**Introduction**

For generations considered the public service degree, the Juris Doctor (JD)—the degree earned after successfully completing three years of law school—is now one of many well-respected degrees that can help you fulfill your social impact career goals.

Public interest law refers to legal practice and education that benefits issues such as civil rights and civil liberties, people living in poverty, environmental protection, immigrants’ rights, women’s rights, and consumer rights. Public interest lawyers can work in a wide variety of roles, including as advocates and lobbyists on issues they care about; policy makers and legislators; and legal counselors representing clients directly.

Law students develop a specific set of skills that can apply to diverse settings, from the courtroom to Capitol Hill, from the boardroom to a prison holding cell. Public interest lawyers serve the homeless, work for environmental causes, represent indigent clients, and write policy for lawmakers. They run nonprofits, they teach, and they work to make the world a better place.

Law school will teach you how to analyze problems from a variety of perspectives, how laws are written, and how courts inter-

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**Conclusion and further resources**
pret laws. You will learn how to be an effective advocate for your cause and how to use the law to improve the lives of others.

While no degree in “public interest law” exists, you can get a legal education that prepares you to practice in nonprofit and government settings where the bulk of public interest work occurs. See the “What to look for in a law school” section below for details about what schools may offer you in support of your social impact career goals. But beware—the culture of each law school differs drastically so it’s crucial to learn as much as you can about the support available to public interest-minded students at each of your target schools.

Finally, a word about financing a legal education: many people enter law school with the intention of using their law degree in a nonprofit setting, only to buckle under the weight of student loan debt. If you are concerned about affording your degree, take a look at the section below on “Challenges of a public interest law degree”.

Why a law degree?

Law school students and alumni offer a range of reasons for going to law school as a way of furthering their social impact careers.

Some people choose law as a career that will allow them to speak up for people who are typically without a voice. “I chose law because I wanted the skills and the power to advocate for those who are unable to advocate for themselves,” says Marissa Band, a 2008 graduate of Rutgers’ School of Law, Camden. Similarly, Jim Comerford, graduating from St. Thomas School of Law in 2010, explains: “I decided to become an attorney to stand up for the rights of people facing poverty and discrimination.”

Others choose law as a means of social change on both a large and small scale: “Attorneys have the privilege of being uniquely positioned to serve those without access to resources through direct service (legal aid, representation in court, etc.) as well as through effecting systemic change (policy work, law-making, etc.),” says Susan LePeau DeCostanza, 2008 graduate of DePaul University College of Law, currently on staff at Chicago-Kent College of Law as a career advisor.

“Because the law is a career that so directly impacts people, I saw being a lawyer as an opportunity to help people make positive changes in their lives and prevent unfair negative changes,” says John Enterline, a student at Northeastern University School of Law planning to graduate in 2011.

Many choose law for a combination of reasons. For example, Stacy Tolos, graduating in 2010 from Emory Law, who serves on the board of Equal Justice Works (www.equaljusticeworks.org), says:

I wanted to understand how the system of government worked and how our society is structured around the law; I wanted to sue corporations that were committing human rights and environmental violations unchecked; I wanted my first job to be higher up than entry level.

Skills you can gain

Among the skills law students develop are legal analysis and analytical thinking, habits for responsible interaction with clients, and techniques of persuasive argumentation. The following discussion analyzes these skills in more detail.

Advocating: Using evidence and sound arguments, lawyers represent the interests and concerns of their clients. Law school offers you the background in the law that will allow you to craft
competent arguments on behalf of your clients, as well as to anticipate the arguments other lawyers may make in opposition.

**Analysis and analytical thinking:** Students learn to categorize and discuss persons and events in highly generalized terms. Lawyers must be able to distill fundamental facts of a problem and to understand the relationship among different elements of a problem.

**Communicating:** The practice of law is steeped in communication: legal experts codify law in writing, contracts and judicial opinions are written documents, and lawyers offer arguments in court cases orally. Law school and activities like moot court, law reviews, and journals can give you chances to practice your legal communication skills.

**Counseling clients:** During law school you should seek opportunities to work directly with clients under the supervision of practicing attorneys. Offering clients legal advice may prevent or support litigation, and will help you put into practice the legal knowledge you gain during your coursework.

**Habits of legal thinking:** Understanding legal processes, seeing both sides of legal arguments, sifting through facts and precedents, using precise language, understanding the applications and conflicts of legal rules.

**Interviewing and listening to clients:** Through clinics, internships, and other field experiences during law school, you should seek opportunities to learn about your clients’ unique circumstances and concerns.

**Negotiation and dispute resolution:** Law school training should give you a grounding in seeing many different solutions to a problem, skills that can help you as a lawyer mediating a conflict among parties or helping your client reach an equitable solution.

**Synthesizing disparate information:** Law school will help train you to digest and to see the relationships among many complex laws and precedents that may have a bearing on the parameters of the cases you handle.

**And a note on skills you may not learn...**

Law schools are sometimes criticized for not placing enough emphasis on practical legal skills such as serving clients and dealing with ethical and social development. Certain educational methods deployed in the standard law school curriculum emphasize the interpretation of facts and precedents in terms of advancing a client’s cause through legal argument, before a judge—removing or downgrading questions about justice, compassion, or moral and social consequences. According to a study called Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law, published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (www.carnegiefoundation.org/publications/educating-lawyers-preparation-profession-law): “In their all-consuming first year, students are told to set aside their desire for justice. They are warned not to let their moral concerns or compassion for the people in the cases they discuss cloud their legal analysis.”

### What is a “public interest lawyer”?

**Public interest vs. pro bono**

You may have heard the term pro bono in reference to lawyers who engage in efforts to support people or organizations that can’t afford to pay for services. It’s important to distinguish pro bono work from public interest work as you think about selecting a law school.

The term pro bono refers to legal services that lawyers render free (i.e., on a volunteer basis) for people with limited means or for nonprofit organizations. The term comes from the Latin pro bono publico, or “for the public good.” The American Bar Association considers pro bono legal services a “model rule of professional conduct” and recommends (but does not require) that all lawyers—including lawyers working in for-profit firms—offer 50 hours per year of pro bono assistance. Each state has its own “model rules” and many include this nod to pro bono work. States do not enforce the rule and many states ignore it. Read more about this rule at www.abanet.org/cpr/mrpc/rule_6_1.html.

