agency, to litigating in state or federal court. Many offices augment individual representation with law reform efforts and community education and organizing.

Direct service providers value people who can produce high quality written work efficiently and who have experience interviewing clients, working with community groups, negotiating with administrative agencies, and oral advocacy. Many organizations prefer applicants who can speak the native language of their clients; there are some jobs that require Spanish fluency, for example.

e. Law Reform/Policy Organizations: How and when do they hire and what qualities do they look for?

Law reform organizations differ from direct service providers in that they focus on changing the law rather than serving large numbers of individual clients. They may do litigation, policy work, or both. In this era, public interest lawyering is increasingly multi-strategic, relying on a combination of litigation, community outreach, education, media strategies, and legislative and regulatory advocacy. Impact organizations differ widely in their scope and focus. Some focus on one issue, such as the environment or women's rights, and some work on many issues. Some have only one office, some have several. For example, Earth Justice has eight offices around the country and the ACLU has an office in every state, with the goal to have a lawyer in each one. In many states, the ACLU is one of the only organizations doing law reform work.

Generally, impact organizations only hire entry-level attorneys through fellowships, either internal ones at the organization itself or project ones funded by an outside entity such as Skadden or Equal Justice Works. Fellowship deadlines and hiring decisions range throughout the year, from early fall to late spring. Because impact organizations do complex litigation, they tend to value evidence of the ability to do complex research, writing, and analysis. They look for clinic experience, internships at impact organizations, journal work and judicial clerkships.

f. International Public Interest: How to break into the field?

International employers look for, among other things, field experience, specialized knowledge of international law (e.g. transitional justice, public international law, international environmental law, etc.), language skills, and the ability to write for various audiences. Geographic flexibility is also helpful.

There are very few entry-level international jobs aside from fellowships, so this can be a very difficult field to break into. It is important for students to use their summers and their time in law school strategically by doing internships and clinics, publishing a note on a timely human rights topic, perfecting language skills, etc. This may position 3Ls to compete for more advanced positions upon graduation. Networking is also incredibly important in this field, and personal recommendations can be essential for getting a job. Some students decide to go to a developing country after graduation to gain field experience, perhaps starting off by volunteering for a local NGO and networking to position themselves for paid employment.

For those interested in international organizations such as the United Nations and UN agencies, there are four main ways to get hired, but none of them are easy – especially if you are from a country that is already “overrepresented” within the UN system. First is through competitive exams offered each year, for certain nationalities. Second is through the Junior Professionals Program funded by certain countries (but not usually offered by the US). The third is by applying for postings listed on their websites, though this can be like buying a lottery ticket, as they may get hundreds of applications and/or have an internal candidate in mind – don't feel rejected if you apply for 30 positions and hear nothing. The last is by applying for short-term contract positions, which are usually advertised only by word of mouth through networks.

Many jobs in this field, not only at the UN, are consultancies for limited periods of time. Obtaining one consultancy can often lead to others, or to longer-term paid work. The downsides of contract work include lack of employer-paid benefits and lack of information – many

consultancies are not posted and are only communicated within professional networks (which makes networking all the more important – no one will send you a job notice if they don't know who you are).

Finally, a word on timing. Outside of fellowships, international organizations hire primarily when they have an opening: when someone quits or when they get a new grant. Hence, they typically seek to hire someone who can start right away. Compared with other legal hiring, this can be late in the cycle and there is no guarantee that students will get a job before graduation or before the bar exam. It is worth noting that even experienced international lawyers in the public sector may find themselves stringing together a series of fixed-term contracts and may experience gaps in employment throughout their careers, and students should consider whether they are comfortable with this lifestyle.

g. Public Interest Law Firms: How and when do they hire and what qualities do they look for?

Public interest law firms are private firms that view their mission as primarily public service. Most concentrate on one or two practice areas, such as criminal defense, labor/employment, or family law. Because they are often small, they only rarely hire entry-level attorneys. When they do hire, they look for strong research, writing and oral advocacy skills.

B. WHERE TO FIND PUBLIC INTEREST JOBS

1. Job Search Resources

Now that you are looking for a permanent job, it is more important to be aware of current job listings. See Appendix 4 for a list of web sites for domestic job searches and Appendix 5 for a list of web sites for international jobs.

Public Service Law Network (www.PSLawNet.org). You should become familiar with the “opportunities” search feature of PSLawNet, which allows you to search for current openings. To access the database, register at www.pslawnet.org. You may use the database while you are in law school and as an alumnus. You can search the database by geographical region, type of organization, and practice area.

