



Columbia  
Law School

**PI/PS**

*Office of Public Interest/  
Public Service Law and Careers*

**2024-2025**

**PUBLIC INTEREST JOB SEARCH**

**TOOLKIT**

Prepared by the  
Office of Public Interest/  
Public Service Law and Careers

For the exclusive use of Columbia  
Law School students and  
graduates

[law.columbia.edu/public-interest](http://law.columbia.edu/public-interest)

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

At the [Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers](#) (the PI/PS Office), we created the Public Interest Job Search Toolkit to help you explore public interest law and provide guidance on how to secure meaningful and exciting opportunities. Whether you are interested in pursuing public interest law as a career or just for an internship, we can help you. No matter what their knowledge or experience was upon entering law school, Columbia Law School students like you have obtained meaningful positions in the public interest world during their law school years and after graduation. The Toolkit will serve as a guide as you explore public interest legal work, think about your options, ready application materials, prepare for interviews, and obtain positions that are meaningful to you.

Our team of [advisers](#) is here to speak with you about your public interest job search and help you map your path through a public interest summer or career. We especially encourage those of you contemplating public interest, public service, or international human rights work after graduation to meet with us. While this Toolkit is full of information and guidance, it should not replace the personalized guidance you'll get from meeting with advisers in our office.

You can find an electronic copy of this toolkit, along with video tutorials and other publications from our office, at [law.columbia.edu/careers/public-interest/job-search-tools](http://law.columbia.edu/careers/public-interest/job-search-tools). These resources include guides for charting your path while at Columbia, exploring different issue areas, and obtaining fellowships and positions in government honors programs. You will also find supplements for LL.M. students and those seeking international positions, as well as information about how to finance your public interest career.

We look forward to working with you during your time at Columbia and throughout your career.

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# INTRODUCTION

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

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

The [Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers](#) (the PI/PS Office) is here to help. We provide one-on-one counseling, publish career guides and resources, and host year-round programming on topics related to public interest work. We work with all kinds of students—we're here for you if you're interested in going into public interest immediately after graduation, looking to transition to public interest after some time at a firm, seeking meaningful pro bono work in the private sector, aren't yet sure what your path might look like, and everything in between.

We know that every student's path—and every lawyer's career—is different. Our advisers are here to provide guidance on internships, classes, clinics, externships, pro bono, journals, student organizations, and other opportunities so that you can craft your plan for law school and beyond.

After you graduate, we will still be here for you. PI/PS advisers work with alumni seeking new opportunities or planning a career transition. We can also connect you with a national network of remote advisers.

No matter what your path looks like, if you want to incorporate work in the public interest, the PI/PS Office is here to help you chart a rewarding path.

Visit [law.columbia.edu/about/departments/PIPS](http://law.columbia.edu/about/departments/PIPS) for more information.

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## Public Interest at Columbia: A General Overview

### *What Is Public Interest Law?*

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

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

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

## What Are You Looking for?

These questions will help you identify what you are seeking in an internship, pro bono or school experience, or career. Don't worry if you don't have all the answers. Many people are not sure what exactly interests them; others are interested in everything. You will likely change or refine your answers as you go through law school.

### YOUR PROFESSIONAL GOALS

Why did you come to law school?

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### Who do you want to serve?

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

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

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

### What timeframe appeals to you?

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

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

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

### YOUR PERSONAL GOALS

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

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### Where do you want to work?

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

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

- Yes
- No

### How important is prestige to you?

- Important
- Not a priority

### How important is your level of income?

- Important
- Not a priority

**YOUR INTERESTS**

What have you found interesting in law school?

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

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**Which legal issues interest you?**

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

- Immigration/Asylum
- Indigenous Rights
- International Human Rights
- Judiciary
- Juvenile Justice
- Land Rights
- LGBTQIA+
- Mass Incarceration
- National Security
- Native American Rights
- Peace and Security
- Poverty
- Public Health/Access to Care
- Racial Justice
- Reproductive Rights
- Sustainable Development
- Transitional Justice
- Torture
- Voting Rights
- Water Rights
- Women's Rights
- Other

**YOUR SKILLS**

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

**Data Skills**

Have/Develop

- Analyzing, evaluating information
- Assessing problems
- Examining, observing
- Investigating
- Long-term planning
- Organizing, classifying information
- Research
- Writing

**People Skills**

Have/Develop

- Advising, counseling
- Listening/conveying warmth and understanding
- Oral communication
- Initiating relationships, networking
- Inspiring
- Interviewing

### Have/Develop

- Leading, managing
- Persuading, lobbying, advocating
- Mediating, settling disputes
- Mentoring
- Organizing, coalition-building
- Presenting ideas clearly
- Teaching, training

### Working with Ideas

#### Have/Develop

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

### ADVOCACY TOOLS

Which organizational strategies and tactics appeal to you?

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

### YOUR PERSONAL VALUES

Which values are most significant to your career planning?

- Activism
- Advancement/achievement
- Adventure
- Calmness (in life, work environment)
- Civic involvement
- Collaboration

- Control
- Community
- Connection
- Contribution
- Creativity/expression
- Diversity (perspectives, culture, people)
- Entrepreneurship/Innovation
- Fairness
- Fame/status
- Financial security
- Ideological compatibility
- Independence
- Intellectual challenge
- Job security/stability
- Justice
- Kindness
- Leadership
- Public participation
- Service
- Social environment/collegiality
- Variety (in tasks, projects, settings)

Reflect on your selections and use them to inform your job search.

- **Read job descriptions carefully** to evaluate compatibility.
- **Seek experiences** that will help you build desired skills.
- **Use your values and goals** to identify compatible practice settings and work environments.
- **Apply to employers** that work on issues you care about.
- **Find opportunities** to use advocacy tools that resonate with you.

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



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## Finding a Good Fit for You

You may not know exactly what you want to do, and you may need to try different things before you find the “right” fit. We encourage students to explore options through internships, externships, clinics, classes, pro bono, research, and work with student organizations. Attend panels and other law school events to learn about different practice areas, meet practitioners, and hear about their work. Columbia alumni are enormously generous with their time when students want to connect. Many come to the law school regularly; others will speak by phone or over coffee. [The PI/PS Office](#) can help you make these connections.

It is also helpful to remember that you are not making irrevocable decisions about your entire career and that—invariably—you will continue to explore opportunities long after you leave Columbia. Public interest lawyers learn about openings, practice areas, and initiatives through networking and working in coalition with other organizations. Many change practice areas and even entire fields throughout their working lives. Private sector practitioners often continue to explore public interest work through pro bono opportunities.

[Advisers in the PI/PS Office](#) can help you identify different organizations, issue areas, and types of public interest lawyering that can help inform your career path—while you are in law school and after you graduate. Learn more about each adviser’s background and expertise and set up a meeting [on the website](#).

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

Once you have a general idea of what type of public interest organization, practice area, and/or advocacy mechanism interests you, consider how to make yourself a competitive candidate. Experience is important, but it is just one of the attributes valued by employers.

#### **Experience**

Public interest jobs are highly competitive. Demonstrating interest in the social good (as illustrated by, for example, prior legal or non-legal work or volunteer experience) is very important. If your application demonstrates a dedication to the issues on which the employer works, the clients it serves, its theory of change, or the advocacy it carries out, you will be an even stronger candidate.

No employer expects a new law student to possess vast experience, but you should work to build experience throughout your three years of law school. Similarly, graduates looking to switch fields need to build experience to be competitive in their new field. The more an applicant can demonstrate their dedication to an organization’s issues, clients, or advocacy approach, the more appealing that candidate will be.

#### **Skills and Knowledge**

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

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

- **Communication and interpersonal skills**, such as interviewing or language skills, are important to employers that deal directly with clients or work with partner organizations.
- **Debate, public speaking, or presentation skills** are important to organizations engaged in litigation, oral advocacy, and community organizing.
- **Research and writing** are important to appellate work, campaign-based organizations, impact litigation, advocacy, and policy centers that draft laws, papers, briefs, or educational materials.
- **Knowledge of non-law subjects** can be important. A scientific background might be important in environmental work; experience as a teacher is useful in education advocacy or children’s rights.

Be ready to explain why your skills or background would be valuable to the employer, even if they do not exactly match their work. If your experience with an issue is highly personal (for example, you were in foster care and now want to work in children’s rights), meet with an adviser to discuss whether to include this information in your application. Some employers will view it as an asset; others may question your objectivity. It is useful to show familiarity with an issue, but be careful about how much personal information you share, and limit the details of your own experience.

### **Initiative, Responsibility, Judgment**

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

### **Enthusiasm**

Employers value students and lawyers who see the proffered job as an opportunity to put their legal education and experience to work. Even if you have not been trained on a particular issue, showing enthusiasm goes a long way. Be ready to offer specifics about why you want this job.

### **Character**

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

### **Grades**

Many public interest employers tend to focus less on grades in hiring than private sector employers. Qualities mentioned above (good judgment, dedication, enthusiasm, empathy, strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills, leadership and teamwork ability, cross-cultural competence, and a strong work ethic) are very highly valued. Still, certain employers, including some judges, impact litigation organizations, public interest firms, and government agencies, may be interested in grades or journal work.

## Exploring Public Interest at Columbia Law School

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

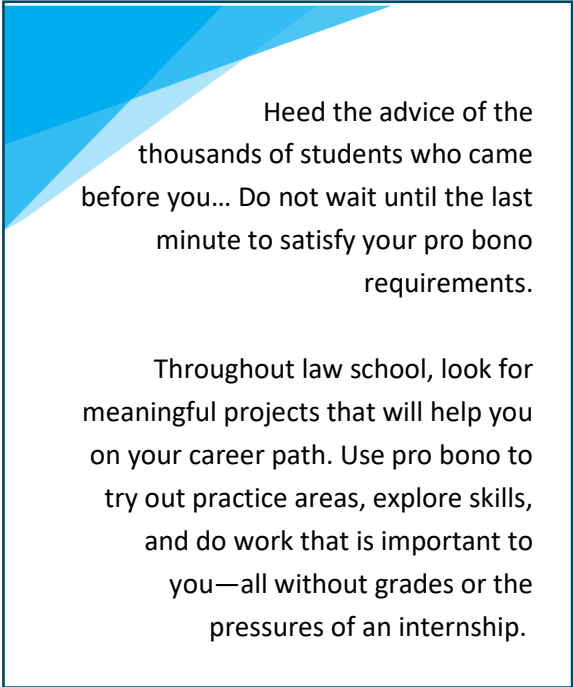
[Events](#) like those hosted by the PI/PS Office, the Columbia Public Interest Community, Law School centers, student groups, [other Columbia schools](#), and organizations around New York City are great opportunities to learn about practice areas that interest you and to start developing connections. In addition to providing substantive information, events allow you to network with other students and with Columbia graduates, professors, PI/PS Office staff, and experienced lawyers. To keep up to date with many of the public interest offerings at the Law School, join the [Columbia Public Interest Community \(CPIC\)](#).

There are also many opportunities for students to get hands-on practice lawyering in the public interest. Students can participate in [Spring Break Caravans](#) or join [student groups](#) like the Parole Advocacy Project, the Uncontested Divorce Project (part of the Domestic Violence Project), and the Suspension Representation Project, which partner with external organizations to provide direct services. Upper-year students can take clinics, externships, and policy labs, which combine fieldwork with seminars on a variety of topics and practice areas.

### Pro Bono Work

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

The pro bono requirement also presents a great opportunity to strengthen your skill sets and add valuable experience. Be strategic in using your pro bono hours! Making use of the variety of New York-based public interest organizations to develop your expertise and increase your contacts is an important advantage of studying at Columbia Law School. Remember that many New York-based public interest employers would be happy to take on Columbia term-time interns during the academic year even though they may not post a formal opening, so feel free to contact employers that interest you.



Heed the advice of the thousands of students who came before you... Do not wait until the last minute to satisfy your pro bono requirements.

Throughout law school, look for meaningful projects that will help you on your career path. Use pro bono to try out practice areas, explore skills, and do work that is important to you—all without grades or the pressures of an internship.

For students going into public interest careers directly after graduation, pro bono work can help solidify your commitment and increase your skills—making you a more competitive candidate for jobs. Students going into the private sector who want to later transition into public interest practice should also try to build connections through their pro bono hours that they can draw on later in their career. On occasion, private sector students are able to continue working on their pro bono projects and with public interest organizations as part of their pro bono practice at their firm.