**Public interest** lawyers, on the other hand, are usually committed full-time to social or environmental justice and serve in staff roles at nonprofits and government agencies. Public interest lawyers are paid for the legal services they render, though often the pay is significantly less than what private lawyers earn.

In the context of law school, pro bono opportunities often exist for law students to provide legal services (under the supervision of a practicing lawyer) without earning fees or academic credit. Law schools provide pro bono opportunities for many reasons, one of which is to be accredited by the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association (the law school accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education; www.abanet.org/legaled/).

On the other hand, opportunities to prepare for a public inter-
est legal career are not always easy to come by, depending on the law school. Some schools offer public interest legal clinics, certification, field experience requirements, and coursework focused on social or environmental justice issues. Other schools have career advisors or public interest directors dedicated to supporting public interest-minded students. Some have practically none of these. See the "What to look for in a public interest law school" section below.

While some schools do support students who seek public interest careers, many may tout their students’ volunteerism as a way to garner a positive community image, without dedicating much time or effort to support public interest students. It’s crucial to look beyond rankings to learn about your target school’s public interest activities and support. Two useful references in your search for public interest law programs are:

» Equal Justice Works’ law school guide
  http://ejwguide.com

» The American Bar Association’s listings of schools based on public interest opportunities
  www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/lawschools/category_listings.html

**Joint degrees with the law degree**

Many schools offer joint-degree options that enable you to earn a law degree and a degree in another field, such as business, environmental science, public policy, or international affairs.

» Learn about the benefits of a joint-degree

“I decided to pursue a dual JD/Master of Public Policy degree because I am interested in advocacy on an individual level, as well as on a broader level, through policy work. I wanted to work on both a micro and macro level. I find helping individual people to be very rewarding, plus it gives me the passion and the knowledge to fight for changes that are needed on a larger scale. Advocating at the policy level is important because it benefits individual lives,” explains Marissa Band, a 2008 graduate of Rutgers School of Law, Camden, and a 2007 graduate of Rutgers’ Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy.

Christy Bott—a student who will graduate in 2011 from University of St. Thomas School of Law—earned a masters degree in Education before pursuing her law degree. The combination of degrees offers her leverage to effect social change. She says,

During my M.Ed. program, I was reenergized with regard to Youth Development. Before working at the school district, I worked full-time at the YMCA in recreational family and youth programming. I moved to the school district because I was frustrated that so many of the youth I served came to my programs lacking in basic educational skills. I believed that I could make a bigger difference in children’s lives if I worked for the school district. Part of what I realized in the YDL program was the dissonance I felt in my career was because my jobs kept me focused on one aspect of children/families. That is also the reason I have continued to law school. I want to be able to focus on youth in a variety of settings, and the JD will open doors for me to make system-wide changes rather than always working only with individual children/families.

**Other legal degrees**

While this overview focuses on the professional Juris Doctor (JD), there are also other types of law degrees.

A small number of people who’ve earned the Juris Doctor later choose to advance to an academic legal degree, the LL.M. or Master of Laws. For example, law professors frequently hold the LL.M. People who’ve graduated from law school overseas may also choose to earn their LL.M. in the United States in order to sit for a bar exam and practice law in-country, while other lawyers pursue an LL.M. to further specialize and enhance their understanding of a legal field. For example, the University of Oregon offers an LL.M. in Environmental and Natural Resources Law (http://llm.uoregon.edu).

The equivalent of the Ph.D. in legal studies is called the Scientiae Juridicae Doctor or J.S.D. which is sometimes considered a post-doctoral legal degree (since the Juris Doctor is a prerequisite).

**What can you expect to find in a program?**

**General structure of the curriculum**

Law school is typically three years long. (The first year is commonly called 1L, the second year 2L, and the third year 3L.) During the first year and a half of law school—according to Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law, a study published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching—most law schools follow a standard curriculum pattern (see below) and all first year law students tend to take the same set of courses. After the first three semesters, students have more freedom to choose courses based on their specific interest areas, and this is likely where you would be able to focus on public interest topics if your school offers relevant courses.
Unlike many graduate programs, law school doesn’t typically require a thesis, per se, but may require a substantial piece of writing based on a student’s own research, and completed under the guidance of a professor.

In addition, many law schools don’t require field experience (though public interest certificates often do)—but in order to get the most out of your education, and to make connections between the legal doctrine you’re learning in class and the real world, most students who’ve responded to an Idealist survey recommend working, interning, or volunteering in the legal field throughout law school.

For example, Thomas Zito, a 2010 JD candidate at Northeastern University School of Law, explains:

“All of the work [I did during law school] benefited me tremendously. By the time I get my degree in May, I will have done an entire year of legal work—half of that work for clients who cannot afford any legal services. My experience working is what got me my postgraduate job. In September I will start working for a small law firm in Western Massachusetts that does plaintiff-side housing and employment discrimination, wage and hour violations, and consumer rights law. The firm only represents poor clients and does not charge them anything. If I did not have the opportunity to work in all the poverty law areas I did, I would never have had the experience to land such a fantastic job right out of law school.

**Accreditation**

The U.S. Department of Education recognizes accrediting organizations that can determine whether a school is offering the basic levels of quality in their educational programs. Noting your target graduate or professional school’s accreditation is important because without accreditation, you can’t use federal student loans to help pay for your education.

The American Bar Association’s (ABA) Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar is the national law school accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The ABA accredits around 200 schools, and students graduating from one of these schools can take the bar exam in any U.S. state. (The bar exam is the multi-day test law school grads take in order to be able to practice law.)

Most states require you to take the bar exam in that state in order to practice law there (since state law is tested on the exam). 19 states require that students are graduates of ABA-approved schools in order to take their bar exam, so if you plan to work in one of the following states, make sure your law school is ABA-approved:

| Arkansas | Kansas | North Carolina |
| Delaware | Maryland | North Dakota |
| Florida | Minnesota | Oklahoma |
| Georgia | Mississippi | South Carolina |
| Idaho | Montana | South Dakota |
| Indiana | Nebraska | |
| Iowa | New Jersey | |

Incidentally, for a school to obtain and retain ABA approval, it must “offer substantial opportunities for... student participation in pro bono activities.” Students don’t have to take part in pro bono activities, but schools must offer them.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the U.S. Department of Education recognizes a few regional accrediting organizations as well, such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, but graduates of law schools only accredited through regional bodies may be limited as to where they can take the bar exam. That means that if you want the freedom throughout your life to take the bar exam and to practice law in any state, you should make a concerted effort to attend an ABA-approved law school.