If you are interested in receiving e-mails that will inform you of job listings that match your interests, submit a personal profile. PSLawNet will then automatically send you notices of opportunities that match the criteria you submit.

Simplicity Job Bank. Jobs are added to the Symplicity Job Bank on an almost daily basis. You should be in the habit of checking the Job Bank on a weekly basis. You can have access to the Job Bank after you graduate as well. You will need to request a new username and password from the Career Services Office.

Email Listserv. If you would like to be added to the public interest email listserv, through which you will be notified of public interest opportunities and information, please notify Kristin Davis at kristindavis@wisc.edu.

2. OCI-On Campus Interviewing

The Office of Career Services' On-Campus Interview Program (OCI) is primarily focused on large firm hiring. However, every year a number of public interest/government agency employers participate, including the City of Chicago Department of Law, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the IRS Office of Chief Counsel, the Milwaukee County DA's Office, the National Labor Relations Board, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

3. Equal Justice Works Career Fair

The University of Wisconsin Law School participates in the Equal Justice Works (EJW) Career Fair held each October in Washington, D.C., which features interviews and "table talks" (information tables) with about 150 public interest and government employers, as well as panel discussions. You must register in advance (usually two to three weeks before the Fair is scheduled) to participate in the Fair (registration is free). Resumes, cover letters, and other requested information should be sent directly to employers in which you have interest (instructions are on the EJW website, www.equaljusticeworks.org). After you submit your applications, employers will contact you directly to schedule interviews. **Students are strongly encouraged to submit resumes to employers several weeks before the Fair to allow sufficient time for resume review and scheduling of interviews.**

4. Other Public Interest Law Career Fairs

The University of Wisconsin Law School also participates in the Midwest Public Interest Law Career Conference (MPILCC), held every February in Chicago. Registration for the MPILCC (which is free) typically takes place in December before the Conference. Employers participating in the MPILCC are public interest employers/government agencies, mainly from the Chicago area or other Midwestern cities.

The University of Wisconsin Law School also sponsors a public interest job fair in February of each year. Participating employers are public interest organizations/government agencies, mainly from Madison and Milwaukee. Students submit cover letters, resumes and other required information through the Symplicity system in January. More information about the UW Public Interest Job Fair will be disseminated in December.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Career Counselor Biography

Kristin Davis is the public interest law advisor in the Office of Career Services. She can be reached at kristindavis@wisc.edu and 262-6444.

Kristin graduated in 1993 from Washington University in St. Louis. During her 1L and 2L summers she interned in legal aid offices in Iowa and Missouri. After graduation, she clerked for a justice on the Iowa Supreme Court and then took a position with a plaintiff-side law firm in Chicago, where she worked primarily on civil rights and employment discrimination matters. She left the firm in 1998, after it changed its focus to more transactional work. From 1999-2002, Kristin was the advisor for judicial clerkships, fellowships and teaching at Harvard Law School. She has been an advisor in the Career Services Office at the University of Wisconsin Law School since August of 2002, and has focused her advising on public interest and judicial clerkships since 2006. She is a member of the Law School's ad hoc committees on Public Interest Law and the Loan Repayment Assistance Program, and has been administering the LRAP since its inception in 2003. She is also a member of the Public Interest section of the National Association for Law Placement.

Appendix 2: Timeline for Planning a Public Interest Career

ONGOING

- Review calendar for events of interest to you.
- Build public interest credentials: student-run pro bono organizations, term-time and summer internships, clinics, journals, leadership in organizations.
- Attend Equal Justice Works Career Fair, Midwest Public Interest Law Career Conference, University of Wisconsin Law School Public Interest Job Fair. If you have a job, network with employers at table talk.
- Network and conduct informational interviews with public interest students, alumni and faculty.

THIRD YEAR

Fall

- Review on-campus deadlines, Government Honors Handbook and PSLawNet fellowship information to construct personal calendar of deadlines.
- Meet with Kristin Davis to plan post-graduation job strategy; revise resume; draft cover letter.
- Sign up to have jobs emailed to you from PSLawNet.

For project fellowships:

Finalize application.

For organization fellowships and government honors programs:

Network with prior fellows before finalizing application materials; prepare for interviews.

For public defender, prosecutor, and government jobs:

Determine if agencies you are interested in are interviewing at On-Campus Interviewing or Equal Justice Works Fair in Washington, D.C.