### **Finding Internships and Jobs**

Internships—either over the summer or during the school year—are great ways to explore different areas of public interest practice and build skills that will aid you in your future career.

There are many ways to find internships and jobs after graduation. Public interest organizations often post jobs directly on their websites, as well as on job boards like [PSJD.org](https://www.psjd.org), [Idealist.org](https://www.idealists.org), and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com). An adviser can help you target your search, and share new postings that may interest you. You can also set up alerts for jobs that you are interested in on [Symplicity](https://www.symplicity.com) and PSJD.

Many organizations also participate in On-Campus Interviewing (OCI) at the law school in the fall and spring, and job fairs like the [Public Interest Legal Career \(PILC\) Fair](#), hosted by New York University in February, or the [Equal Justice Works \(EJW\) Career Fair](#) in October.

### ***As a 1L***

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In 1L fall, you should start thinking about issues and types of lawyering you may like to explore over your first summer, as well as geographic areas you may want to work in. Making a list of employers to apply to and areas to explore early will help ensure you do not miss any early deadlines—and help you take control of your internship search. Not every organization will interview 1Ls early in the fall, but some have deadlines early in the semester. You should meet with an adviser early to help tailor your list of target employers and ready your materials for submission.

Even students who plan a private sector career should expect to work in public interest their first summer, given past hiring trends.

In your first year, plan to attend the [Public Interest Legal Career \(PILC\) Fair](#), held at New York University in February. Make sure to register and submit applications to participating employers by the deadline.

### ***As a 2L***

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Upper-year students planning to do public interest work should be thinking about their second summer by the close of their first summer. Public interest internship postings generally begin to go up in late summer or early fall.

You should continue to attend public interest programs and do pro bono work, participate in clinics and externships, take public interest classes, do term-time internships, work on public interest journals, lead

student organizations, work for professors, or publish an article or note on a public interest topic. You should meet with a [PI/PS adviser](#) and continue networking and exploring job fairs like [Equal Justice Works](#) in October.

If you plan to work in public interest after graduation, your 2L year is very important. You should start planning for postgraduate employment during 2L (and throughout law school) by networking, exploring different aspects of issue areas you are interested in, researching fellowship sponsorship and government honors programs, and identifying offices and organizations that you would be interested in working at after graduation.

For your 2L summer, you should intern at a public interest organization in a field you are interested in, and you should be preparing to apply for postgraduate employment. Applications and interviews for postgraduate jobs, fellowships, and honors programs can start in late summer and early fall, so you should be prepared to hit the ground running by the end of your internship. Make sure you are meeting with your [PI/PS adviser\(s\)](#) for individualized advice for your 2L internship and academic courses.

### ***As a 3L***

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During the fall and winter of your 3L year, you will be applying for jobs and, if you are interested, fellowships, including project-based and organization-based fellowships. The hiring timelines for post-graduate jobs vary, but you should expect to start applying for post-graduate positions in the late summer before starting 3L and throughout the fall.

Conversations with [PI/PS advisers](#), professors, Columbia graduates, and practitioners will be important throughout your time at Columbia, but especially in your final year.

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

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

There are several reasons to explore public interest and government work while at Columbia.

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

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

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

### *Is experiential learning important?*

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

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

In addition to or instead of enrolling in a clinic, externship, or practicum, some students intern with a New York-based public interest or government organization during the term. This is an opportunity to develop your expertise and increase your contacts; employers frequently hire individuals who have interned with them or with similar organizations. (See [Should I do a term-time internship?](#), below).

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

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

[Clinics](#) are situated on campus and are taught for the most part by full-time faculty who are also experienced practitioners in their fields. [Externships](#), on the other hand, take place off campus, when students work on site at an organization and are taught by adjunct faculty who are experts in their fields—all of this under the overall supervision of the Columbia director of externships.

Think about the kind of experience you seek. Clinics allow students to have client relationships and responsibility, with real emphasis on your development as a lawyer. Externships will give you a better sense of what the real world of practice in that office and field would be like. The Law School has many options, so you need to think carefully:

- **Consider timing.** Not all clinics and externships are offered every semester. Additionally, some are for only one semester, whereas others are a two-semester commitment.
- **Think about the issues and skills that each clinic and externship focuses on.** Choose those that interest you and teach the skills you want to develop. Talk to students who have taken them.
- **Think about the time commitment.** Clinics generally give students more responsibility for their cases than externships and therefore involve a greater time commitment and award more credits.

### **Please remember: if you do not get into a particular clinic or externship, try again later.**

Spots are limited, and sometimes 3Ls and LL.M.s get priority. This should not discourage you from applying; in fact, you should apply at every opportunity for the offerings that interest you.

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

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

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

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

Columbia students have a big advantage by being in New York City—there are a myriad of public interest opportunities at our doorstep. Many organizations are thrilled to have a Columbia intern during the year and will assign more interesting work and provide better supervision than in the summer, when more interns are competing for attention. In addition, it is often easier to get a term-time position, so if you did not get your “dream job” in the city during the summer, you should apply again for a term-time position with that organization and you will likely have better luck.

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

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

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



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

For a list of courses based on area of interest, see our [Public Interest Roadmap](#) and [Curricular Guidelines](#), and meet with your [PI/PS adviser\(s\)](#) to discuss which courses work best with your individual career goals.

Be aware that not all classes are available every semester, so plan your schedule accordingly. Additionally, think about taking advantage of J-term offerings. Meet with a [PI/PS adviser](#), [Student Services adviser](#), or professor to get their advice as you choose your classes. If you plan to clerk, consider which classes would be helpful for that as well. (Talk to the [Office of Judicial Careers](#) or professors for advice.)

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

### *Should I do a journal?*

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

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

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

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

Law school is a big adjustment, and everyone does it at their own pace. We generally advise 1Ls to take time to acclimate to school (and focus on classes) and to take on pro bono projects only if they feel ready. For those who are interested in exploring pro bono options during 1L year, and feel that interaction with the “real” world outside of Columbia will be a motivation and not overwhelming, the PI/PS Office and student organiza-

For Columbia pro bono credit, an internship must be unpaid and not for academic credit. Rising 3Ls working in public interest over 2L summer are an exception; they may earn CLS pro bono credit for compensated work. A paid or for-credit internship, however, may count towards the [New York State Bar pro bono requirement](#). More information at [law.columbia.edu/pro-bono](http://law.columbia.edu/pro-bono).

tions have developed [in-house projects](#) with manageable and flexible time commitments. There also are off-campus opportunities suitable for some 1Ls.

Finally, in March there are [Spring Break Caravans](#), weeklong pro bono projects that take place in New York City and other locations.

**An important note:**

1L pro bono hours completed during the spring semester of 1L year count towards the Columbia 40-hour pro bono graduation requirement. By contrast, pro bono completed during 1L fall semester will not count toward that requirement, but they will go on your transcript as voluntary pro bono work and may count for the [New York State Bar pro bono admission requirement](#). Any 3L or LL.M. who completes 100-plus hours of pro bono (including voluntary pro bono hours completed during 1L fall semester) will be honored at the Law School’s annual Honors Reception in the spring.

More information:

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

*I am considering a public interest career. How will I get a job? Or learn about fellowships?*

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

We strongly urge you to consider applying for postgraduate fellowships or government honors programs, as they provide a direct path to employment. Although the application process can be time-consuming, it is well worth it, since it is a means of designing or obtaining your “dream” job and is often the best entrée to a public interest or government job. If you are interested in fellowships, the PI/PS Office will assign you a fellowship adviser at the end of 2L year to work with you and will provide resources like our [Post-graduate Fellowship Toolkit](#). For project-based fellowships, you will need to begin working to secure a host organization and a project over 2L summer. Applications for these fellowships, and for many organization-based fellowships (which are more like standard job applications), are due starting early in 3L fall.

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

If you are interested in public defense, work closely with our public defense adviser during 2L year and during the summer after 2L year. Typically, hiring starts early in 3L fall. Make sure to set up a [PSJD.org](http://PSJD.org)

account to monitor fellowships and consult with our office regularly.

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

Many public interest and government salaries have risen in recent years and, when combined with Columbia's generous [Loan Repayment Assistance Program \(LRAP\)](#) benefits, support a good standard of living (even if not the lavish lifestyle supported by Big Law salaries). In addition, Columbia has instituted a Public Service Bridge Loan for recent graduates, which provides further support.

Most government agencies and many large nonprofits post salaries on their websites. We can provide information about other employers, including salary surveys of Columbia graduates and sample budgets. We can also provide advice regarding negotiating salaries. The [PI/PS Office](#) and the [Office of Financial Aid](#) have information about LRAP (including [FAQs](#) and a detailed program guide) and other key financial information as well. We have also included the FAQs at the end of this section.

### Take advantage of the opportunities at Columbia. Don't forget to:

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

### What is LRAP?

- LRAP, or the Loan Repayment Assistance Program, is a Columbia program that helps graduates pursuing public interest careers repay their loans.
- In a nutshell, LRAP allows you to pay back your law school loans in 10 years, paying 30% of your income over \$70,000\*. If you work for 10 years and have an annual income of \$70,000, you won't pay anything toward your student loans. If you have an annual income of \$80,000, for example, you would pay only \$3,000 per year, or \$30,000 total toward your student loans.

### Are there options within the LRAP program?

Columbia's LRAP includes three options:

1. **Traditional Option.** The most commonly used program operates as outlined above and is solely done through Columbia.
2. **Federal Option.** There is also a Federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, and if you choose to use this program, Columbia will supplement the federal program. The income threshold for this program is \$110,000, instead of \$70,000. However, there are restrictions, as well as the possible uncertainty of the federal program.
3. **Combined Option.** The third option combines the Columbia and federal programs together, but since it relies on the federal program, it also has some level of uncertainty. If you want to find out if the federal program might be a good option for you, talk to the LRAP Administrator, Ms. Seandell James, for more information.

### How does traditional LRAP actually work?

- After you graduate, you will start getting bills to pay back your student loans. LRAP gives you money, in the form of a forgivable loan, to help you make those payments.
- The amount of money you receive through LRAP depends on your income and loan payments.
- LRAP will cover all of your loan payments based on a 10-year repayment schedule until you make \$70,000. Once your annual income exceeds \$70,000, you will be responsible for 30% of the amount over \$70,000. So, if you make \$80,000 and have annual loan payments of \$25,000, you will get \$21,000 as a forgivable loan through LRAP, and you will pay \$3,000 yourself.

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

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

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

- Your annual income is calculated based on the amount you earn, and is adjusted based on your undergraduate educational debt, and by your spouse's income.
- Your income will be reduced by the amount of your annual undergraduate loan payments and any eligible dependent allowance.
- Additionally, a married graduate's income is calculated as half of the couple's joint income, or the graduate's income alone, whichever is higher. A spouse's income will be adjusted down by up to \$30,000 for educational loan debt payments.

### What kinds of debt are covered?

- LRAP covers Columbia Law School debt, borrowed by the student in the form of federal and some private educational student loans, up to the standard cost of attendance as calculated by the school each year.
- Effective August 1, 2022, transfer students are eligible to have one year of educational loans from their prior law school included in their LRAP eligible debt.
- LRAP does not cover undergraduate student loans (though undergraduate debt borrowed by the student factors into your salary calculation) or student loans from other non-law school graduate programs.

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

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

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

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

### Does it matter where I live?

- No. LRAP coverage is not based on geography.

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

- Yes. You can enter LRAP up to 7 years after graduating. However, during your non-LRAP years, you are required to pay your loans on an LRAP schedule—that is, pay 30% of your annual earnings above \$70,000 toward your student loans.
- So, if you earned \$180,000 at a law firm for a year, you would need to have paid back \$33,000 (or 30% of \$110,000) that year. If you hadn't done so, you would be required to make a lump sum payment on your loans before being eligible to participate.

### What about clerkships?

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

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

- Yes. Each year, there are approximately 300-350 LRAP participants.
- Be on the lookout for events presented by Social Justice Initiatives (SJI), Financial Aid and student groups to get to know more about the interests, lifestyles, and careers of our LRAP graduates!

### Where do I find additional LRAP information?

Please visit the following website for the full LRAP description: [www.law.columbia.edu/financial-aid](http://www.law.columbia.edu/financial-aid).