**Usual coursework and concentrations**

As mentioned above, during the first three semesters of law school most students take the same set of courses (for more info on each, try reading about these course topics in Wikipedia):

**Civil procedure**: A course that deals with the body of law that establishes the rules courts follow when a law suit arises. The course also looks at the structure of a lawsuit, pretrial procedures, and the appellate review process.

**Constitutional law**: A course that looks at the body of law dealing with the distribution and exercise of federal and state government power, the Bill of Rights and other civil liberties issues, and constitutional history and freedom.

**Contracts**: A course that looks at agreements enforceable by law, and how to determine the consequences when the agreement is not fulfilled.

**Criminal law/procedure**: Courses looking at laws, the consequences a person receives when they break law in contrary to the public order, and the rights of people accused of crimes.
Legal writing: A research and technical writing course on how to express legal analysis and legal rights and duties in memos, briefs—a piece of persuasive writing meant for the court.

Property law: A course that introduces the area of law that governs real property (land, buildings) and personal property.

Torts: A course that deals with the body of law that addresses civil wrongs and the consequences of being held liable for injuring someone intentionally or accidentally.

It's common during the first year for all students to take the same course load, which can (unnecessarily) exacerbate the sense of competition and intensity of 1L, according to some students who responded to an Idealist survey. Students are normally broken into sections, and although they take the same subjects, their professors vary. Tension can arise among students who perceive one professor as being too generous with good grades, while perceiving another professor as a tough grader. With the entire class of students jockeying against each other for top grades, funding, and future opportunities, such discrepancies can be troubling.

After the first year, students choose among courses in particular areas of the law. See a list of many areas of law on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_areas_of_law). The following is a sampling of fields of law that may be practiced in nonprofit and government settings, the primary locus of public interest law practice:

- Civil rights law—lawyers who focus on civil rights protect individual rights and freedoms from government action, discrimination, or interference.
- Advanced criminal (or penal) law—prosecutors, public defenders, and district attorneys work in the public sector either to convict or to defend people accused of crimes.
- Education law—lawyers who specialize in education law work with schools and school districts, or parents and students, on a wide range of issues from teacher hiring, to adequate education for kids with special needs. Check out http://educationlaw.org for more information on this field.
- Environmental law—lawyers who work on environmental issues represent governments, activists, or corporations for a range of aims such as defending natural resources and regulating pollution.
- Family law—lawyers working on family matters can represent anyone within a family, on issues like marriage, adoption, divorce, and abuse—to name a few.
- Immigration law—lawyers represent foreign citizens or governments, on issues dealing with migration, citizenship, and the legal status of foreign nationals in other lands.
- Labor or employment law—lawyers can represent workers, unions, or employers—on cases dealing with the rights of employees and their employers. Topics include aspects like unfair dismissal, anti-discrimination, health and safety, and child labor.

Some courses on specialized areas of the law may be offered as small-group seminars. These courses can be similar to a regular graduate-level humanities course, or they may involve a more formal approach in which the professor adopts the case-dialogue or Socratic teaching method that is used in most large, first-year law courses.

Case-dialogue or Socratic teaching method

Many law school courses are characterized by the distinct teaching approach that law professors employ often called “case-dialogue” or “Socratic” method, which pits a professor’s unrelenting questions against a student’s knowledge of a court’s argument in a case assigned for reading. (Find a full description of the method on Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socratic_method#Law_school], or check out the 1970s film The Paper Chase, about a first-year Harvard law student, his contracts course, and the Socratic method of his professor played by John Houseman—in the opening scene the professor even explains the reasoning behind this methodology.)

Using this methodology, professors typically call on students at random (which can be stressful, especially in the beginning when legal language is still unfamiliar) and ask probing questions to test students’ knowledge and assumptions about the court cases they’ve read in preparation for the class session.

This teaching methodology has its detractors and its defenders. A third-year law student who responded to an Idealist survey noted: “The teaching style used by most professors primarily aids students who learn in only one way: those who learn by reading and listening to a teacher talk with another student about the material.” For its part, the Law School Admissions Council defends the “case-method” approach as the way students learn to “distinguish among subtly different legal results and to identify the critical factors that determine a particular outcome.” (www.lsac.org/AboutLawSchool/Juris-Doctor-Degree.asp)
Who gets this degree and what do they go on to do?

No single academic or even professional background is the best path and preparation for a legal career. People report joining law school from a wide range of backgrounds, and for an array of reasons, from seeking to further their impact, to gaining additional skills and credentials that allow them to strengthen their current career, or even as an expression of faith.

For example, Charlotte Noss, a 2010 JD candidate at Northeastern School of Law, says:  
I was a union organizer working with low-wage immigrant janitors to improve their working conditions through organizing a labor union, and decided to go to law school to gain additional tools, skills, and resources to enhance the work that I was doing.

Erin Cox, a 2010 candidate at Boston College Law School, explains her motivations for attending law school:  
After graduating from college, I took a job as a case manager resettling refugees at a legal services agency because I thought I wanted a career in social work. I loved working with immigrants, but I struggled with how difficult it was for me to measure success as a case manager, resettling refugees. I realized I could work with the same clients in a more defined role if I was an immigration attorney. I decided to go to law school because I wanted to spend my career helping immigrants gain something definite and tangible—legal status.

And Peter Williams, a 2010 candidate at St. Thomas School of Law says:  
My decision to attend law school was driven by my desire to practice law as it was originally intended: as a service-oriented profession. Law covers such a broad topical area that lawyers play a crucial role in nearly every facet of society, meaning that everyone will need a lawyer at some point in their lifetime. My faith is the most important aspect of my life and a cornerstone of my faith is service. I see the law as the greatest way I can serve and fulfill the duty to which I am called by my faith.

Prior experience

In general, law schools aren’t known for looking beyond the numbers (specifically your LSAT scores) when they make admissions decisions. The most competitive schools are acutely aware of the role test scores and applicants’ undergraduate GPAs play in law school rankings. To remain competitive, many schools are willing to admit students based mostly on the numbers.

That said, schools that actively recruit for their public interest programs may look at your demonstrated commitment to social and/or environmental issues. Your work, national service, and volunteer, internship, and academic experience will all indicate to the admissions office that you are serious about your a social impact career. Beyond impressing law school admissions officers, however, it’s crucial to gain these kind of experiences so you can better determine whether law school is really something you are ready to commit your time and money to accomplishing, and how it will help you further your impact.