Spring/Summer

- Apply for fellowships with spring deadlines.
- Apply for non-fellowship jobs that post announcements in spring and summer.

Appendix 3: Library Resources

The following books are available for check-out or perusal in Career Services:

Public Interest Directories/Domestic

Serving the Public: A Job Search Guide, Vol. I–USA, Harvard Law School

The Directory of Legal Aid and Defender Offices, National Legal Aid & Defender Association
(in Kristin’s office)

Insider’s Guide to Private/Non-profit Legal Employers in the Washington, DC Metro Area

Lawful Pursuits: Careers in Public Interest Law

Public Interest Directories/International

Serving the Public: A Job Search Guide, Volume II-International, Harvard Law School

International Public Interest Law: A Guide to Opportunities in the United States and Abroad

Finding and Funding International Public Service Opportunities (handout)

Opportunities with International Tribunals and Foreign Courts (handout)

International Opportunities Resource Guide

Careers in International Law

Fellowships

PSLawNet Comprehensive Fellowship Guide – The Ultimate Resource for Lawyers and Law Students (in Kristin’s office and on pslawnet.org)

Government

Federal Legal Employment Opportunities Guide, NALP, in cooperation with Partnership for Public Service

Working on Capitol Hill (handout)

Now Hiring: Government Jobs for Lawyers

Applying for Federal Jobs

The Book of U.S. Government Jobs

Federal Law-Related Careers Directory

Federal Jobs: The Ultimate Guide

The Public Service Employer Directory

Vault Guide to Capitol Hill Careers

Vault Guide to Government/Non-profit Legal Employers

Washington Information Directory

Public Interest Law Firms

Private Public Interest and Plaintiff’s Firm Guide (handout)

Human Rights

Human Rights Internship Handbook

Public Policy

Washington, DC Internships in Law and Policy

Miscellaneous

The Great Firm Escape: Harvard Law School’s Guide to Breaking Out of Private Practice and into Public Service

Appendix 4: Websites for Domestic Job Searches

GENERAL

PSLawNet, www.pslawnet.org (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

Comprehensive listing of public interest legal positions, including volunteer opportunities, paid summer positions, and post-graduate positions and fellowships.

Idealist (Action without Borders), www.idealist.org (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

Comprehensive listing of public service positions, both legal and non-legal, in over 140 countries. This is an especially good site for post-graduate job listings. Searchable by subject matter, country, type of position, and other categories.

National Legal Aid & Defender Association, www.nlada.org/jobop.htm (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

This is the best site for post-graduate jobs in civil legal services organizations and defender organizations. Other public interest organizations are also listed. Searchable by state.

Foundation Center, www.foundationcenter.org

Provides information about every foundation in the country. Much of this information is free, but some of it is for paying subscribers only. Job corner contains a database of job openings in foundations, corporate grant makers, and other nonprofit organizations. Searchable by type of employer and region.

GOVERNMENT

Government Honors & Internship Handbook,

<http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm> (2008-2009 username: “graham”; password: “cracker”). Contains information on federal government post-graduate honors programs and summer internship programs.

Office of Personnel Management, www.usajobs.opm.gov

This is the federal government’s official one-stop source for federal jobs (permanent and internships) and employment information. Searchable by position, salary, and geographic location. Updated every business day. Can create an “agent” to email particular kinds of opportunities as soon as they are posted. **Note: when searching for federal jobs, you should also check the agency site, as not every job makes it into USA JOBS.**

National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG), www.naag.org

The most comprehensive online site for the latest developments in the offices of the state Attorneys General throughout the country, including ground-breaking litigation, new appointments, and job opportunities.

Fedworld, www.fedworld.gov

Contains job listings, both law-related and other, with the federal government. Run by the Department of Commerce and links to USA Jobs.

Federal Jobs Search Page, www.hrsjobs.com

Similar to OPM and Fedworld sites listed above, this site is notable because it contains links to **state government web pages.**

Roll Call Jobs, www.rcjobs.com

Features jobs in government affairs, lobbying and other positions with organizations that do lobbying and other work with the federal government.

STATE-SPECIFIC JOB SITES

Chicago, <http://www.chicagobar.org/careerresources/>

To help law school graduates search for a public sector career, the Chicago Bar Association Government Services Committee and the Young Lawyers Section of the Chicago Bar Association of Chicago have compiled the most current hiring information available on numerous government agencies in Chicago.