Also contact the Law School Financial Aid Office:

- [LRAP@law.columbia.edu](mailto:LRAP@law.columbia.edu)
- (212) 854-6522
- William and June Warren Hall, 5th Floor

\*\$70,000 threshold effective February 1, 2023

# PUBLIC INTEREST JOB SEARCH BASICS

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

## Job Search Resources

Our [job search tools webpage](#) lists numerous sources for information about public interest opportunities. Here are some basic resources to help you get started:

[PSJD.org](#) is a great resource to identify employers within your interest and preferred geographic area. Search by subject and location, research organizations, and review job postings.

[The Arizona Guide](#), also known as the Government Honors & Internship Handbook, offers comprehensive information on federal, state, and local government internships and postgraduate honors programs. Visit our [job search tools webpage](#) for Columbia's password.

[Symplicity](#) houses job postings that employers send to Columbia.

**Columbia's Public Interest Database** provides the inside scoop on summer internships via past interns' evaluations. Evaluations through summer 2017 can be found in the Public Interest Database, on [LawNet](#) under "Student Services." Evaluations for 2018 through present are on [Symplicity](#); select "My Account," then "Evaluations," and then "Search" to find the employer. This collection does not represent every student who interned with these employers. We can often help you locate additional students with experiences to share.

[The PI/PS New York Public Interest Index](#), accessible on our [job search tools webpage](#), lists NYC-area public interest and government employers (including New Jersey and upstate New York) by subject area.

### PSJD Tip

When looking for summer jobs, start by searching employer profiles so that you can see organizations even if they do not have a posting on PSJD.org; you may apply to them directly. Postgraduate jobs are different—send a formal application only when there is a posting.

### GRAD TIP

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

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## Planning Your Search: Some Frequently Asked Questions

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

Try for your “dream job,” but be flexible, applying for jobs “outside the box” and in broad geographic areas. There is no limit on the number of jobs you may apply for and no stigma to being offered a job and declining it (as long as you do so in a professional manner). A successful search takes creativity and persistence. We usually recommend beginning with a list of at least 15-20 organizations for 1L summer. Start thinking about your 1L summer during the fall, and make sure you are applying no later than over winter break.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you get an offer from a public interest organization that is not your clear first choice, you should be very appreciative, and, if they have not given you a deadline to answer by, ask the organization for one or two weeks to give them your answer. (They do not have to give you this time, but they may be willing to do so.) Then immediately contact your top-choice organizations, explain that you have another offer but that they are of greater interest to you, and ask if they can make a decision within the necessary timeframe. (See [Negotiating Offers](#).) Respond to the first organization's offer within the time they have allotted; do not ask for additional time. Of course, if the preferred organization moves ahead and gives you an offer, you should accept.

Though you may tell multiple organizations that you have another offer and are interested if they can make a decision by your deadline, you should only tell **one organization** that they are your top choice—and if they then make an offer, you must accept.

Once you have accepted an offer, you must withdraw any outstanding applications to other organizations. You have made a commitment that should not be broken. See a [PI/PS adviser](#) with any questions.

### 7. *May I split my summer?*

Although many students who have split a summer have reported positive experiences, we generally advise caution with this option because:

- Spending a shortened amount of time in each position gives you less opportunity to explore the work, get to know the staff and culture, and develop quality relationships with supervisors or other potential mentors.
- You will have less time to prove yourself, which can hurt your chances for getting a good reference or an offer.
- You may be assigned less interesting work because you will be there a shorter time, or because you are not there when they give out initial assignments.
- Not all organizations will consider an intern who will be there for only half the summer.

Nonetheless, there are situations in which splitting a summer makes sense. This is more often the case for 2L summer than 1L. Talk to a [PI/PS adviser](#) and refer to [Deciding Whether to Split Your Summer](#) on our [job search tools webpage](#).

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

Many attorneys are able to move from private sector jobs into a public interest career. Most employers understand that financial and other considerations may make going to a firm an important personal choice. The key to making a transition to the public sector is to make sure that you have significant public interest work experience in law school including clinics, externships, internships, and ideally have engaged in substantive pro bono or public interest work while in the private sector. However, public interest is very competitive. Employers will also be looking at your application at the same time they get applications from those with more recent public interest experience. In some fields (e.g., environment, labor), working for the “other side” may close doors with some employers. Other employers, like some impact litigation organizations and government agencies, value time at a firm, as well as clerking, as a way to get litigation training. While relevant pro bono is available at some firms, it is also important to consider whether the skills that you gain through your billable work are transferable (e.g., litigation skills are transferable, even if the substantive area of work is different). Employers will expect you to talk about why you chose a private sector employer and how that fits into your career plan. You will have a chance to show how your choices have led you to be a great candidate through your resume, cover letters, and interviews.

Consult a [PI/PS adviser](#) to help you plan for the longer term when considering this option.



## Public Interest Job Search Timelines

Public interest organizations do not always have a regular hiring schedule for summer interns or new lawyers, unlike other employers. Students tend to receive job offers late in the cycle, sometimes not until after graduation. Those who begin their research early, develop a plan, and follow through are more likely to be successful in their search. The timelines below are designed to help you strategically position yourself for internships, fellowships, and jobs. For more detailed timelines, refer to [Your Public Interest Roadmap: Exploring Public Interest/Public Service Law at Columbia Law School](#) (linked on our [job search tools webpage](#)).

It is critically important to check your LionMail account regularly, as this is the main way that our office and employers will communicate with you, and to respond to emails in a professional and timely manner.

### GRAD TIP

While there's no way to know for certain how long it will take to find a postgraduate position, we recommend beginning your networking nine to twelve months before you would like to change jobs and starting to apply for jobs four to six months beforehand. If you want to move more quickly, increase your networking accordingly. Reach out to the [PI/PS Office](#) to connect with an adviser who can help you think through your options as an experienced attorney.

### 1L Job Search Timeline

#### September and Throughout 1L Year

- [Join the Columbia Public Interest Community](#) to connect with classmates interested in social justice and public interest work and learn about events and opportunities.
- Attend Columbia events, such as Public Interest Mondays featuring practitioners and discussions of public interest topics or guidance on how to fund a public interest career.
- Reflect on your interests and goals.
- Think about the issue areas and types of legal work that interest you.
- Explore student organizations.
- Talk with upper-class students about their public interest work.
- Attend events with alumni practicing public interest law.
- Look for our newsletter every Monday and visit [LawCal](#) daily.
- Get to know other students interested in public interest.
- Meet faculty.

### 1L Fall

- Meet us! Make an appointment with a [PI/PS adviser](#) to discuss your interests and develop ideas for 1L summer.
- Review our webinars on the job search, resumes, cover letters, and interviewing.
- Create a [PSJD.org](#) account and begin browsing organizations.
- Attend programs to learn from 2L and 3L students about their experiences.
- Revise your resume to standard public interest legal format (see [samples](#) in this toolkit).
- Get your resume reviewed by the PI/PS Office. You can submit it to the [1L Online Resume and Cover Letter Review Portal](#) for quick review. (Our [job search tools webpage](#) has the link.)
- Research summer internships and create a list of 15-20 employers to apply to.
- Take note of application deadlines, and be aware of especially early ones.
- Begin preparing cover letters and submit them to your [PI/PS adviser](#) for review. You can also submit one letter to the [1L Online Resume and Cover Letter Review Portal](#).
- Complete the [Columbia Summer Funding \(CSF\)](#) checklist to register for CSF.
- If you are interested in the summer [Human Rights Internship Program \(HRIP\)](#), submit a statement of interest.
- Register for the Public Interest Legal Career (PILC) Fair (held in February) at [pilcfair.law.nyu.edu](#).

### 1L Winter

- Apply for summer internships.
- Register and apply for interviews at the [PILC Fair](#).
- Update your voicemail so that it is appropriate to receive messages from employers.
- Check your online presence—what will employers find if they search?
- Participate in our Public Interest Mock Interview Program.
- Attend PILC Fair in February (watch for our prep session).
- Watch for information about Spring On-Campus Interviews (OCI), which will include public interest and government employers. You can bid for interview spots in January.
- Consult with a [PI/PS adviser](#).
- Follow up on job applications if necessary.
- Send out additional applications.

**1L Spring**

- Continue your job search. If you are still looking by March, meet with a [PI/PS adviser](#).
- Consider applying to clinics/externships for 2L year; attend info sessions.
- Consider journals and organizational leadership positions; attend info sessions.
- Learn about Fall On-Campus Interviews (OCI) and the Summer Interview Programs (SIP). OCI will include public interest and government employers, and SIP may include a very small number of government agencies.
- Attend the Summer Payment Session if you are participating in CSF or HRIP.
- Understand [LRAP](#); attend info sessions on financing a public interest career.
- Attend relevant PI/PS Office programs.

**2L Job Search Timeline**

**TIP:** Your 2L job search will differ from your 1L search. Keep the following in mind.

- You will be in greater demand than you were as a 1L, with significantly more to offer employers, who will see you as committed to a public interest career. Therefore, you can be more selective. Apply to your top choices first. Consider your postgraduate goals, targeting jobs that will provide the skills, knowledge, and connections you need.
- Your 2L job search will begin in mid-July and early August. Employers hire 2Ls earlier than 1Ls, even if no separate deadline is indicated.
- You will need to update your resume, sometimes significantly. Along with your 1L summer internship, you may add clinics/externships you are enrolled in for 2L fall (but do not include a description until they begin), as well as student group or pro bono projects to which you are committed. Your cover letter will be different as well, and it will be very important to your application. Seek PI/PS Office guidance.
- Splitting your summer between a firm and a public interest employer (or between two public interest employers) is, for some students, the right option. If you are considering splitting, speak with the BOTH the PI/PS Office AND the [Office of Private Sector Career Services](#).
- Law School career offices are open all summer, so reach out! Advisers can also connect you to students and alumni with experiences relevant to your goals.

### 1L (Rising 2L) Summer

- Reflect on your 1L summer internship.
- Speak with attorneys working in your areas of interest.
- If possible, develop a writing sample.
- Watch for information about Fall OCI; the application period is in July.

### 2L Fall

- Talk to a [PI/PS adviser](#) about 2L summer; the application period is in early 2L fall
- Make a list of organizations to apply to for 2L summer. Note early deadlines.
- Update materials! Consult with the PI/PS Office.
- Prepare and send internship applications to public interest organizations and government agencies. Most employers expect 2L applications in the fall even if they do not list a deadline.
- Continue to attend programs and events of interest.
- Watch for emails from the PI/PS Office; monitor [Symlicity](#) and [PSJD.org](#).
- Keep track of deadlines.
- Meet with a PI/PS adviser as needed.
- Apply for 2L summer positions.
- Register for the [Equal Justice Works \(EJW\) Career Fair](#), apply for interviews. Attend.
- If you will be participating in [Columbia Summer Funding \(CSF\)](#) in 2L summer, make sure you are registered. (All 2Ls who opt out of SIP are automatically registered.)
- Send in your statement of interest for the [Human Rights Internship Program \(HRIP\)](#).
- Interview for 2L positions; consult with the PI/PS Office.

### 2L Spring

- If considering project-based fellowships, brainstorm organizations and project ideas.
- Consider and apply for clinics and externships for 3L year.
- Attend the Summer Funding Payment Session if you are participating in CSF or HRIP.
- Note any early fellowship deadlines and apply if applicable.
- Meet with the Office of Judicial Careers if you are interested in postgraduate clerkships.

**Throughout 2L Year**

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

**3L Job Search Timeline**

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

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

**3L Fall**

- Complete applications with early fall deadlines (government honors programs, EJW, Skadden, Columbia fellowships, etc.).
- Throughout the fall, attend information sessions on relevant postgraduate fellowships.
- Regularly check [Symplicity](https://www.symplicity.com), the [Arizona Guide](https://www.arizona.edu/guide), and [PSJD.org](https://www.psjd.org).
- Participate in [EJW Career Fair](https://www.ejw.org), if relevant.
- Contact the PI/PS Office for mock interviews.
- Interview for fellowships and jobs.

### **3L Spring**

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

### **Throughout 3L Year**

- Stay in contact with the PI/PS Office.
- Connect with alumni as you ready applications and prepare for interviews.