Here are some ways to build experience before applying to law school:

Volunteer for a legal services organization (in a non-legal role). Serve as a translator if you have the necessary fluency; help with intake, research, marketing, and other tasks.

Work or volunteer with an organization that serves a population you care about or works on an issue you’re passionate about, not necessarily related to legal problems. You’ll learn a great deal about nonprofits, the community, and the cause—and all of these will inform your decision about where and what to study.

Join a national service corps that focuses on legal issues, conflict resolution, a specific social issue you want to address later on as a lawyer, or a specific population you’d like to work with later on as a lawyer.

• Use the “advanced opportunity search” function for open positions on AmeriCorps.gov and choose skills, issues, and populations you are most interested in.
• The Massachusetts Legal Association for Self-Sufficiency (www.mlasp.org), for example, places AmeriCorps members in law-related organizations throughout Massachusetts.
• California JusticeCorps recruits AmeriCorps members throughout California to work in the court system. (www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/justicecorps/)

This sort of exposure to practical legal issues and people in need of legal assistance can help you focus on your objectives for both your legal studies and your career. For example, Jesse Traugott, a 2009 Vermont Law School grad shares the following life-changing experience that led him to law school:

During undergraduate school, I majored in Anthropology and Philosophy. I had planned on pursuing a graduate level degree in Cultural Anthropology and/or Archaeology; however, one experience in college changed my plans and led me on the path to law school instead.
In the summer of 2003, I attended an archaeology field school through the University of Hawaii. During this five-week stay 2000 miles off the coast of Chile on the island of Rapa Nui (Easter Island), one event forever changed the way I view the world. About ten students, including myself, were working in pairs to document the condition of various archaeological features scattered throughout several square kilometers.

As my partner and I were walking about... a local native Rapa Nui woman pulled over on the road a couple of hundred meters away. Right away she sternly voiced her concern with our activities. I clearly remember her telling us that we were on her native land, upon which her ancestors had lived for many previous generations. I did my best to calmly explain to her that we were with the University of Hawaii on a field school, and that we were working in collaboration with the curator of the Rapa Nui museum. [But] I have thought long and hard since then about this encounter.

The woman was completely correct. I can definitely see how she and others would interpret even non-invasive archaeological research as us outsiders violating the ways, traditions, and legacy of her ancestors... The indelible mark left upon me by my conversation with this woman on Rapa Nui has since that time become much more than a memory: it is a philosophy and carries with it an energy I would like to focus in order to help protect the environment and rights of indigenous peoples who seek legal aid.

This is why I wish to attend law school. This is not to say that I lost my respect for the field of anthropology, but rather, I realized that the type of impact I wanted to make with my career would be better realized through the legal field.

Career paths

According to PSLawNet, an online resource for public service legal careers (www.pslawnet.org/nonprofitpublicinterestcareers), most public interest law jobs are found in the nonprofit and government sectors—and the range of issues that public interest lawyers work on is extremely broad, perhaps as broad as any other social impact role: “From lobbying to litigating, from work in a big city to work in remote regions abroad, from hands-on work with the impoverished to protecting civil liberties through appellate advocacy, there is a near-infinite amount of rewarding work to be found in the nonprofit sector.”

PSLawNet describes the work areas of public interest lawyers in the following ways.

Advocacy: Lawyers may staff nonprofits that focus on furthering a specific cause or improving access to civil rights for a certain population. Lawyers at advocacy organizations may advance specific public policies, represent individual clients, or lobby elected officials.

Civil legal services: Lawyers working with civil legal services organizations provide free representation to people who cannot afford to pay and who need assistance with non-criminal matters—from housing and homelessness issues, to farm worker and employment issues, to disability, family, and elder law.

International legal and human rights organizations: Some lawyers focus on protecting the rights of people who cross borders (immigrants, refugees, people taken across borders against their will), on citizens of other countries who experience difficulties with their own governments’ legal systems, and other issues relating to international settings. Lawyers who work on international legal and human rights issues can be based in the United States or overseas. Either way, fluency in a relevant foreign language can be essential.

Public defense: Public defenders work on both trial and appellate levels to offer free representation to people who cannot afford to pay and who need assistance when they are accused of a crime—anything from minor thefts to murder.

Sample position descriptions requiring a JD (italics added for emphasis):

City-Wide Mediation Program Manager
FOR A GOVERNMENT AGENCY
The City-Wide Mediation Program Manager assists the City Family Court ADR Coordinator and the Assistant Executive Director in the overall administration of the Family Court Mediation Program. This position also assists in the day-to-day supervision of the Mediation Case Managers for Custody & Visitation and in the oversight of the Family Court roster of independent mediators of Custody & Visitation cases. This position is responsible for overseeing the compilation of necessary data and statistics to complete all quarterly/annual reports to funding sources. This position also serves as a member of Senior Management team.

Regular travel between four City Family Court locations required; periodic attendance during night court hours required. Fluency in Spanish is a plus.

Additional Qualifications:
Five years supervisory/administrative experience in the legal or social services field. Completion of forty hours mediation training...
and a mediation apprenticeship. Substantial experience in mediating cases involving family/child issues. Substantial experience in or knowledge of the child welfare and family court systems. Familiarity with child welfare, domestic violence, and child abuse/neglect issues essential. Law Degree or Masters Degree in Social Services field required.

Immigration Attorney

FOR A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Description:
- Comprehensive Immigration Work
- Attend meetings to discuss policy issues affecting client population.
- Develop and maintains relationships with individuals, organizations, and government agencies within the immigration advocacy community
- Conduct intake and assessment of potential clients
- Assist Supervising Attorney in conducting outreach and training.
- Track and collect statistical information for grant reports
- Perform other duties as assigned by supervisor

Additional Qualifications:
- Admitted to state bar.
- Must speak Spanish.

HIV/AIDS Legal Discrimination Advisor

FOR A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Description:
The XYZ Initiative is seeking an experienced HIV/AIDS Legal Discrimination Advisor to work with the Research and Assessments Office on a six-month project. The HIV/AIDS Legal Discrimination Advisor will have overall responsibility for developing an HIV/AIDS Legal Discrimination Assessment Tool. Based on international and regional human rights standards and best practices, the tool will identify and assess both de jure and de facto protections for persons living with HIV/AIDS. In addition to serving as the overall project coordinator, the HIV/AIDS Legal Discrimination Advisor will serve as a programmatic and substantive resource for XYZ, contributing to knowledge management and building internal expertise and capacity for programmatic development in HIV/AIDS legal discrimination issues.