Minnesota, www.mnjustice.org

The site of the Minnesota Justice Foundation, this site lists Minnesota legal internships.

New York City, www.gothamgazette.com

Gotham Gazette Classifieds, an on-line listing of public service jobs in New York City, includes many law-related jobs.

New York City (government jobs), www.nyc.gov/portal/index.jsp

SUBJECT-MATTER SPECIFIC

For subject-matter specific web sites, please visit the Career Services web site at www.law.wisc.edu/career.

Appendix 5: Websites for International Job Searches

Included here are bulletin boards or compilations of listings related to international public interest. We have also listed some specific organizations or entities, although this is only a sample of the major organizations – there are many more out there!

GENERAL

ABA-Section of International Law, Human Rights Committee E-Brief

Contains organization profiles, job listings, and weekly human rights news. Students can sign up to receive the weekly newsletter and also view past issues. Subscribe & see past issues at <http://mail.abanet.org/archives/inthumrights.html>.

American Society of International Law

Career resources for students are listed at <http://www.asil.org/careers/careerwebsites.html>.

Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID)

Weekly listing of gender-related vacancies; often includes human rights jobs. <http://www.awid.org/jobs/>

Communication Initiative

Website designed to facilitate communication among development professionals (legal and non-legal). Vacancies are listed at <http://www.comminit.com/vacancies.html>.

DevNet Jobs

Job listings in the development field, including many related to human rights and humanitarian work. Membership is required to view some listings. Free newsletter. www.DevNetJobs.org

Foreign Policy Association

Website and also weekly jobs newsletter. http://www.fpa.org/jobs_contact2423/jobs_contact.htm

Human Rights Blog <http://www.humanrightsblog.org/listings/>.

Human Rights Jobs

Some jobs open to all, others are for members only. <http://www.humanrightsjobs.com/>

Human Rights Resource Center

Links to numerous job pages at NGOs and inter-governmental organizations. <http://www.hrusa.org/field/joblinks.shtm>

Human Rights Tools

This website has a variety of tools for human rights professionals. Job listings can be found at <http://jobs.humanrightstools.org/>.

Idealist.org

Job listings in public service, including human rights positions throughout the world. If you enter your profile, Idealist will send you relevant listings. To sign up, fill out a profile at: <http://www.idealists.org/en/ip/idealists/MyIdealists/Register/default?SID=7264eb90e386d68fd1d1645d9de4f63c>

One World

Similar to idealist.org. <http://us.oneworld.net/section/us/jobs>

PSLawNet

Can search organizations, jobs, fellowships and internships (paid and unpaid) throughout the world. Has better coverage of some countries than others. www.pslawnet.org

ReliefWeb

Lots of field positions are advertised here for mostly humanitarian and some human rights jobs. <http://www.reliefweb.int/vacancies/>

REGIONAL JOB LISTINGS**American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages**

Job index for people with Slavic language skills. <http://aatseel.org/jobs/job-index.asp>

Pambazuka News

Website and newsletter on social justice in Africa. <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/jobs/>

PAE-REACT

This is the contractor paid by the US State Department to select US citizens for seconded jobs with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. www.pae-react.com

INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

International Criminal Court, http://www.icc.int/en/ICC_jobs.html

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

Theoretically the ICTY's jobs are listed on the main UN site, but this is not always the case. <http://www.un.org/icty/practical-e/index.htm>

United Nations

Check under "Human Rights", "Legal", and "Humanitarian Affairs."

<https://jobs.un.org/Galaxy/Release3/vacancy/vacancy.aspx>

For information on the competitive exam, see

<http://www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/examin/exam.htm>.

UN Development Program

Some rights-related jobs <http://www.undp.org/jobs/>

For information on UNDP Leadership Development Program see <http://www.undp.org/lead/>.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Theoretically the High Commissioner's vacancies are all listed on the UN site, but in reality there are often jobs here that are never posted to the main site.

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/about/vacancies/index.htm>

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Information on external vacancies and international professional roster at

<http://www.unhcr.org/admin/3ba1bdcb7.html>.