# PUBLIC INTEREST JOB APPLICATION MATERIALS

This section contains:

## Public Interest Resumes

- [A section-by-section guide to building your resume](#)
- [A list of resume action verbs](#)
- [A resume checklist](#)
- [Sample resumes](#), including “before” and “after” 1L, 2L, 3L, and graduate resumes and portions of resumes geared toward specific situations. *Use the samples as a reference guide only; do not copy them verbatim.*

## Public Interest Cover Letters

- [A cover letter template](#)
- [A checklist](#)
- [Sample cover letters](#), including 1L, 2L, 3L, and graduate cover letters. *Use the samples as a reference guide only; do not copy them verbatim.*

## [Resume and Cover Letter Pairings](#)

These pairings are included to illustrate how resumes and cover letters work together. They are two different documents that TOGETHER provide a persuasive narrative. *Use the samples as a reference guide only; do not copy them verbatim.*

## Applying for Jobs: Putting Together the Application

- [A sample email accompanying a job application](#)
- [A job tracking chart](#) to get you organized
- [An attachment checklist](#)
- [A sample reference list](#) and [writing sample cover sheet](#)
- [Sample emails](#) for following up on an application

## Public Interest Resumes: Section by Section

### 1. Create Your Top Header

Your header typically includes your name, address, Columbia email, and phone. Include a non-NYC permanent address only if applying for jobs in that region. Before including your cell phone number, make sure your voicemail message is appropriate and that you are prepared to handle calls from potential employers in public locations. It is acceptable to omit your address if you do not want to disclose where you live, but include your phone and email. You may also include your pronouns.

**TIP:** [Download a resume template in Microsoft Word](#) on our job search tools page.

**GIDEON TAYLOR**  
 1919 West 185<sup>th</sup> Street, #B1, New York, NY 10036  
 212-888-2285 • gt667@columbia.edu • He/Him

### 2. Create Your “Education” Section

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

**EDUCATION**  
**COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY  
 J.D., expected May 2025  
 Activities: Columbia Society for International Law  
 Society for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

**UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER**, Rochester, NY  
 B.A. in Political Science and Spanish, *summa cum laude*, received May 2021  
 Honors: Phi Beta Kappa  
 Susan B. Anthony Institute Women’s Leadership Award  
 Golden Key Scholarship (awarded to the highest-ranked female junior)  
 Activities: Political Science Students Advisory Committee  
 Student Government, Chief of Staff

### 3. Create Your “Honors” Section

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



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

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

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

**Study Abroad:** Columbia in Beijing at Tsinghua University, Spring 2020  
 Université de Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Switzerland

***If You Published a Thesis/Note:*** Your college thesis or law school note can be included in italics in a third subsection below “Activities” and “Honors,” entitled “Thesis,” “Note,” or “Publication,” under that school.

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

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

Begin by making a list of all post-high school jobs, legal and non-legal, paid and volunteer, in reverse chronological order. Include the employer’s name, your job title, dates and locations, and a brief description of your work. Format these elements consistently throughout.

Write out what you did for each job or pro bono project as if you were answering a question at an interview and then edit it down to concise sentences. Never submit a resume with sparse descriptions of your experience. The reader should understand what you did in your last position from reading the document. Include anything that a legal employer would care about (such as experience with research, writing, oral communication, or working with clients, or exposure to legislative advocacy); and include leadership and other achievements (such as promotions).

Be specific about your experience, particularly when it involves the skills employers are looking for. For example, instead of “Drafted research memos,” be more specific: “Researched legal issues relating to the Fourth Amendment, wrote a research memorandum with legal analyses, and presented findings to supervising attorney.”

Include all substantial volunteer experiences (such as jobs that required you to donate several hours a week for an extended period) in your “Experience” section. If you worked in an unrelated field prior to law school or could not intern as an undergraduate because you had to work to support yourself, highlight

skills and experience that would interest a legal employer. For example, managing a team of 25 servers at a restaurant demonstrates your ability to supervise large teams, prioritize tasks, and work efficiently under pressure. Working as a lifeguard shows that you respond well in a crisis. Working as a medical researcher shows that you can conduct complex research and report your findings. In your descriptions, highlight these transferable skills. If you have more relevant experience covering the same time, however, you may want to omit the less relevant jobs from your resume.

Think strategically about which experiences you include and what you highlight in each description. Your most relevant experiences (not necessarily the most recent) should have the longest descriptions. Do not exaggerate. Begin each sentence with an action verb (see the list in this section and sample resumes).

If you are applying to an international employer, see “Internationalizing Your Resume” in the [International Supplement to the Public Interest Job Search Toolkit](#) on our [job search tools webpage](#).

### **EXPERIENCE**

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

*Senior Program Specialist/Team Leader*

Washington, DC

Aug. 2021-July 2022

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

## **6. Add “Language Skills,” “Bar Admissions,” and “Publications” Sections, if Applicable)**

### **Language Skills**

Include if you are applying for jobs where languages are useful (such as overseas positions or direct service work). Describe your fluency. Be truthful—this is fair game to test during an interview!

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

### **Bar Membership/Bar Admissions**

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

### **BAR MEMBERSHIP**

New York (2022), District of Columbia (2023). Member of the D.C. Bar Committee on Immigration and International Human Rights.

## Publications

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

### **PUBLICATIONS**

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

*South Asian Refugees and Immigrants: A Human Rights Dilemma*, 22 Hum. Rts. Q. 59. (2021)

## 7. A Note About “Interests” Sections

Whether to include an interests section depends on various factors. If you have extensive relevant experience, it is usually better to forego an “Interests” section in favor of including that experience. On the other hand, if your experience is limited and you have available space on the page, including an “Interests” section might make sense. In addition, for government jobs, including clerkships and international internships, you may wish to include one.

When including an “Interests” section, make it specific and brief (just three to four interests), and be prepared to discuss these interests in an interview. Avoid interests that are unlawful, that you do not actually partake in, or that are inappropriate for a professional workplace. Be mindful of the impression that you may create through the inclusion of particular interests.

Wondering if an “Interests” section is appropriate for you? Speak with the [PI/PS Office](#).

## **INTERNATIONAL RESUMES**

If you are applying to a job based outside the U.S. or with an international employer in the U.S., edit your resume to eliminate anything that might be unclear or confusing to someone who is not familiar with U.S. geography, abbreviations, or references. For example, write out state names (“Rhode Island,” not “RI”) and dates (“June-August 2012,” not “Summer 2012”). Include a “Languages” section, if applicable. If you have substantial and relevant international travel experience, consider adding a “Travel” section. For international jobs, emphasize your experiences abroad under “Education” or “Experience.” Consult the [International Supplement to the Job Search Toolkit](#) for more tips.

## ***Resume Action Verbs***

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

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

## ***Resume Checklist***

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This is not an exhaustive checklist, but it will help you get started on a standout resume!

### **FORMAT**

- Resume is one page. (Go onto a second page only in special circumstances: e.g., you graduated more than five years ago or have published extensively. More than two pages is rarely acceptable.)
- Resume is not cluttered and is easy to read, utilizing 11- or 12-point fonts such as Times New Roman or Garamond, with generous margins (no smaller than .7 inches all around).
- Your name stands out at the top but is not too large; aim for a font size of 14-18 points.
- There are no more than two lines breaks between your section header and the accompanying text. Otherwise, your resume is single-spaced.
- All abbreviations and formatting are consistent throughout. For example, months are either consistently abbreviated or not abbreviated.
- There is no underlining or use of bullet points.
- There are no typos or grammatical errors.
- Format is similar to the samples.

### **CONTENT**

- Resume has a top header and “Education” and “Experience” sections.
- Contact information is professional and up to date. If you are a graduate, you used a personal email address.
- All relevant jobs, volunteer work, and activities are included, including pro bono, internships, externships, clinics, journals, student groups, and research for a professor.
- Current law school activities are in your “Education” section. Employers care about these, especially those related to the employer’s work. Even unrelated activities show you as well- rounded. Your position or title with a student organization is included.
- Clinics and externships are in your “Experience” section.
- Descriptions highlight your public interest experience.
- Resume is tailored to the job you are seeking.
- You prioritized activities that apply to your professional goals as well as those in which you held a leadership position.
- You may want to skip activities that conflict with an employer’s goals, such as conservative political activities when applying to a progressive organization.

- For an academic prize or honor, you included a brief parenthetical description to illustrate the prestige of your achievement.
- You used a variety of verbs to describe your experience and highlighted a range of skills (communication, analytical, interpersonal).
- Resume is saved as a PDF file.

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## Resumes Samples

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

### 1L Resumes

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

### 2L Resumes

- Francesca Silvestri (Before and after revisions)
- Michael Goldberg
- Nidhi Khan
- Darius Wiley

### 3L Resumes

- Mai Nguyen
- Mateo L. Salazar

### Graduate Resumes

- Stephanie Montenegro (Example of a resume that indicates a gap in work experience due to leave)
- Mary Cummings Brown

### Other Resumes

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

## Sample 1L Resume: Before Revisions

### Gideon Taylor

919 W 171<sup>st</sup> Street, Apt. B1  
New York, NY 10036  
(212) 888-2285 • gct667@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D. expected May 2026

Activities: 1L Human Rights Advocates Program  
Frederick Douglas Moot Court Competition  
Student Senate  
Naming and Symbols Faculty Committee

##### **University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education**, Philadelphia, PA

M.S. Received May 2022

Major: Urban Teaching Residency

Thesis: "Addressing Students with ADHD: Urban vs. Suburban Educators: A Case Study"

##### **RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES**, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

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

Major: Labor Studies and Employment Relations

Study Abroad: CIEE Barcelona, Spain, Spring 2019

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **Debevoise & Plimpton LLP**, New York, NY

*SEO Law Fellow*

2023

June 2023 – July

Conducted legal research by reviewing 1000+ cases identifying relevant information to a pro bono client's compassionate release case. Compiled a list of relevant cases to be submitted in a BOP packet for a pro bono client seeking compassionate release. Assisted on an international pro bono matter for a client seeking asylum in the US via a special immigrant visa. Produced research related to how chat GPT and generative AI affect the film/music industry in terms of copyright and ownership for an investment management client.

##### **Penn Treaty High School**, Philadelphia, PA

Music Teacher

2023

September 2022 – June

Wrote curriculum for 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade music. Planned/taught lessons and graded papers. Taught music theory, music history and how to play guitar to 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade classes and one all ages special ed class.

**LANGUAGE SKILLS:** Spanish (proficient)



## Sample 1L Resume: After Revisions

### GIDEON TAYLOR

919 West 171st Street, Apt. B1, New York, NY 10036  
(212) 888-2285 • gct667@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2026

Activities: Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition  
Student Senate (member of budget committee, assistant chair of social committee)  
Naming and Symbols Working Group (organize initiatives that explore and respond to the Law School's historical ties to slavery and other practices of exclusion)

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

M.S., received May 2022

Major: Urban Teaching Residency (Graduate School of Education)

Thesis: *Addressing Students with ADHD: Urban vs. Suburban Educators: A Case Study*

##### **RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**, Brunswick, NJ

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

Major: Labor Studies and Employment Relations

Study Abroad: CIEE Barcelona, Spain, Spring 2019

Activities: Member of the crew team (freshman year)

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **Columbia Law Human Rights Institute**

*1L Human Rights Advocate Fellow*

New York, NY

August 2023-Present

Conduct desk research for the International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations on cases where protestors, activists, and public figures were persecuted after surveillance measures were used. Receive mentorship from practicing human rights advocates, and Columbia Law faculty, staff, graduates, and students. Attend monthly seminars regarding key issues in human rights, given by leading human rights advocates. Visit NGOs in New York City, meeting with staff and learning about human rights careers.

##### **Debevoise & Plimpton LLP**

*SEO Law Fellow*

New York, NY

June 2023-July 2023

Conducted legal research by reviewing 1000+ cases identifying relevant information to a pro bono client's compassionate release case. Compiled a list of relevant cases to be submitted in a BOP packet for a pro bono client seeking compassionate release. Assisted with a client seeking asylum via a special immigrant visa. Researched how chat GPT and generative AI affect the film and music industry in terms of copyright and ownership for an investment management client.

##### **Penn Treaty High School**

*Music Teacher*

Philadelphia, PA

September 2022-June 2023

Wrote music curriculum for 10th-12th grades and special education. Taught music theory and guitar.