Additional Qualifications:
Requirements: the HIV/AIDS Legal Discrimination Advisor must hold a law degree from either a U.S. or foreign law school and have at least seven to ten years of relevant legal experience in HIV/AIDS legal discrimination issues. An LL.M or other graduate degree is strongly preferred. Other requirements include:

- Excellent legal research, writing, and editing skills; knowledge of international law and comparative legal systems; strong project management skills. Candidates must be highly motivated, able to work independently and as part of a team, and possess excellent interpersonal skills. This is a six-month project.

- To see current job listings, select “J.D.” as the education requirement in Idealist’s job search
- www.idealist.org/jf/na/job
- Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers. Choose your preferred version and read Chapter Five (“Become a stronger candidate”) www.idealist.org/careerguide
- Learn more about service programs and their benefits www.idealist.org/service
- Learn more about volunteering www.idealist.org/volunteer
- Find volunteer opportunities www.idealist.org/it/na/vol
- Learn more about volunteering as a board member www.idealist.org/it/ia/vol
- Read our series of articles offering tips on how to prepare for grad school www.idealist.org/en/psgerc/preparing.html

What should you look for in a law school?

Making a decision about which law school to attend is as important as the decision to attend law school in the first place. Some law schools are better than others in providing opportunities for their students who want to pursue a career in public interest after school.

A note of warning: just because a school advertises its pro bono activities, it does not mean the school has a real commitment to public interest coursework and careers, or that it meets the needs of students who pursue social and environmental justice (see the “What is a public interest lawyer?” section above). It behooves you to scratch below the surface and ask specific questions about how the school can support you.

Equal Justice Works (www.equaljusticeworks.org) is a great place to begin your search for a law school that fits your interests and that makes public service a priority; they also publish the Equal Justice Works Guide to Law Schools (www.ejwguide.com). According to Equal Justice Works, “all law schools provide a core curriculum that includes: contract law, torts, property, civil procedure, criminal law, constitutional law, and legal research and writing. Beyond these courses, some schools now offer elective courses during the first year, some of which incorporate public interest issues or hands-on opportunities. In addition, some

Idealist.org Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center (idealist.org/psgerc)
schools offer students the opportunity to participate in a specialized public interest curriculum or certificate program.”

**Signs of a public interest-supportive law school**

As you come up with a short list of law schools to apply to, keep in mind that curricula across law schools can be very similar—so it’s up to you to look at other indicators that the school is supportive of public interest-minded students and alumni, and their diverse needs.

“I came to Northeastern because I was committed to public interest work and I have not been disappointed,” says Audrey Grace, Northeastern University School for Law, 2010. “Whether in our regular ‘podium’ classes—such as torts, contracts, civil procedure, etc.—or in smaller seminar classes, I can see that most of the professors are committed to social justice and teach from that perspective... At Northeastern I am comfortable with raising my hand and bringing up issues when I feel as though there are deeper, social problems behind the law being taught and my opinion is encouraged.”

Clearly, it can be difficult to acquire advance knowledge of your target schools’ capacities to satisfy your focus on public interest law in the way Audrey describes. Below, you’ll find some helpful indicators of the relative value placed on public interest law by a given school—do your best to research the existence of such opportunities and practices in your target schools.

**Community service opportunities and requirements**

Some law schools or student bar associations—such as that of Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville—mandate a minimum number of service hours during the school year. Other schools encourage students to take part in general volunteering during their orientation and other times (not necessarily law-related). ABA-accredited schools are required to offer students opportunities for pro bono (law-related) service. Find out the extent to which your target schools inspire students to get involved with the local community. The more involved the student body is in real-world issues facing people off-campus, the more likely your classes will integrate that consciousness into discussions of the legal doctrine you’re learning.

**Community service requirements during orientation and other times**

Does your target school offer a special cord to wear at graduation that indicates your public interest commitment? Will it include a letter from the dean, or a note on your transcript? Schools may offer diverse ways to help you demonstrate your dedication to public interest work during law school, which can give you a leg up during a hiring process with a legal services organization or other employer. These methods of supporting you may also indicate a deeper, institutional level of support for public interest pursuits in general.

**Career advising**

Career advising offices educate students about their career transition from law school to post-graduation work (and often times with internships during school). Career offices tend to be clearinghouses of legal job openings, and may offer on-campus opportunities to interview with employers, job fairs and panel discussions, resource libraries, and workshops that teach you how to craft a resume or ace a job interview. As such, look for schools that have at least one career advisor dedicated to public interest careers—though they may have additional responsibilities. You can learn this by asking directly at the career advising office (you can even ask what percentage of their time is devoted to public interest support). You can also browse PSLawNet’s list of member schools—while not a guarantee that the school focuses on public interest topics, membership can indicate a measure of support for this sort of service (www.pslawnet.org/ussubscriberschools).

**Certificates in public interest (as part of your law degree)**

Some law schools offer a curriculum track for students concentrating in public interest law—culminating in a certificate after you’ve fulfilled a minimum number of course credits. Find out if your target school offers a certificate. The advantage is that public interest jobs are very competitive, and demonstrating your commitment to social impact work and legal education through a certificate can help you stand out among other job applicants, especially those who treat public interest work as a fall-back measure when plans to work in a private firm are unsuccessful.

**Clinics**

A legal clinic is a law school program that offers hands-on legal experience (and academic credit) to students and pro bono services to clients. Students help out with research, drafting legal arguments, and meeting with clients, and in some cases preparing for or even delivering oral arguments in court. Many law schools offer a clinical program in the second or third year where students learn how to represent clients under the watchful eye of a faculty advisor and supervising attorney. Students get to “cut their teeth” on meaningful cases as a part of their coursework and also have the opportunity to work in the summer for public interest legal organizations or public service law firms.

**Co-ops**

A co-op (cooperative education experience) is a full-time legal internship for course credit. Some schools, such as Northeastern
University School of Law (which pioneered the concept), offer or require students to take part in several co-ops during law school.