UNICEF

Some rights-related jobs. <http://www.unicef.org/employ/current.htm>

INTERNATIONAL NGOs

American Bar Association Rule of Law Programs

<http://www.abanet.org/rol/opportunities/opportunities-home.shtml>

Center for International Environmental Law http://www.ciel.org/Join/Join_Jobs.html

Center for Reproductive Rights http://www.reproductiverights.org/ab_employment.html

Global Rights http://www.globalrights.org/site/PageServer?pagename=wwcd_index_44

Human Rights First http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/about_us/about_us.htm

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/jobs/>

International Center for Transitional Justice <http://www.ictj.org/en/about/jobs/index.html>

International Committee of the Red Cross www.icrc.org

International Crisis Group <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1152&l=1>

International Rescue Committee <http://www.theirc.org/jobs/index.html>

Open Society Institute <http://www.soros.org/about/careers>

DOMESTIC ORGANIZATIONS (sometimes have opportunities in international law)

National Lawyers Guild, <http://www.nlg.org/members/jobs.htm>

ACLU <http://www.aclu.org/jobs/>

Center for Constitutional Rights <http://ccrjustice.org/job-internship>

Appendix 6: “Building Interview Skills: What to Tell Students About the Behavioral Interview,” January 2005 NALP Bulletin
(reprinted w/permission)

Building Interview Skills: What to Tell Students about the Behavioral Interview

This law school perspective on preparing for behavioral interviewing may also suggest interviewing strategies to employers.

by Patricia White

Career services staff are always on the lookout for ways to help students improve their interview skills. Your students will have a distinct advantage when interviewing if you familiarize them with the purpose of — and how to prepare for — the “behavioral interview.” This interviewing technique has been used effectively in the business world by such diverse companies as Wachovia, Accenture, Tweeter Home Entertainment, and Teradyne for some time, and a number of law firm interviewers are now recognizing the benefits of behavioral interviewing.

What is a behavioral interview and why do employers use this method?

Behavioral interviewing is based upon the premise that the best predictor of future behavior and performance is past behavior and performance in a similar situation. Given the extremely high cost of recruiting, hiring, training, and mentoring new associates, law firms want to do all they can to ensure that their new hires will be stable, productive, successful lawyers. The behavioral interview technique utilizes a questioning style quite different from the standard, “Tell me about yourself,” or “What are your three greatest strengths?”

Behavioral interview questions often begin with phrases such as, “Tell me about a time . . .” or “describe a situation when . . .” These types of questions can be quite daunting for the student who is unfamiliar with the style and who doesn’t understand the interviewer’s purpose in asking such questions. Ida Abbott, in her book *Lawyers’ Professional Development*, writes that “law firms are taking a more strategic approach to hiring by establishing hiring criteria”

Patricia White, Esq., is a former Associate Director of Career Services at Franklin Pierce Law Center in Concord, NH. She now resides in Sarasota, FL.

beyond the achievements reflected in résumés. Abbott says that these “criteria target the characteristics of lawyers needed to build and sustain the firm, and they make the recruiting process more precise and effective.” To maximize the value of behavioral interviews, those who use them have identified the characteristics and behaviors of their most successful associates and have designed questions to elicit whether the candidates being interviewed have exhibited those traits and actions in their previous work experience.

An example of a characteristic firms value is “motivation.” As Carolyn Wehmann points out in her October 2003 *NALP Bulletin* article, “Using Behavioral Interviewing to Target Talent,” once criteria are defined, it is helpful for employers to develop specific descriptions of how those criteria are demonstrated. A description of how a motivated lawyer behaves might include, “takes initiative, seeks additional responsibility, responds to criticism, organizes time and work.”

With this definition of motivation, an interviewer will be looking for descriptions of specific past performance that demonstrate that the student has behaved in the desired way in the past. Thus a student may be asked, “Tell me about a time when you went beyond the call of duty and performed beyond what was expected,” or “How do you motivate yourself to do a task that you really don’t want to do?”

Students must be prepared to discuss specific examples of behavior that demonstrate the qualities they claim to have. They cannot fall back on their laundry lists of admirable traits such as being “hard working,” “dedicated,” or “detail-oriented.”

Help them prepare

Many career counselors organize their career planning advice around a series of steps that begin with self-assessment and researching employers. We often meet with student resistance to the concept of self-assessment, but

never is it more important that a student have completed this exercise than in the behavioral interview situation. Because of the probing nature of behavioral interview questions, it is especially important that students engage in significant introspection so that they understand such things as:

- Why they have made the life decisions they have made (this reflects their values, talents, and motivation); and
- How to provide specific examples of behavior that demonstrates they have the proficiencies and traits an employer seeks. (This is where a student’s research skills come into play.)