##### **Teach for America**

*8<sup>th</sup> Grade Special Ed. Math and English Teacher/Caseload Manager*

Philadelphia, PA

August 2020-June 2022

Taught and wrote curriculum. Analyzed data to develop 20 Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Coordinated and led IEP meetings with parents, general education teachers, and service providers.

**LANGUAGE SKILLS:** Spanish (proficient)

## Sample 1L Resume: Before Revisions

### RUBY THOMAS

Allston, MA • (781) 290-7000 • rubythomas@gmail.com

#### EDUCATION

**Dartmouth College** - Hanover NH **2018-2022**  
 B.A., *cum laude*, Cognitive Science and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies **GPA 3.85/4.00**

#### Academic Awards

- *High Honors in Cognitive Science*: Awarded for exceptional writing and defense of a senior thesis (2022)
- *Academic Achievement Award in Cognitive Science*: Awarded to seniors with the strongest performance in the Cognitive Science major (2022)
- *Rufus Choate Scholar, First Honor Group*: Top 5% Annual GPA (4.00) (2020-2021)
- *Third Honor Group*: Top 35% Annual GPA (2021-2022)
- *Presidential Scholar*: Junior Research Funding Award for Cognitive Science Research; Attained GPA in top 40% of class of 2022 to qualify (2020-2021)
- *Meritorious Citations in Introductory Linguistics, Feminist Queer Performance, Young Adult Literature, Contemporary Issues in Feminism, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Senior Seminar*: Faculty award citations because of unusual talents, dependability, initiative, resourcefulness, or other meritorious characteristics that are not indicated adequately by academic grades. Citations comprise only 2.4 percent of total grades. (2019-2022)

#### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

**Dartmouth College** - Hanover, NH & Remote **Sept. 2019-Present**  
*Cognitive Science Research Assistant in Professor Jonathan Phillip's PhilLab*  
*Paid position 10-15 hours per week during undergrad, continuing work remotely after graduation*

- Engaged in interdisciplinary research focused on morality, *identity*, agency, causality, and possibility that culminated in a senior honors thesis being published and two additional publications.
- Designed an independent Honors Thesis project to study the representation of intersectional identity and its impact on imagining possibility.
- Analyzed study data in Python, R, and MATLAB using NumPy, Pandas, Tidyverse, and TidyR.
- Awarded a research stipend as a Presidential Research Scholar to study what drives our judgements of whether an agent acted freely.

**Harvard University** - Cambridge, MA & Remote **Dec. 2019-Sept. 2020**  
*Psychology Research Assistant in Professor Fiery Cushman's Moral Psychology Research Lab*  
*Paid position 40 hours per week for 15 weeks, continued to work remotely 10 hours per week on a research stipend.*

- Conducted full time research on applied psychology, philosophy, computer science, and neuroscience to answer fundamental questions about morality.
- Developed studies with Qualtrics, jsPsych, and oTree. Analyzed data in MATLAB, JavaScript, and R.
- Designed new projects on retributive tendencies for punishment and assisted Regan Bernhard, Ph.D. with ongoing projects regarding moral culpability funded by a grant from The John Templeton Foundation.
- Collaborated with colleagues from the *PhilLab* to publish work focusing on perceptions of human agency.

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

**Dartmouth College Admissions**- Hanover, NH & Remote **March 2019-June 2022**  
*Tour Guide & Tour Guide Trainer*  
*Paid position 3 hours per week for tours, additional 10 hours per week for training guides (Jan. 2022-June 2022)*

- Gave personalized walking tours to prospective students and special campus guests to acclimate them with the college.
- Acted as a representative for the admissions office by participating in admitted student programming, speaking on virtual student panels, and creating informative promotional social media content.
- Selected, trained, and mentored future tour guides from the student applicant pool.

**ACLU of NH** - Remote **June 2020-Sept. 2020**  
*Remote Organizer & Paid Phone Banker*  
*Paid position 15 hours per week for 12 weeks*

- Assisted with field organizing projects for the non-partisan 2020 “Get Out the Vote” campaign.
- Participated in virtual weekly volunteer meetings; made over 500 phone calls a week to New Hampshire residents.
- Directly distributed information on absentee voting to register eligible voters in New Hampshire.

### **Weston Recreation Camp - Weston, MA**

*Lead Counselor*

**June 2018- August 2019**

*Paid position 40 hours per week for each 6-week summer session.*

- Cared for and mentored children ages 4-5. Requires full recertification of First Aid and CPR each summer.
- Planned and organized enrichment activities while leading a group of about 20 children and overseeing two other staff members.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

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### **Cognition:**

Bernhard, R.; Thomas, R.; Phillips, J. “It’s Not What You Did, It’s What you Could Have Done.” *Cognition*, November 2022. ([Cognition](#))

Bernhard, R.; Thomas, R.; Cushman, F. “Paradox of Punishment.” *Cognition*, forthcoming.

### **Cognitive Science Society:**

Thomas, R. “Possibility is not a Luxury: The role of identity in representations of possibility.”

Dartmouth College Undergraduate Thesis awarded High Honors, June 2022.

CogSci, submitted. ([Dartmouth Digital Commons](#))

## **LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES**

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### **The Embattled Program, Founding Board Member**

**2021-2022**

- Founded an organization within The Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault to allocate college funding to uplift the efforts of students moving forward conversations about sex, consent, gender, sexuality, and related topics at Dartmouth.
- Voted on the allocation of funding for student research project proposals and mentored underclassmen spreading the impact of their work across campus communities.
- Proposed and executed an independent project to provide vibrators and information about personal sexual health to low-income and minority students.

### **Cobra Senior Society, President**

**2021-2022**

- Led operations for Dartmouth’s oldest all-female senior society.
- Organized projects to unite a diverse group of senior leaders as well as to offer support to female and non-binary freshman through the development of a mentorship book.
- Offered membership to an exclusive selection of rising seniors at Dartmouth who demonstrated a clear commitment to leadership and inclusivity across campus. Maintained connections with and hosted events for Cobra alumni dating back to the founding members of 1978.

### **Sigma Delta Sorority, Wellness Chair**

**2021-2022**

- Designed and piloted a new leadership position for risk management and sexual health and wellness for a local sorority of 150 women.
- Organized informational resource guides, hosted campus-wide events discussing sexual violence prevention in Greek life and created spaces for community growth and conversation about mental and sexual health.

### **Planned Parenthood Generation Action, Co-President**

**2019-2021**

- Led one of the more than 350 campus groups overseen by the national Planned Parenthood organization.
- Engaged with a network of young activists across the country and mobilized advocates for reproductive freedom, raising public awareness about reproductive rights, educating young people about sexual health, and creating lasting change in their communities.

## **SKILLS & CERTIFICATIONS**

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**Technical** – Proficient in Python, MATLAB, JavaScript, and R. Experience with Python packages: NumPy, Pandas, and pyBIDS (Brain Imaging Data Structures). Graphic Design in Procreate and Canva.

**Communication** – Conversational fluency in Spanish, Extensive public speaking and performance experience.

**Research** – fMRI Lab Scan Assistant Certified, Certified CITI Program course for Human Research (Group 2: Social/Behavioral Research), Behavioral Study Design on jsPsych, oTree, Testable, and Qualtrics. Participant Management on Amazon Mechanical Turk.

**Health** – Trained to provide peer support to survivors of sexual violence. Certified for First Aid and CPR.

## Sample 1L Resume: After Revisions

### RUBY THOMAS

622 W 116<sup>th</sup> St., Apt. #50, New York, NY 10025  
(781) 290-7000 • ruby.thomas@columbia.edu • linkedin.com/in/ruby-thomas

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2026

Activities: *Columbia Journal of Gender & Law*, Staff Editor

Gender and Sexuality Law Moot Court

Domestic Violence Project

South Asian Law Students Association

##### **DARTMOUTH COLLEGE**, Hanover, NH

B.A. in Cognitive Science and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, *cum laude*, received June 2022

Honors: Academic Achievement Award in Cognitive Science

Rufus Choate Scholar (top 5% annual GPA)

Meritorious Citations in Linguistics, Theater, English, and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies

Thesis: *Possibility Is Not a Luxury: The Role of Identity in Representations of Possibility*, Awarded High Honors

Activities: Planned Parenthood Generation Action, President

Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault, Founding Board Member of Embattled

Sigma Delta Sorority, Executive Board

Cobra Senior Society, President

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **Phillab at Dartmouth College**

Hanover, NH

*Cognitive Science Research Assistant for Professor Jonathan Phillips*

Sept. 2019- Aug. 2023

Implemented interdisciplinary research focused on morality, identity, agency, causality, and possibility that culminated in a senior honors thesis and two publications. Designed and launched new studies while conducting technical analysis for on-going projects. Expanded existing techniques for studying counterfactual decision making by formulating new applications of these approaches to the study of intersectional identity representations.

##### **Dartmouth College Admissions**

Hanover, NH

*Tour Guide & Tour Guide Trainer*

Mar. 2019-Jun. 2022

Led personalized walking tours to prospective students and special campus guests to acclimate them with the college. Selected, trained, and mentored future tour guides from the student applicant pool. Represented the admissions office on student panels, organized admitted student programming, and generated informative promotional social media content.

##### **Moral Psychology Research Lab at Harvard University**

Cambridge, MA

*Psychology Research Assistant for Professor Fiery Cushman*

Dec. 2019-Sep. 2020

Conducted full-time research on applied psychology, philosophy, computer science, and neuroscience to answer fundamental questions about morality. Developed new projects on retributive tendencies for punishment and assisted Regan Bernhard, Ph.D. with ongoing projects regarding moral culpability.

##### **ACLU of New Hampshire**

Remote

*Remote Organizer & Paid Phone Banker*

Jun. 2020-Sept. 2020

Oversaw field-organizing projects for nonpartisan 2020 "Get Out the Vote" campaign. Conducted virtual weekly volunteer meetings and made over 500 phone calls per week to distribute information on absentee voting to New Hampshire voters.

#### PUBLICATIONS

Bernhard, R.; Thomas, R.; Cushman, F. "The Paradox of Aversive Punishment." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Attitudes and Social Cognition*, Forthcoming 2023.

Bernhard, R.; Thomas, R.; Phillips, J. "It's Not What You Did, It's What You Could Have Done." *Cognition*, Nov.2022.

**LANGUAGE** Spanish (intermediate)

## Sample 1L Resume

### MORGAN S. HENRY

845-400-6877 · msh4435@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2026

Honors: John Paul Stevens Public Interest Fellow  
Max Berger '71 Public Interest/Public Service Fellows Program (selective three-year program for students committed to the public interest)  
Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Graduate Scholar

Activities: If/When/How, Co-President  
Columbia Law Women's Association, Public Interest/Public Service Co-Chair  
Gender & Sexuality Law Moot Court, External Competition Team  
*Journal of Gender & Law*, Articles Editor

##### UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN, Dublin, Ireland

M.A. in Gender Studies, with first class honors, received November 2020

Honors: George J. Mitchell Scholar

Activities: Abortion Rights Campaign, Policy & Advocacy Working Group

Thesis: *A Match Made in Hell: The Rhetorical Influence of American Anti-Abortion Groups in Ireland 2018-Present*

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

B.A. in Political Science, *cum laude* and with distinction in the major, received May 2019

Honors: Harry S. Truman Scholar  
U.S. Department of State Benjamin A. Gilman Scholar  
Jack Kent Cooke Foundation College Scholar

Activities: Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Generation Action Intern

Thesis: *Have the 'Blue Dogs' Lost their Bite? An Assessment of Abortion Politics in the Democratic Party*

#### EXPERIENCE

##### SANCTUARY FOR FAMILIES

*Intern, Queens Family Justice Center*

New York, NY  
Offer Accepted for Summer 2024

##### SAEED & LITTLE

*Legal Intern*

Oxford, UK (remote)  
May-Aug. 2023

Led discovery review and prepared client for his deposition in a Title IX case. Conducted legal research and wrote memo about the scope of victim advocates' communication privilege. Drafted discovery requests in Title IX and childhood sexual abuse cases.

##### McALLISTER OLIVARIUS

*Head U.S. Legal Analyst*

Maidenhead, UK  
Sep. 2021-Mar. 2023

In addition to substantive legal work, supervised other Legal Analysts and trained new U.S. team members. Tracked all deadlines and deliverables for the U.S. civil litigation practice.