**Coursework**

Most standard law school courses do not present law from the perspective of the common person. For example, a contracts course will not typically address “adhesion contracts”—the non-negotiable contracts you agree to when you get a credit card or a cell phone plan. That said, some law schools do offer specific coursework related to issues that come up in the public interest world, such as poverty law, civil rights, environmental law, and family law. Look at online course catalogs available for your target schools and learn whether the schools offer sufficient course options in line with your public interest career goals.

**Fellowships and scholarships for tuition assistance**

Schools may award fellowships and scholarships during the school year to students who’ve demonstrated a commitment to public interest legal work. The funding may come in the form of full or partial tuition scholarships. Students who take part are usually top students (in terms of grades and LSAT scores), and may be able to access special opportunities to further their public service education and career transition. Ask about public interest tuition assistance in your target school’s financial aid office before you make the decision about where to apply.

**Fellowships and matching funds for summer opportunities**

To help fund summer public interest volunteer positions or low-paying public interest summer jobs between academic years in law school, some law schools agree to match student-generated funds—or to fund students through alumni-donated funds. These summer funding opportunities are helpful in allowing you to pursue unpaid summer internships in public interest law (while still receiving compensation to cover living expenses). The funding frees you from working for a firm that pays (but doesn’t necessarily practice the type of law you’re targeting), or from accepting summer jobs unrelated to law. Also note that some private firms will fund interns for a whole summer internship in which students work half the time in the firm, and the other half in a public interest internship. Find out if your target schools offer funding assistance for summer public interest work. Also note that Equal Justice Works offers a summer fellows program for students from any law school. The EJW Summer Corps offers a $1,000 education award to participants. (www.equaljusticeworks.org/programs/summercorps/general)

**Field experience (internships and externships)**

Internships and externships are attorney-supervised volunteer positions in nonprofits, government agencies, or judicial offices. Participating students may or may not receive academic credit. Field experiences expose students to a legal work setting for a term of a few weeks up to an entire school year. Learn whether your target school offers academic credit for public interest field experience, and whether you’ll be able to find a faculty or staff member dedicated to connecting students with such opportunities.

**Journals**

Some law schools sponsor a publication that specifically covers public interest or public policy topics. Law students who write for and edit these journals gain experience with legal research from a public interest law perspective. Learn whether your target school offers a public interest journal, which can offer you a valuable way to explore public interest connections in the content of your coursework.

**Public interest centers**

Public interest centers may be part of a law school, or may be independent organizations. When they are part of the law school, they most likely serve as the hub for public interest activities (anything from advising students on curriculum and careers, to organizing career fairs and panel discussions, and connecting students with internships and public interest-minded alumni). Public interest law centers also may dedicate themselves to specific issues, such as environmental protection or investigating the cases of death row inmates who insist on their innocence.

**Other public interest activities to look for on campus**

Look for extracurricular activities on your target campus as another way to get educated about public interest issues and practices. Active public interest student organizations (including student chapters of Equal Justice Works), lectures or brown-bag lunch series, and/or study groups may exist to further support students dedicated to public interest issues. Also inquire about school-sponsored listservs, blogs, and other online groups and resources that help connect students with public interest knowledge and opportunities.

Learn more about all the aforementioned opportunities by asking the school directly, connecting with current and former students, reading the school’s website, and researching on third-party sites like the Equal Justice Works’s Law School Guide and American Bar Association’s member school profiles.

» Equal Justice Work’s Law School Guide
  www.ejwguide.com

» American Bar Association website
  www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/lawschools/category_listings.html
What should you know about admissions?

Depending on your target school(s), applying for law school can be very different from applying for other types of graduate or professional study covered in Idealist.org’s Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center (www.idealist.org/psgerc).

Law schools tend to be very competitive and rank-conscious, for example—and because rankings like that of the U.S. News and World Report depend on numbers like LSAT scores and undergraduate GPAs of the incoming class, you’re more likely to be judged by test scores and past grades than you would be if you were applying for other types of schools that are less rank-conscious.

Conversely, unquantifiable qualities, like your past professional experience, may count less in law school admissions than they would at other social impact grad schools. That said, schools that make public interest a priority will look at your experience and accomplishments (as well as your test scores and grades).

Applying

The Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) (www.lsac.org) is the most centralized, comprehensive source of information on law school admissions.

LSAC’s website is thorough and includes information about the following:

- Preparing for law school
  www.lsac.org/AboutLawSchool/AboutLawSchool-menu.asp
- Choosing a law school based on your qualifications
  www.lsac.org/Choosing/choosing-menu.asp
- A searchable guide to ABA-approved law schools
  http://officialguide.lsac.org
- Registering for, preparing for, and taking the LSAC-administered Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), the standardized test required for admissions to most law schools, including information about fees (the basic test is $132), fee waivers, special accommodations, and much, much more.
  www.lsac.org/LSAT/TheLSAT-menu.asp
- Applying to law school
  www.lsac.org/Applying/Applying-menu.asp
- Financing law school
  www.lsac.org/Financing/Financing-menu.asp

LSAC also organizes free-to-attend Law School Recruitment Forums throughout the country (www.lsac.org/choosing/law-school-recruitment-forums.asp) that offer prospective students a chance to meet with ABA-approved law schools and to participate in workshops that help you navigate the law school admissions process and even to clarify your career goals.

Idealist’s Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center offers articles on graduate assistantships, other on-campus jobs, and the skinny on different types of student loans. A couple articles look at working full-time or part-time while going to school—both of which offer financial and other benefits (and challenges). The articles aren’t specifically geared toward law students, but do contain many useful insights on the graduate school experience.

- Learn more about funding your graduate education
- Read our series of articles offering practical advice on applying to grad school
- Read our series of articles offering tips on how to prepare for grad school

Challenges of a public interest law degree

Getting into the right law school for you is one big challenge to overcome. But once you’re in, you may still find yourself fighting to get the public interest education you came for.

Below are some of the other challenges you may face as you embark on your law school career.

Challenge #1: Financial pressures

Law school is notoriously expensive, and tuition costs are on the rise. Since the mid 1990s law school in-state tuition has increased over 7 percent at public schools; tuition has increase by nearly 4 percent at private universities. Student debt from law school is also on an upward trajectory. For the 2007-08 school year, average student debt at public law schools was nearly $60,000, and average student debt at private law schools was over $90,000.

Some of these tuition hikes are evidently due to positive changes in law school teaching methods. The Government Accountability Office issued a report in October 2009 finding that a “change to a more hands on, resource-intensive approach to legal education and competition among schools for higher rankings” have affected costs, including increasing the emphasis on
clinical (experiential) education, reducing class sizes, and offering more diverse courses (i.e., environmental and international law). Law schools also claim that staffing and salary increases to better support students and to compete for top-notch faculty are partially to blame for rising tuition costs.