If a student is responding to a specific job description or an OCI posting, it may be easy to determine what characteristics are sought. Many firms clearly state the qualities they value on their web site or NALP listing. However, even when a student cannot access this type of information for a particular employer, they can prepare by considering those characteristics that employers commonly value and seek out in their employees; then, through their self-assessment, students can identify the behaviors that show they have demonstrated those traits.

Four characteristics/behaviors that legal employers find desirable

Some key competencies and patterns of behavior that law firms recognize as important to lawyers’ success are decision-making and problem-solving skills, motivation, communication and interpersonal skills, and planning and organization. Here are some sample questions that interviewers often use to elicit descriptions of these behaviors:

- **Decision making and problem solving.** Give an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision. Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make within the last year. Give me an example of a time when you used good

judgment and logic in solving a problem. Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem. Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures. Tell me about a time when you failed to spot an obvious solution to a problem.

- **Motivation.** Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low). What have you done that demonstrates initiative? How did your former supervisor get your best performance from you? What type of work environment do you need to function most productively? Tell me about a time when you failed to meet your expectations.
- **Communication and interpersonal skills.** Tell me about a time when you had to persuade a coworker or colleague to accomplish a task or to see your point of view. Describe an unpopular decision you have made and how you dealt with the result. Tell me about a time you had to deal with an individual you did not like, or who did not like you. Tell me about a time when you had to work with a person who did things very differently from you.
- **Planning and organization.** Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and had to prioritize your tasks. What method do you use to schedule your time? Give me an example of how you handle interruptions to your schedule. Everyone has had an experience when they just could not complete a project on time — when has this happened to you? How do you determine what is critical and what is not? Tell me about a time when you created a plan to accomplish a long-range project or goal.

Tools students can use to prepare

Two tools will assist your students in preparing for behavioral interviews: their résumé and a three-step process for organizing their answers. Using their résumé as a guide, students should thoughtfully consider the projects, tasks, and interactions represented by their previous employment. It may have been some time since they thought about a particular job, and their résumé will help refresh memories about specific job performances. Students should try to identify particularly challenging and difficult, as well as especially rewarding, experiences.

They can use the sample questions listed above to practice describing work-related experiences that demonstrate the behaviors being sought.

Students need a method of organizing their answers so that their responses do not become rambling and unfocused. A common format career planning experts suggest is the STAR method. When using this technique the interviewee should:

- Briefly describe the **Situation or Task**;
- Explain the **Action** that he or she took; and
- Describe the **Results** of the action.

Using this organizational strategy will help students keep their answers concise and specific.

Student FAQs

Some students will feel intimidated by the prospect of encountering the behavioral interview style because they either have had no pre-law school work experience or they consider their work experiences irrelevant. In these cases, students can call upon academic experiences (organizing assignments, prioritizing tasks, working in a study group or other collaborative project). Reflecting upon their non-law related work experiences, volunteer activities, competitive sports involvement, and other areas of interest can yield examples of behaviors that can be used to answer these interview questions as well.

Behavioral interview questions are sometimes framed in the negative, such as, "Tell me about a time when your work was criticized." Here the information sought is a description of the candidate's faults as well as how he or she handles criticism. A student would be wise to respond with a description of a poor idea rather than a poor work product, which might unnecessarily focus negative attention on performance. Discussing a poor idea also offers a better opportunity to describe what was gained from the experience, which is the goal anytime questions about negative experiences are asked. In this example a student could discuss an employer's criticism of his or her idea about how to approach a research problem, what he or she gained or learned from that criticism, and how he or she then proceeded. The outcome or **Result** of the **Situation** then becomes positive.

Even with the most thorough self-assessment, research, and preparation, students will be asked questions they feel they don't

know how to answer. First of all, students should understand that it is perfectly acceptable to ask for clarification of a question by saying, "I'm not sure what kind of information you'd like me to provide here. Can you be more specific?" Students should also feel free to thoughtfully reflect upon a question before answering. Rather than feeling compelled to answer immediately, students should maintain control of their responses by saying something like, "Do you mind if I take a moment to think about that?" And, if nothing comes to mind, an acceptable answer is, "Although I've never actually missed a deadline, I've come close and have had to reprioritize my tasks."