*U.S. Legal Analyst*

Sep. 2020-Sep. 2021

Drafted pre-action settlement demand letters, complaints, witness statements, damages analyses, and other legal correspondence for cases involving sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination. Conducted client intakes and witness interviews independently.

## Sample 1L Resume

### **BEN AHMED**

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

#### **EDUCATION**

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

J.D., expected May 2023

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

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

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

Major: Applied Economics and Business Management

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

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

#### **EXPERIENCE**

**Pillsbury Winthrop LLP**

*Legal Assistant*

New York, NY

July 2018–Aug. 2020

Interviewed expert witnesses for pro bono litigation involving a wrongful death penalty conviction. Prepared, filed, and coordinated service of pleadings in Chapter 11 bankruptcy cases. Conducted legal and factual research. Prepared marketing materials for potential clients and legal notices for publication in national media.

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

*Peer Advisor and Administrative Assistant*

Ithaca, NY

Aug. 2017–June 2018

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

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

*Teaching Assistant, Marketing Management*

Ithaca, NY

Jan.–May 2017

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

**TakeNote, Inc.**

*Business Editor*

Ithaca, NY

Aug. 2016–Jan. 2017

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

**Penguin Putnam Inc.**

*Subsidiary Rights Intern*

New York, NY

June–Aug. 2016

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

## Sample 1L Resume

### ABEL ASSEFA ZENAWI

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

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: African Law Students Association

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

B.A., with honors, received May 2020

Major: Anthropology

Activities: Anthropology Student Association Semester Abroad in Jamaica

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

#### EXPERIENCE

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

College Park, MD

Department of Anthropology, Research Assistant

June 2020–Aug. 2020

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

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

College Park, MD

*Admissions Assistant*

Sept. 2019–May 2020

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

##### **GIANT SUPERMARKET<sup>2</sup>**

Silver Spring, MD

*Salesclerk*

June 2018–Aug. 2019

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

##### **WALGREENS**

College Park, MD

*Stockroom Clerk*

Aug. 2016–May 2018

Stocked store shelves and organized excess inventory in stockroom.

#### LANGUAGE Fluent in Amharic, Oromo

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<sup>2</sup> This 1L included his work experience at Giant Supermarket and Walgreens on his resume to reference skills he developed at these jobs, to demonstrate that he had to work to support himself, and to explain why he did not have any internships. As he starts gaining legal experience, he will take this off his resume. If and when you have more relevant work experience, you will leave positions like this off your resume.

## Sample 1L Resume

### NAOMI BENNETT

407 West 118th Street, Apartment 7B, New York, NY 10027  
nxb2234@columbia.edu • 510-222-3344

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2026

Activities: The Max Berger '71 Public Interest/Public Service Fellows Program  
Student Senate, 1L and 2L Student Senator  
Health Law Association, Events Chair  
Law Revue (musical law comedy), Performer and Writer

##### **Washington University in St. Louis, School of Arts & Sciences**, St. Louis, MO

B.A. in International Area Studies, with Honors, received May 2020

Minors: Mathematics; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Activities: Women's Varsity Tennis Team; Sexual Assault and Rape Anonymous Hotline (Peer Counselor)

Study Abroad: Chinese University of Hong Kong

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **New York Legal Assistance Group, Special Litigation Unit**

*Incoming Intern*

New York, NY  
May 2024 – Jul 2024

##### **Science, Health, and Information Clinic**

*Research Assistant*

Assist Professor Chris Morten to conduct research on government investment in vaccine development and the intersection between healthcare and intellectual property.

New York, NY  
Jan 2024 – Present

##### **U.S. House of Representatives, Congresswoman Anna G. Eshoo**

*Health Legislative Assistant*

*Legislative Aide and Correspondent*

*Staff Assistant*

Managed the Congresswoman's legislative portfolio in healthcare, reproductive rights, and LGBTQ+ issues. Drafted legislation, speeches, and letters to federal agencies. Assisted during Energy and Commerce Committee hearings. Served as a link between constituents, stakeholders, and the Congresswoman.

Washington, DC  
May 2022 – Jun 2023  
Aug 2021 – Apr 2022  
Sep 2020 – Jul 2021

##### *Board Member of the LGBTQ+ Congressional Staff Association*

Organized events for LGBTQ+ Congressional staffers with community-based and national organizations serving LGBTQ+ people, such as emergency shelters and the Trevor Project. Chair of the Queer Women's Task Force.

Feb 2022 – Jun 2023

##### **WeLead Training Program**

*Member of Training Class of 2022*

Participated in a training program through American University to learn leadership skills, campaign tactics, and ways to close the gender gap in the political arena.

Washington, DC  
Jul 2022 – May 2023

##### **Congressional AI Fellowship**

*Fellow*

Attended six seminars led by technologists and scholars across sectors to discuss the major questions surrounding artificial intelligence.

Washington, DC  
Oct 2022 – Dec 2022

##### **The Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project**

*Intern*

Drafted legal briefs and conducted in-depth research for clients seeking asylum in the U.S. Guided clients through deadlines and accompanied them to appointments at USCIS.

St. Louis, MO  
May 2018 – Aug 2018

**LANGUAGES** Spanish (proficient)



**Sample 2L Resume: Before Revisions****FRANCESCA SILVESTRI**111 West 121<sup>st</sup> St #555 New York, NY 10027 212-555-1212 [fus1111@columbia.edu](mailto:fus1111@columbia.edu)**EDUCATION**

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- 2017–2020 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY  
J.D. degree anticipated May 2020
- 2013–2017 UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER, Rochester, NY  
B.A. degree, *summa cum laude*, awarded May 2017  
Double major in Political Science and Spanish  
Minor in Latin American Studies
- 2012–2013 COLEGIO VILLA RICA, Veracruz, MEXICO  
Rotary International Exchange Student following graduation from high school  
Attended Colegio Villa Rica for one full year, becoming fluent in Spanish  
Traveled extensively throughout central Mexico and the Yucatán peninsula

**HONORS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

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- Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society Member  
Selected as Chief Student Marshall at the University of Rochester 2011 Commencement  
Golden Key Scholarship, awarded to highest academically ranked junior  
Susan B. Anthony Institute Women's Leadership Award  
U.S. Department of Defense National Security Education Program, David L. Boren Scholar

**INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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- Spring Semester 2016 SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING, Fortaleza, Ceará, BRAZIL  
*Culture, Development, and Social Justice Scholar.* Participated in a study abroad program focused on heightening social awareness through a seminar on Brazil's history, economics, politics, and culture, including field studies. Completed an advanced Portuguese language course. Conducted original research on Brazilian agrarian reform and the social movements surrounding it.
- Summer 2015 U.S. EMBASSY, INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, Mexico City, MEXICO  
*Office for Latin America Intern.* Utilizing bilingual Spanish-English skills, advised and counseled Mexican and Latin American citizens regarding policies and approaches for completing high school, undergraduate, and graduate studies in the U.S. Conducted group orientation sessions in Spanish. Assisted with the research, editing, and design of the Bilingual Schools in Mexico City publication. Created a law school informational diskette and electronic newsletter.
- Summer 2013 AMIGOS DE LAS AMERICAS INTERNATIONAL, Rio Grande do Norte, BRAZIL  
*Health Care Volunteer.* Worked in a rural Brazilian village to improve health and sanitary conditions. Built latrines; planted trees; renovated an elementary school; and provided education in dental health, breastfeeding, and first aid. Became proficient in conversational Portuguese.

## WORK EXPERIENCE

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

## CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

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

## INTERESTS

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Softball, reality television, big cities.

## Sample 2L Resume: After Revisions

### FRANCESCA SILVESTRI

111 West 121st Street, #555, New York, NY 10027

212-555-1212 • fus1111@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2022

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

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

B.A., *summa cum laude*, in Political Science and Spanish<sup>3</sup>, received May 2019

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

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

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **Open Society Justice Initiative**

*Legal Intern, Mexico Migration Project*

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

New York, NY

Sept. 2020-Present

##### **Department of Homeland Security**

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

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

Minneapolis, MN

May-August 2020

##### **Hennepin County Attorney's Office**

*Intern, Child Protection Division*

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

Minneapolis, MN

May-August 2019

##### **University of Rochester**

*Teaching Assistant for Spanish and Microeconomics*

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

Rochester, NY

2018-2019

##### *Resident Advisor*

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

2018-2019

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

*Intern, Office for Latin America*

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

Mexico City, Mexico

Summer 2017

#### LANGUAGE SKILLS<sup>4</sup> Spanish (fluent); Portuguese (proficient)

<sup>3</sup> Student removed her minor. You do not need to include your undergraduate minor on your resume unless it is particularly relevant to work for which you are applying or fills in a piece of your narrative that is not apparent from other parts of your resume.

<sup>4</sup> See [Public Interest Resumes: Section by Section](#) (earlier in the Toolkit) if you are considering including an "interests" section.

## Sample 2L Resume

### MICHAEL GOLDBERG

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

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2022

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

Activities: *Human Rights Law Review*

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

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

Major: Cognitive Science

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

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

Activities: Cuba Health Project Peer Advisor

#### EXPERIENCE

##### COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE CLINIC

New York, NY

*Student Participant*

Fall 2020

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

##### COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

New York, NY

Research Assistant to Professor Vincent Blasi

Fall 2020

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

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

New York, NY

*Intern*

Summer 2020

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

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

New York, NY

*Student Advocate*

Fall 2019

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

##### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Philadelphia, PA

Department of Neurology, Undergraduate Research Assistant

2017–2019

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

## Sample 2L Resume

### Nidhi Khan

Pronouns: she/her<sup>5</sup>

(212) 555-5599 • nk2211@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2022

Honors: *Columbia Law Review*, Articles Editor

Activities: Max Berger '71 Public Interest/Public Service Fellow (selective three-year program for students committed to the public interest)  
South Asian Law Students Association, Academic Chair  
Student Public Interest Network, Vice President

##### **BOSTON COLLEGE**, Boston, MA

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

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

#### EXPERIENCE

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

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Spring 2021

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

##### **NEUFELD SCHECK & BRUSTIN, LLP**

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Fall 2020

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

##### **NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE OF HARLEM**

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2020

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

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

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Fall 2019-Spring 2020

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

##### **BAIN & COMPANY**

Boston, MA

Associate Consultant

Summer 2018-Spring 2019

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

#### PUBLICATIONS

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

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

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<sup>5</sup> Note that this student chose to leave off her address and chose to include her pronouns. Please consult a PI/PS adviser if you have questions about whether to do either of these things on your resume.

## Sample 2L Resume

### DARIUS WILEY

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

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2022

Honors: *Columbia Journal of Race and Law*, Articles Editor  
Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar (for academic achievement)  
Racial and Social Justice Fellow (for demonstrated dedication to racial and social justice)

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

**Columbia University**, New York, NY

B.A. in Economics, received May 2017

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

Activities: Black Students Organization  
Habitat for Humanity  
Club Soccer

#### EXPERIENCE

**Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem**, New York, NY

Fall-Spring 2020

*Legal Extern*

Helped represent indigent clients. Handled a misdemeanor case from arraignment to dismissal. Conducted client, family member, and witness interviews, appeared in court, visited client, advocated for client's medical needs, and successfully negotiated a dismissal of charges. Assisted an attorney throughout the year with her caseload by conducting legal research and writing memos, drafting motions, investigating and compiling mitigation evidence, visiting and interviewing clients, and preparing for trial and sentencing.