For students headed towards a public service career, it’s of utmost importance to find ways to offset the cost of your legal education. Otherwise you may spend a lot of time during law school wondering whether you’ll even make ends meet as a public interest lawyer—and you may feel swayed to work in a private law firm just to pay off your debt. The issue is not that working in a private firm or corporate law setting is somehow “wrong”—rather, the point is that if doing so falls outside your career aim of being a public interest lawyer, then you need to be especially attuned to various ways of minimizing your law school debt.

**Action steps:**

**Student loan debt relief**

A majority of law students take out student loans. You can learn more about law-specific loan and other financial aid options from the Law School Admissions Council (www.lsac.org/Financing/Financing-menu.asp).

As a person focused on the public interest, you should also be aware of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (which went into effect in July 2009). The CCRAA offers you a couple of great opportunities to repay your loans at a more affordable rate, and also to have your federal direct loans forgiven entirely after ten years of payments. The CCRAA includes these two programs:

- **Income-Based Repayment (IBR)**—Caps monthly direct and guaranteed (FFEL) student loan payments based on the borrower’s income and family size. According to IBRinfo (www.ibrinfo.org), “For most eligible borrowers, IBR loan payments will be less than 10 percent of their income—and even smaller for borrowers with low earnings. IBR will also forgive remaining debt, if any, after 25 years of qualifying payments.” Besides taking out the right kind of loan to start with (or consolidating your loans into the Direct Loan Program), it’s important to note that if you get married, your spouse’s income counts when calculating your monthly payment.

- **Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)**—Retires the direct or guaranteed (FFEL) student loan debt of public service professionals who’ve been making ten years of qualified payments on their loans. Counting as “public service” includes 501(c)(3) nonprofit employment; government (federal, state, local, tribal), military, public school and college employment; and national service participation (like AmeriCorps and Peace Corps). Read the fine print of what counts as “qualified payments.”

You can put both of these new programs to work for you—so you can make income-contingent payments for ten years and then retire your debt, if you qualify for participation. Also note that it’s really up to you to access the programs and to keep track of your payment and employment records to prove your eligibility.

**Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAP) and other debt relief for alumni**

Loan repayment assistance programs (LRAPs) offer debt relief to law school graduates working in nonprofits, government agencies, and other legal fields with relatively low salaries. LRAPs may offer a loan that is partially or completely forgiven, contingent on public interest work, income, and length of time spent devoted to public service.

Note that some LRAPs offer more assistance than others, and that while $3,000 per year for the first few years after graduating school is helpful to pay off debt, the total benefit (say, $9,000) is still a fraction of law school debt (which can amount to figures as high as $120,000). Also some LRAPs take into account your spouse’s income, which may make you ineligible for participation.

LRAPs are administered by law schools, state bar foundations, employers, and federal and state governments. Find out whether your law school offers a loan repayment assistance program—inquire at school, or browse the American Bar Association website (www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/lawschools/pi_lrap.htm).

- Equal Justice Works list of law school LRAP programs www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources/student-debt-relief/law-school-lraps/list-law-school-lraps
- Also learn about non-school statewide-LRAP programs from the American Bar Association www.abanet.org/legalservices/sclaid/lrap/statelraps.html

**Post-graduate fellowships and awards**

Competitive fellowships are available to help recent law school grads move into public interest roles. These fellowships offer financial assistance that either completely fund a finite term (one
or two years) of public service in the legal field, or else complement a low-paying public interest legal position.

- Check the website of your target school(s), or inquire in the career and/or admissions office about the availability of such fellowships at your target school.

  » PSLawNet’s information on postgraduate fellowships
  www.pslawnet.org/postgraduatefellowships

Other financial resources for public interest law students and alumni:

- Equal Justice Works section on student debt relief, especially for public interest law grads
  www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources/student-debt-relief/student-debt
- Equal Justice Works archived webinars on student debt relief with expert Heather Jarvis
  www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources/student-debt-relief/student-debt-relief-webinar-series
- Equal Justice Work’s student debt relief podcast series with Washington School of Law at American University
  www.wcl.american.edu/publicinterest/ejw/podcast.cfm
- Law School Admissions Council section on financing law school
  www.lsac.org/Financing/Financing-menu.asp

**Work during law school**

While law school has a reputation for being extremely time-consuming and competitive, many students do work part-time during their studies. Public-interest minded students who find social impact legal jobs to help finance their education report many benefits beyond the pay. Witness the testimony of Susan LePeau DeCostanza, DePaul University College of Law, 2008:

During law school I had the opportunity to work for a civil rights organization, a direct legal services organization, a public interest law journal, and an office promoting public service career development for law students. These experiences were incredibly important for my personal and professional development. Among other endeavors, I was able to represent the best interests of children in court, facilitate access to the legal system for clients who would not otherwise have the means to hire an attorney, call public attention to racial and religious discrimination, and promote pro bono efforts among law students. Gaining practical experience during law school is invaluable for legal career development, and my legal education would not have been complete without professional legal work experience during law school.

Your career office may have some good resources for you—also check out the career resources below (in the “Challenge #4: Job search” discussion below).

**Challenge #2: Swimming upstream at your law school**

Depending on your law school culture, you may feel you are swimming upstream, trying to eke out a public interest education and experience during your law school years.

For example, one law student reported that her school’s career advisory office frequently emails the entire student body with notices about internships and job openings with private, corporate firms. When the student asked to be taken off the mailing list to receive such notices, she was told that she was required to be on the mailing list since the it was also used to disseminate other general information and announcements from the law school. When the student asked for the career office to develop a comparable mailing list on public interest topics, she was told no, but that she should bring it up with the public interest student organization.

Needless to say, in this respect it’s best to find a school that supports its public interest students in the first place, rather than relying too much on your powers as a reformer from the inside (See the earlier section, “What should you look for in a public interest law school?”). Still, in all cases there are some steps you can take to turn the tide in favor of public interest law students.