"Do I have to tell them everything?" Students should keep in mind that a job interview is not "True Confessions." Although career services professionals counsel students to be scrupulously truthful in their application materials, that does not mean that they must volunteer negative information unless they are directly asked the question. As Martha Neil notes in her article "Asked (Sort Of) and Answered" in the September 2004 issue of the *ABA Journal*, candidates should keep their answers simple and not offer information that reflects poorly on them. When a truthful answer to a direct question requires a negative response, students should be prepared to provide the honest answer, together with a brief explanation for the deficiency and their plan for improvement.

"What if it doesn't seem like a behavioral interview but just an effort to make conversation?" Sometimes questions that don't seem to fall into the pattern of behavioral interview questions are aimed at uncovering behaviors that are important to the employer. A question like "What kinds of activities do you enjoy when you're not studying or working?" may be designed to elicit whether a student is a team player or a loner, highly competitive or unmotivated, civic-minded or self-centered. Students need to think about what may be behind a question being asked.

Conclusion

Understanding and preparing for behavioral interviews give students one more way to hone their interviewing skills. Regardless of whether they encounter this technique, the self-assessment, employer research, and thoughtful reflection upon their work experiences and other activities will prepare students to excel in the interview room. ■

Appendix 7: Sample Cover Letters

1. Environmental organization

Ellie Jones
321 East 14th St. Apt. 10
New York, NY 10003
ejones@stsl.edu
April 8, 2006

Heather Hill, Legal Director
Earthjustice
426 17th Street
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Ms. Hill:

I will be completing my JD at *Sojourner Truth School of Law* in May and I am writing to apply for the position of Associate Attorney in Earthjustice's International Program. At *Sojourner Truth*, I have gained expertise in aspects of international law including international trade, human rights, law and development, and international criminal law. A position applying rigorous legal advocacy to address international harms in these areas is the dream job I have been preparing for and I believe I would be able to make a significant contribution to the work of Earthjustice.

Through my course work and extracurricular activities in law school, I have developed strong written and oral advocacy skills. I engaged in extensive complex legal analysis and writing for the Asylum Program at Human Rights First, where I drafted legal memoranda on the immigration status of stateless persons. My oral advocacy skills have been honed in a variety of contexts. Most notably, I was a semi-finalist in a WTO moot court competition in Geneva, Switzerland, involving the right of developed countries to grant trade preferences to developing countries meeting certain criteria for limited use of pesticides.

Prior to and during law school, I have demonstrated initiative, whether in facilitating the creation of a national NGO network in support of girls' education as a Peace Corps volunteer in Togo, or devising programming during my clinical work with a South Asian community organization during law school. I have collaborated with a wide variety of colleagues, from international student members of my moot court team to United Nations officials. As you will see from my resume, I have a deep commitment to international justice and sustainable development. Although my environmental experience is not as extensive as my experience in trade and human rights, I have addressed environmental issues as a component of sustainable development in both my course work and professional experience.

I am eager to apply my skills, knowledge, work ethic and sense of humor to the work of Earthjustice. Should you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email (ecj252@nyu.edu), or by phone (917-435-9263). I look forward to talking with you.

Very truly yours,

Ellie Jones

2. Public Defender Job; 2L Summer at Same Public Defender's Office

Alice Lee
240 Mercer Street, #627
New York, NY 10012
(212) 443-5552; (917) 318-3917
al241@nyu.edu
November 9, 2005

Luis Rodriguez, Esq.
Office of the Los Angeles Public Defender
210 West Temple Street, 19th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Rodriguez:

As you know, I am a third year student at *Sojourner Truth School of Law* and I am writing to express my interest in a Deputy Public Defender position with the Offices of the Los Angeles County Public Defender. Given my long-standing interest and varied experiences in indigent criminal defense, I believe that I would be able to make significant contributions to the Public Defender's vigorous representation of clients.

Through my internships and law school clinics, I have developed an extensive range of lawyering skills, from client communication and trial advocacy to research and writing. My summer experience at your offices exposed me to the issues indigent clients face when initially confronted with the criminal justice system and developed my client communication and relationship-building skills. It also taught me to think quickly and perform strategically in zealously advocating for clients. This year, one of my projects in the Immigrant Rights Clinic is a partnership with the Immigrant Defense Project of the New York State Bar Defenders Association, where I am expanding my research and writing skills by drafting an amicus brief on a criminal-immigration issue. My other Clinic project allows me to develop my trial advocacy skills by representing an immigrant domestic worker and advocate for her wage and hour claims in federal court.