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

Summer 2020

*Summer Intern*

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

**Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia**, Washington, DC

Fall 2017-Spring 2019

*Investigator*

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

**NYC Parks Department**, New York, NY

Summers 2016, 2017

*Counselor and Tutor*

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

## Sample 3L Resume

### Mai Nguyen

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

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2021

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

Activities: Rightslink  
Human Rights Internship Program  
Human Rights Institute, 1L Advocate  
Capital Appeals Project (spring break pro bono project, March 2020)

**Columbia University**, New York, NY

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

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

Activities: Reading tutor with Washington Heights Tutors

**International School of Geneva**, Geneva, Switzerland

Bilingual International Baccalaureate Diploma, received August 2015

#### EXPERIENCE

**Center for Constitutional Rights**, New York, NY Summer 2020

*Summer Intern*

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

**National Coalition for Haitian Rights**, Port-au-Prince, Haiti Summer 2019

*Summer Intern*

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

**U.S. Peace Corps**, New York, NY/Dakar, Senegal 2016-2018

*Intern*

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

**U.N. Conference on Trade and Development**, Geneva, Switzerland Summer 2015

*Intern*

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

**LANGUAGES** Mandarin (fluent), French (fluent)

## Sample 3L Resume

### MATEO L. SALAZAR

533 W. 147<sup>th</sup> St., #4 New York, NY 10031 • (917) 480-1410 • mls2024@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2025

Honors: *Academic Honors* for 1L; *Best in Class Award* for Immigration Law; Anti-Racist Grant Recipient; Social and Racial Justice Fellow

Note: *Breaking BI: Using the False Claims Act to End the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program*

Activities: *Journal of Law and Social Problems* Executive Articles Editor; Latinx Law Student Association (LaLSA) Public Interest Chair; Society for Immigrant and Refugee Rights VP; LaLSA Asylum & Refugee Moot Court; Research Assistant for Professor Anjum Gupta

**SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY**, Santa Clara, CA

B.S. in Psychology and Philosophy w/Pre-Law Emphasis, *magna cum laude*, received June 2020

#### EXPERIENCE

##### THE BRONX DEFENDERS

Bronx, NY

*Immigration Defense, Summer Intern*

May 2024-Aug. 2024

Worked on complex immigration cases involving criminal convictions. Assisted with representation of detained and non-detained noncitizens in their deportation proceedings through both written and trial advocacy.

##### AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

New York, NY

*National Immigrants' Rights Project, Legal Extern*

Jan. 2024-Apr. 2024

Conducted legal research and wrote memos for preparation of current nationwide litigation pertaining to federal preemption of proposed state immigration laws, rights of detained immigrants, and family separation. Aided in strategy and preliminary research for potential litigation against unjust alternative to detention programs.

##### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS CLINIC

New York, NY

*Student Attorney and Teaching Fellow*

Aug. 2023-May 2024

Managed an asylum case as a co-lead student attorney. Wrote the legal brief, compiled all evidence, and advised client through the process. Lead another client through removal proceedings by requesting prosecutorial discretion. Conducted know-your-rights presentations at the U.S.-Mexico border and at local non-profits in New York.

##### PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Washington, DC

*Trial Division, Summer Law Clerk*

May 2023-Aug. 2023

Performed legal research and drafted various memos and motions to suppress, sanction, and sever. Conducted analyses of discovery materials for witness examinations and preliminary hearings. Interviewed clients to draft a sentencing letter and an early parole termination motion. Trained in a Trial Practice Group for trial advocacy skills.

##### CATHOLIC CHARITIES ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

Silver Spring, MD

*Immigration Legal Services, Paralegal*

Aug. 2021-Aug. 2022

Prepared immigration forms for indigent clients seeking asylum, U-Visas, family petitions, among other forms of relief. Prepared clients for court proceedings through legal research, mock hearings, drafting of declarations, creating country condition reports, filing of motions, and compiling evidence.

##### ERIE NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

Chicago, IL

*Legal Administrative Assistant [Jesuit Volunteer Corps Volunteer]*

Aug. 2020-Aug. 2021

Aided DOJ representatives and attorneys with case management by translating legal documents, compiling required evidence, and performing intake screening consultations with new clients while managing my own DACA cases.

#### LANGUAGE

Spanish (fluent)



## Sample Graduate Resume

### Example of Gap in Work History Due to Leave

#### STEPHANIE MONTENEGRO

202 Main Street, Apt. 14, Jersey City, NJ 07302 • [smm123@columbia.edu](mailto:smm123@columbia.edu) • (202) 228-2297

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., received May 2019

Honors: Stone Scholar 2017-2018 (honors)

Activities: *Columbia Human Rights Law Review & Jailhouse Lawyers Manual*, Operations Director Research Assistant for Professor David Pozen

If/When/How, Events Coordinator and Communications Chair

Note: *Intersectional Employment Discrimination: The Potential Cooperation of Title VII and the ADEA*

##### THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY, Ewing, NJ

B.A., *magna cum laude*, in Political Science, minor in Spanish, received May 2016

Activities: Phi Beta Kappa

TCNJ Society for Parliamentary Debate, Vice President of Operations

Theses: (1) *Welfare Reforms and Gender Equality*

(2) *African Americans and Financial Crashes*

#### EXPERIENCE

##### LEGAL AID SOCIETY SPECIAL LITIGATION UNIT

New York, NY

*Justice Fellow*

Mar. 2023 – Present

Initiated class action and impact litigation to create systemic change for vulnerable New Yorkers. Drafted and researched complaints and motions for federal and state courts including an appeal to the Second Circuit. Strategized with lead attorneys to plan litigation and participated in discovery meetings with opposing counsel. Scheduled to participate in upcoming oral arguments in the Eastern District of New York.

##### UNITED STATES, DISTRICT COURT OF NEW JERSEY

Newark, NJ

*Judicial Law Clerk*

Aug. 2022 – Dec. 2022

Drafted opinions and conducted research on topics in civil and criminal law. Developed case theories in partnership with the Judge. Prepared the Judge for hearings by writing oral argument outlines and observed the federal judicial process. Managed two interns and trained incoming clerks as the Head Clerk.

##### WHITE & CASE, LLP

New York, NY

*Litigation Associate*

Sep. 2019 – Aug. 2022

*Summer Associate*

Summer 2018

Drafted legal documents including two pro bono appeals for the Supreme Court of the State of New York Appellate Division, Second Department. Honed research skills through work with legal databases to aid in litigation. Attended court hearings and client interviews to collect case information. Received award for pro bono work. Medical leave, Aug. 2020- Jul. 2022.

##### SQUIRE PATTON BOGGS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT

New York, NY

*Legal Extern at Columbia Law School*

Aug. – Dec. 2018

Gained experience in post-conviction relief and general appellate litigation through class discussion, readings, and fieldwork on present cases under the supervision of lead attorneys. Fieldwork included research of case law and social science articles, writing memos and sections of an appellate brief, and assisting in creating a parole packet.

#### BAR ADMISSIONS

Admitted in New York State, Southern District of New York, and Eastern District of New York

## Sample Graduate Resume

### MARY CUMMINGS BROWN

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

#### EXPERIENCE<sup>6</sup>

##### NATIONAL WOMEN’S LAW CENTER

Washington, DC  
2015-Present

*Staff Attorney*

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

##### QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE

New York, NY  
Spring 2015

*Extern*

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

##### CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

New York, NY  
Summer 2014

*Legal Intern*

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

##### LINCOLN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

New York, NY  
Summer 2013

*Legal Intern*

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

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., received May 2015

Honors: Pauline Berman Heller Prize Fund (highest-ranked female graduating law student)  
Best Oral Argument, 1L Moot Court Competition

Activities: *Columbia Law Review*, Notes Editor  
If/When/How Law Students for Reproductive Justice

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

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

Major: Art History

Honors: Departmental honors in Art History

Activities: *Yale Undergraduate Journal of Comparative Literature*

#### BAR ADMISSIONS

Admitted in New York State

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<sup>6</sup> This student put her “Experience” section before her “Education” section because she is a graduate with at least five years of experience.

## Sample Resume (Portion): Joint Degrees

### Option 1

#### ANDREW PARK

105 West 120th Street, Apt. 2n, New York, NY 10027  
212.699.9999 | andrew.park@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2021

Activities: American Constitution Society  
Society of Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Moot Court, Captain  
*Columbia Human Rights Law Review & Jailhouse Lawyers Manual*, Executive Articles Editor  
Columbia Society of International Law

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

M.P.A., expected May 2021

Concentration: International Relations

**RICE UNIVERSITY**, Houston, TX

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

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

### Option 2

#### ANDREW PARK

105 West 120th Street, Apt. 2n, New York, NY 10027  
212.699.9999 | andrew.park@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

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

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

Concentration: International Relations

Activities: American Constitution Society  
Society of Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Moot Court, Captain  
*Columbia Human Rights Law Review & Jailhouse Lawyers Manual*, Executive Articles Editor  
Columbia Society of International Law

**RICE UNIVERSITY**, Houston, TX

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

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

## Sample Resume (Portion): Permanent Address

### SOLOMON A. KING

Solomon.King@law.columbia.edu | 347.847.9923

#### Current Address:

400 West 120th Street, Apt. 9  
New York, NY 10027

#### Permanent Address:<sup>7</sup>

31 Weaver Drive  
Philadelphia, PA 99999

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: Public Interest Law Foundation, Board President  
First-Generation Professionals, 2L Representative

##### ACLU UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Charlottesville, Virginia

B.A., with distinction, received May 2017

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

#### EXPERIENCE

##### NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

New York, NY

*Extern, Civil Rights Bureau*

Fall 2020

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

##### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

New York, NY

*Research Assistant to Professor Matthew Waxman*

Summer 2020

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

##### TEACH FOR AMERICA

Oregon City, OR

*Kindergarten Teacher*

Summer 2017-Spring 2019

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

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<sup>7</sup> Tip: Use your permanent address when applying for summer internships or jobs in that geographic area.

## Sample Resume (Portion): Transfer Student; Upcoming Clinic

### AKEYLA HARRISON

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

#### EDUCATION

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

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: Harlan Fiske Stone Moot Court Society  
*Columbia Journal of Environmental Law*, Submissions Editor  
Publication: Legal Measures to Curtail Global Warming, 22 *CJEL* (2021)

**Brooklyn Law School**, Brooklyn, NY

September 2019-May 2020 (then transferred)

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

**McGill University**, Montreal, Canada

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

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

#### EXPERIENCE

**Environmental Law Clinic**, Columbia Law School<sup>8</sup>

*Student Participant*

New York, NY

Spring 2021

**Earthjustice**

*Summer Law Clerk*

New York, NY

Summer 2020

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

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<sup>8</sup> It may be appropriate to list an experience to which you are committed in the near future. If you have not yet begun the experience, you should omit any description, as here. When the clinic begins, the student will add description of what she is working on, written in present tense. When the clinic ends, she will rewrite the description to be in past tense.

## Sample Resume (Portion): Undergraduate Transfer<sup>9</sup>

### **JULIA THOMAS**

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

#### **EDUCATION**

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

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: National Lawyers Guild  
*Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, Editor

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

B.A. in Environmental Studies, received May 2020

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

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

September 2016-May 2017 (then transferred)

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

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<sup>9</sup> See a PI/PS adviser if you transferred during your undergraduate years and are not sure whether to include your first college or university on your resume. In this case, the student is applying for a summer internship in Boston and might consider including Tufts on her resume to show her connection to the area. If the student was applying to internships in New York or Washington, DC, she might not find it necessary to keep Tufts on her resume, especially if space on the page was an issue.

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## Public Interest Cover Letters

Your cover letter is a persuasive “brief” on why you want a particular job and why you are the best candidate. You want the letter to highlight your credentials and provide a narrative about your fit.

Convince the employer that you are passionate about and committed to their issue area and that you are the best person for the job due to experience, skills, and knowledge. Focus on how you can help the employer and its clients, not on how the job will help you. Especially if your resume does not appear to be a perfect match for the organization and/or position at first glance, the cover letter can make connections between your experiences and the job.

Public interest, human rights, and government employers often rely more on cover letters than resumes to assess candidates, so cover letters can make a difference!

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

If you are applying to an international employer or for international jobs, please also review our [International Public Interest Job Search Toolkit Supplement](#). LL.M.s should review our [LL.M. Supplement](#). Both are available on our [job search tools webpage](#).

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

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

### Remember!

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

#### GRAD TIP

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

## Cover Letter Template

**TIP:** Download this cover letter template in Microsoft Word on our job search tools page.

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

Date

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

Dear Ms. Loyer:

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

Second paragraph: Explain why you are interested in this type of work and this specific organization. **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE LETTER, SO MAKE IT GOOD!** Highlight your experience, commitment, and passion. The more you can show that your mission and that of the organization are aligned, the more compelling your narrative will be (this requires some research into the organization’s work). Be sure to include any connections or linkages to your past work and the job for which you are applying.