**Action steps:**

- Be proactive on your own campus about asking for what you need from each department. Try to find allies among faculty and staff who can help you navigate the politics of the school. Petition your dean with specific suggestions for how the school can be more responsive to public interest topics.
- Find allies among other students (here, the public interest student organization can be crucial), and among off-campus public interest legal organizations where you can seek out mentors, and volunteer and internship opportunities. Some law students recommend seeking out a second- or third-year law student who carries a public interest torch, and to enlist them as a mentor (and then to extend the same courtesy to other students when you reach the later stages of school).
- Plug into national networks such as Equal Justice Works and PSLawNet, and their online resources. Check out EJW’s annual Conference and Career Fair and consider attending during any or all of your three years in law school (the career fair includes internships).
- Learn what you can from the websites of other, more public interest-minded law school career offices and their blogs and other communications.
• Find out whether your state bar association has a public interest group and reach out to the attorneys that are already practicing public interest law in your area for networking and support.

**Challenge #3: Courses (seemingly) unrelated to public interest topics**

Especially during your first three semesters in law school, when your course load is likely to include the standard law courses outlined earlier and professors at most law schools are unlikely to teach from a public interest perspective, you may wonder what you’ve gotten yourself into! While your coursework may not (seem to) relate to public interest topics, it’s paramount to find ways to connect what you are learning to your public interest topics. And bear in mind that law school peers you may one day litigate against are studying these topics, too—it’s in your interest as a future public interest lawyer to understand the tenets, precedents, and practices these standard courses are designed to transmit (even if you don’t agree with all of them!).

**Action steps:**

- Take advantage of pro bono opportunities offered through your school. (If your school is ABA-accredited, it’s required to offer pro bono opportunities for students.) Offering free legal services to people and organizations—under the supervision of an attorney—may help bring some otherwise dry legal topics from your classes to life.
- Seek out off-campus volunteer and internship opportunities that connect you with organizations, people, and issues you care about. You may be discouraged from committing yourself to extracurricular activities too early in your first year of school—but depending on your personality and ambition, these outside pursuits might be a tonic for your morale.
- If your school offers a public interest journal, consider getting involved. The journal may give you a chance to research and write about public interest applications of the legal topics you’re learning about in your coursework.
- If you have time, try to find “light” reading that connects the legal issues you are learning about with real people and situations. For example, a biography of an immigrant who faced legal issues, or a memoir about someone with a legal background who crusaded for environmental justice. These, too, can be valuable “precedents” for your approach to coursework.

**Challenge #4: Job search**

The job search challenge is two-fold. On the one hand, public interest law jobs are highly competitive and employers may be suspicious of law grads who apply without any demonstrated interest in social or environmental concerns. Your track record on specific issue areas (as a volunteer or intern), your direct experience with client populations, and your public interest coursework and writings can all help you establish you as a serious candidate.

On the other hand, depending on your school, you may have a harder time learning about public interest jobs and careers. Please refer to the resources below to learn more about careers in the public interest as well as specific job opportunities.

**Action Steps:**

- Exhaust the support you can get from your school community: Does the public interest group offer a listserv with job listings? If not, can you start one? What ideas do faculty and staff allies have about where to learn more about job openings? If your career office does not offer any public interest career support, what support can they offer you? What public interest alumni networks can you tap into?
- Take time outside of class to volunteer and intern, to give yourself an experiential legal education if it’s not part of your school’s curriculum. It’s not only a chance to build new skill sets, but also a way to discover which areas of law are exciting to you in practice, or conversely, which ones bore you to tears.
- Keep good records of the public interest and pro bono experiences you gain in law school so that you can share this information on your resume and in job interviews. Save the names and contact information of volunteer managers, supervising attorneys, and organizations where you volunteered or interned. Track the number of hours you have volunteered, and track the quantifiable impact you’ve made in the lives of clients, their families, and communities. Hang on to the names and course descriptions of public interest coursework you’ve completed. If you publish articles in the public interest journal on campus, keep copies of the published journal and electronic copies of your article that you can share as a writing sample. Documenting your service should become part of your modus operandi.
- Starting with people you already know on and off campus, take part in informational interviews and other networking opportunities as a way to integrate yourself into local and national public interest social networks and to find out where public interest law jobs are available and/or
Degree Overview: Public Interest Law

Idealist.org Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center (idealast.org/psgerc)

posted. Learn about organizations that focus on the issues you care about. And share your connections with others as needed—networking is very much a two-way street.

Also, check out these public interest career resources:

» American Bar Association Rule of Law Programs
   www.abanet.org/ceeli/program/staffpositions.htm

» Idealist.org has nonprofit and government-sector legal job, internship, and volunteer postings (in the search screens, choose “law and legal assistance” from the “Area of Focus” drop down menu).
   www.idealast.org

» National Legal Aid and Defender Association jobs section includes civil legal services, defender organizations, pro bono and public interest organizations, public interest law firms, and academia.
   www.nlada.org.org/Job

» Two resources from the Harvard Law School Office of Public Interest Advising: Planning Your Public Interest Career; and Serving the Public: A Job Search Guide.
   www.law.harvard.edu/students/opia

» PSLawNet database of public interest jobs and employers, including many nonprofit and government career resources and links.
   www.pslawnet.org

Conclusion and further resources

The decision to attend law school is not to be taken lightly. Law school involves at least three years of working hard, learning new ways to think and to solve problems, finding legal internships, financing hefty tuition, and studying for the bar.

But if you are committed to serving the public good, and seek an opportunity to represent those who have a limited voice, you should consider attending law school as a path toward diverse opportunities in public service.

Once you’ve made the decision to go to law school, your first task is to find a school that lives up to your commitment to the public good. Take advantage of the resources included in this overview to help you decide where to apply, and once in school, be steadfast in your public service commitments.

Public interest law quick links

These links provide useful further reading on this degree area.

» American Bar Association section on legal education and student resources
   www.abanet.org/legaled.html

» The American Bar Association’s listings of schools based on public interest opportunities
   www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/lawschools/category_listsings.html

» Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law, a report by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
   www.carnegiefoundation.org/publications/educating-lawyers-preparation-profession-law

» Equal Justice Works
   www.equaljusticeworks.org

» Equal Justice Works’ law school guide
   www.ejwguide.com

» Law School Admissions Council (LSAC)
   www.lsac.org

» PSLawNet
   www.pslawnet.org

People who look at this degree also consider

Depending on your career goals, you may be choosing among several degree areas. People who apply for law school may also consider applying for graduate degrees in:

» Public administration/policy
» Social work
» Nonprofit management
» Journalism
» Conflict resolution
» A social or environmental justice issue area

Get overviews of many of these degrees at