I am passionate about defending indigent and disenfranchised clients by ensuring that their rights are asserted. Working in criminal defense organizations with inspiring practitioners, such as those in your offices, has fueled my desire to continue contributing my energy and skills in this effort. It would be an honor for me to join your ranks as a public defender.

Enclosed are my resume and writing sample. My former supervisors at your office – John Doe and Mary Smith – are available to speak with you regarding my qualifications. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you and I am available at your earliest convenience. Should you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or at the e-mail address noted above.

Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alice Lee

3. Public Defender Job; 2L Summer in Law Firm

300 West 110th Street, #8E
New York, New York 10025
(646) 666-5696
jlendman@stsl.edu
November 12, 2005

Toni Romano, Recruitment Coordinator
Criminal Defense Division
The Legal Aid Society
1 Battery Park Plaza, 28th Floor
New York, New York 10004

Dear Ms. Romano:

I am a third year student at *Sojourner Truth School of Law* and I am writing to express my interest in a position as a staff attorney with the Criminal Defense Division of the Legal Aid Society. Given my long-standing interest and varied experiences in criminal law, I think that I would be well suited to work in Legal Aid's Criminal Defense Division.

Throughout my law school career, I have gained experience in all aspects of indigent criminal defense, including arraignments, investigations, motion practice and trials. As the enclosed copy of my resume indicates, I worked at New York County Defender Services my 1L summer, where I gained confidence in interviewing and relationship-building with clients. Additionally, I became very comfortable in the courtroom. I further honed my skills during a year-long criminal defense clinic where I had the opportunity to work intensively on several cases. My experience in public defense has been uniquely fulfilling and made me certain that I would pursue this work after law school.

This past summer, for financial reasons, I worked as a summer associate for Arnold & Porter. There I was given the opportunity to spend much of my time on pro bono work. I strengthened my research and writing skills tremendously and co-authored an article that was published in the *New York Law Journal*. While I was fortunate to receive an offer to work in the firm's litigation group, my heart has always been in public interest work. My summer in the private sector only made me more eager to begin my public interest career.

Enclosed for your review are my resume, writing sample, references, and responses to the Applicant Questionnaire. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications in greater detail. I am available at your earliest convenience. Should you wish to schedule an interview, please contact me at (646) 666-5696.

Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,

John Lendman

Enc.

4. “COLD” Letter to Legal services (no posted opening); use of alumnae name, after obtaining permission

Fernando Hernandez
15A Berkely Place
Brooklyn, NY 11217
718-246-5555
efeh324@stls.edu
January 14, 2007

Mr. Victor Black
Legal Aid Society of Ohio
924 Bethel Street
Cleveland, OH 96813

Dear Mr. Black:

I am a third year law student at *Sojourner Truth School of Law* and I am interested in being considered for an entry-level position at any of your offices. I will be graduating in May 2007 and plan to take the July Ohio Bar exam. One of your staff attorneys, Lisa Smith, who also graduated from *Sojourner Truth*, suggested that I write to you. I believe that my broad range of advocacy skills and substantial expertise in poverty law will enable me to contribute to the work of your office.

I grew up in an immigrant family where my father has a chronic illness and my mother is a survivor of cancer. The many challenges we faced as a low-income family struggling with health care issues and debt have made me a passionate and tireless advocate for those who find themselves in similar situations.

During law school I have gained experience in direct advocacy for low-income clients, from client interviewing to negotiation to administrative hearings. While interning at Legal Aid, I successfully advocated on behalf of an uninsured domestic worker with over twenty thousand dollars worth of hospital bills to have the hospital reduce her payments. I also successfully represented individual clients at administrative hearings, including a very complex case involving a managed long term care plan. This year in *Sojourner Truth's* Immigrant Rights Clinic, I am applying for a discretionary waiver on behalf of a client in removal proceedings. I am representing him at his hearing before an immigration judge, briefing a complicated issue of law, and preparing testimony and oral arguments.

I have also developed substantial research and writing skills that will enable me to quickly produce the motions and briefs that are needed in a fast-paced legal aid office. For example, during my first summer of law school at Planned Parenthood, I researched and wrote educational materials pertaining to emergency contraception, and at Legal Aid I helped write a Title VI discrimination complaint based on the lack of interpreter services at local hospitals.

I am eager to contribute my knowledge, skills, and experience to the work of your office. I look forward to hearing from you, and have included my resume and references as well as a writing sample.

Sincerely,

Fernando Hernandez

Enc.