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

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

Sincerely,  
Student Name  
[You can include your pronouns here as well if you like]



## ***Cover Letter Checklist***

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- Your cover letter is tailored to each job you are applying to (although letters for jobs in the same sector may be similar). Public interest letters are different than private sector or clerkship letters.
- Your cover letter does not assume that the employer has read your resume. (Some read the cover letter first.)
- Your cover letter uses clear and effective topic sentences.
- You carefully crafted an explanation of your merits. Remember, do not just list credentials!
- Your cover letter discusses your involvement in relevant student organizations, moot courts, externships and clinics in order to show demonstrated interest in the employer's work.
- Your cover letter is responsive to the job announcement (if one exists). It is important to read the job posting very carefully.
- You signed your cover letters. An electronic signature is fine.
- Your cover letter is saved as a PDF file, and you will email it as an attachment to your application.

## Cover Letter Samples

### 1L Cover Letters

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

### 2L Cover Letter

- Angelica Vega

### 3L Cover Letter

- Mia Johnson

### Graduate Cover Letters

- Sharma Phuyal
- Yula Virks
- Miao Tian

\*Note: For more cover letters, see [Sample Resume and Cover Letter Pairings.](#))

## Sample 1L Cover Letter

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

December 19, 2023

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

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a first-year student at Columbia Law School (CLS) and am seeking an internship with the Criminal Division of the United States Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of New York for this upcoming summer. I attended a panel on the U.S. Attorney's Offices in New York this fall at CLS and spoke with several students who have participated in internship programs with your office. Given my strong commitment to working in the field of criminal law, and the excellent reviews your office received from other students, I would welcome the opportunity to intern in your office this summer. As a recipient of summer funding from CLS, I am able to accept an unpaid internship.<sup>10</sup>

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Vladimir Eleryk

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<sup>10</sup> Tip: Do not directly copy this introductory paragraph; write an opening that will suit your own individual needs.

## Sample 1L Cover Letter

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

December 4, 2023

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

Dear Ms. Frank:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Eduardo Mazier  
Pronouns: he/him/his

## Sample 1L Cover Letter

444 West 114th Street, #44  
New York, NY 10024  
(212) 555-5544

January 15, 2024

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

Dear Ms. Smith:

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

I developed an interest in reproductive health and women's rights when I worked as a peer educator for Planned Parenthood of Central Texas. This interest was refined in college, where I studied the physiology and technology of reproduction as a biology major and learned more about the connection between women's health, reproductive rights and development in courses on bioethics and public health. During my senior year, I built upon my science background by conducting research and analysis on "fetal pain" for a seminar on Reproduction and the Law. While at law school, I have done research on women's health for the Women's Link Worldwide Project. This coming semester, I will expand my understanding of the legal issues in reproductive and women's rights through participating in a forum with Columbia's Health Law Society.<sup>11</sup>

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

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

Sincerely  
Amy R. Chiu

---

<sup>11</sup> Tip: You are in control of your experience. Seek opportunities to develop skills relevant to jobs of interest to you. A commitment to a specific future project is almost as good as past experience, particularly for a 1L.

## Sample 1L Cover Letter

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

December 5, 2023

Deepa Bijpuria, Immigration Staff Attorney  
Tahirih Justice Center  
201 N. Charles St., Ste. 920  
Baltimore <sup>12</sup>, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Bijpuria:

I am a first-year student at Columbia Law School seeking a summer 2024 internship with your organization. As a graduate of University of Maryland, I would be grateful for the opportunity to return to Maryland this summer and participate in the work of Tahirih Justice Center. As an African immigrant, I truly understand and believe in your mission of protecting immigrant women and girls from violence, and I would be honored to use my legal training for this goal. I have received funding from Columbia for the summer and therefore can accept an unpaid internship.

As both an immigrant from a war-torn region in Africa<sup>13</sup>, and as an anthropology student studying the effects of regional strife on Africa's youth, I have become aware of the social and economic effects that violence can have on individuals. Although my experience has focused on the impacts of war, rather than gender-based violence, my knowledge and commitment to eradicating the effects of violence would serve me well at your organization. While at Columbia, I intend to continue to focus on the issue of violence. I have joined the African Law Students Association, and am organizing a panel of guest speakers next semester, focusing on legal tools to eradicate the effects of violence on the individual. I also look forward to taking classes such as African Human Rights Systems in Comparative Perspective, Anthropology and the Law, Gender Justice and various health law classes. I also plan to participate in Columbia's Immigration Defense externship, and possibly an externship on the prosecution of domestic violence crimes.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tip: 1Ls should try to be geographically flexible, and apply to organizations that are in cities/regions that are less popular with Columbia Law students, such as Baltimore in this case. If you have a personal connection to the region, make sure to mention it in your letter, as that will strengthen your application.

<sup>13</sup> Tip: Although it can be helpful to show familiarity with the issues the organization works on, you need to be careful how much information you provide. Abel fled from a war-torn region and immigrated to the U.S. Although gender violence was not something he was fleeing from, he has seen firsthand the effects of violence on women, and has experienced firsthand the struggles of assimilating in the U.S. Although some employers may think this helps his application, other employers may worry that he is not objective and would be too emotionally impacted by helping clients. Therefore, he was careful in this letter to mention his immigration status, but not delve into all the details.

<sup>14</sup> Tip: Even if you do not have directly relevant experience, you can still write a good cover letter. Think about how your experiences are relevant to the job. Do not highlight your lack of experience; instead, draw parallels to other experiences you have had, or identify similarities. You can also talk about things you plan to do in the future. Abel has no previous legal experience and had to work to support himself so never did any internships. He has never done work with women immigrants or on gender violence/domestic violence issues. He has never worked with legal clients, or done advocacy or policy work, yet he

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

I have enclosed my resume for your review and would appreciate the chance to speak with you further about my application. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Abel Assefa Zenawi

---

does not dwell on how he is NOT a good fit with the organization; rather he focuses on how his past experience would translate to being helpful for this office.

## Sample 1L Cover Letter<sup>15</sup>

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

December 15, 2023

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

Dear Ms. Katz:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Julia Thomas

---

<sup>15</sup> Even if you have absolutely no prior experience working in the field in which you are applying for the summer, do not be intimidated. You can still show your interest in and commitment to the work, as well as highlight the skills you'll bring to the job, as this student does.



## Sample 2L Cover Letter

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

October 2, 2023

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

Dear Mr. Kim:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Angelica Vega

## Sample 3L Cover Letter

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

September 2, 2023

Director, Administration Management and HR Division<sup>16</sup>  
Legal Honors Program  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of General Counsel, Room 10245  
451 Seventh Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20410

To Whom It May Concern:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Mia Johnson

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<sup>16</sup> Tip: If a job posting specifies that applications be sent to a specific address (as in this instance with no name) do not use the name of the individual who may be reviewing your application since you must always remember to follow the directions specified in the job posting.

## Sample Graduate Cover Letter

April 4, 2024

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

Dear Ms. Carroll:

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Sharma Phuyal

## Sample Graduate Cover Letter

62 West 72nd Street  
New York, NY 10111  
(718) 890-5678

August 1, 2023

Fred Sizer, Esq.  
Federal Trade Commission Bureau of Competition  
601 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Mr. Sizer:

I am a 2021 graduate of Columbia Law School seeking an entry-level position with the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Competition for this upcoming fall. Immediately following law school, I clerked for the Honorable Robert N. Chatigny at the District of Connecticut. I am currently clerking for the Honorable John M. Walker, Jr. on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Once my clerkship has concluded, I cannot think of a better place to begin my career than the Federal Trade Commission. The Commission's work in regulating major industries like healthcare and energy has a tremendous effect on the everyday lives of Americans. The Commission considers complex and cutting-edge legal issues—issues I have encountered in academic and professional settings and that are meaningful to me.

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Yula Virks

## Sample Graduate Cover Letter

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

June 15, 2023

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

Dear Ms. Rodriguez:

I am writing to express my interest in a position as a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society. Since graduating from Columbia Law School in 2018, I have worked as a litigator at the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP (“Paul Weiss”). In private practice, I have undertaken a number of projects (some in conjunction with your organization) involving families in the legal system and have acquired broad litigation experience, which has solidified my intent to transition into a career focused on protecting and asserting the rights of children and families.

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Miao Tian

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## Resume and Cover Letter Pairings

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

### Resume and Cover Letter Pairings

- Abel Assefa Zenawi (1L)
- Jasmine Harris (Recent Graduate)
- Stephanie Montenegro (Recent Graduate) (Note: This pairing is an example of a graduate who has a gap in work experience due to leave.)

**Sample: 1L Pairing**<sup>17</sup>

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

December 5, 2020

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

Dear Ms. Bijpuria:

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

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

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

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<sup>17</sup> An [annotated version of this cover letter](#) appears earlier in this toolkit.

I have enclosed my resume for your review and would appreciate the chance to speak with you further about my application. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Abel Assefa Zenawi



**ABEL ASSEFA ZENAWI**

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

**EDUCATION**

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

J.D., expected May 2023

Activities: African Law Students Association

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

B.A., with honors, received May 2020

Major: Anthropology

Activities: Anthropology Student Association  
Semester Abroad in Jamaica

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

**EXPERIENCE**

**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

*Department of Anthropology, Research Assistant*

College Park, MD

June 2020–Aug. 2020

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

**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

*Admissions Assistant*

College Park, MD

Sept. 2019–May 2020

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

**GIANT SUPERMARKET**<sup>18</sup>

*Salesclerk*

Silver Spring, MD

June 2018–Aug. 2019

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

**WALGREENS**

*Stockroom Clerk*

College Park, MD

Aug. 2016–May 2018

Stocked store shelves and organized excess inventory in stockroom.

**LANGUAGE** Amharic, Oromo (fluent)

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<sup>18</sup> This IL included his work experience at Giant Supermarket and Walgreens on his resume to reference skills he developed at these jobs, to demonstrate that he had to work to support himself, and to explain why he did not have any internships. As he starts gaining legal experience, he will take this off his resume. If and when you have more relevant work experience, you will leave positions like this off your resume.

## Sample: Recent Graduate Pairing

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

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

July 21, 2020

Dear Hiring Manager:

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Jasmine Harris

## JASMINE HARRIS

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

### EDUCATION

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

J.D., received May 2018

Honors: Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar

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

Empowering Women of Color, 3L Board Member

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

Research Assistant, Professor Kent Greenawalt, Fall 2018

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

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

**George Washington University**, Washington, DC

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

Major: Government

Activities: *The Hatchet*, Writer and Staff Editor

Study Abroad: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spring 2013

### EXPERIENCE

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

*Judicial Clerk*

Fall 2019-Present

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

*Associate*

Fall 2018-Summer 2019

*Summer Associate*

Summer 2017

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

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

*Educational Opportunities Section Intern*

Fall 2017

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

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

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2017

Conducted legal research and drafted memoranda on topics in mental health, jails, and disabilities law. Drafted portions of brief in pending school reform case.

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

*Summer Intern*

Summer 2016

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

**The Education Trust**, Washington, DC

*Legislative Affairs Assistant; Legislative Affairs Intern*

Winter 2014-Summer 2015

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

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

*Health and Education Policy Intern*

Summer 2013-Fall 2013

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

*Intern*, Newark NJ

Summers 2011, 2012

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

**MEMBERSHIPS**

New Jersey State Bar, 2018; District of Columbia Bar

**LANGUAGES**

Spanish (proficient)

## Sample: Recent Graduate Pairing

202 Main Street, Apt. 14  
Jersey City, NJ 07302  
smm123@columbia.edu

January 16, 2024

The Civil Rights Law Firm, LLP  
77 Madison Avenue, Suite 2B  
New York, NY 10016

Dear Hiring Manager:

I write to express my interest in an associate position at the Civil Rights Law Firm, LLP (“CRLF”). My most recent position as the Fellow for Racial Justice at the Legal Aid Society (“LAS”) in the Special Litigation Unit has allowed me to deeply engage in public interest litigation. At the conclusion of my fellowship, I intend to work at a firm, like CRLF, where I can continue utilizing my excellent litigation skills to defend the civil rights of marginalized communities.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, I share CRLF’s commitment to civil rights work. Even in private practice at White & Case, LLP, my extensive pro bono docket allowed me to work on a number of public interest cases, like an asylum case on behalf of a domestic violence victim and an appeal in New York State Court to aid a struggling non-profit organization. These experiences led me to my current position, where I now focus entirely on zealously representing low-income New Yorkers in class action and impact litigation cases. For example, my team represents a class of drivers in a lawsuit against the New York Taxi and Limousine Commission for unconstitutionally targeting racial minorities in their undercover street hail operations. These cases have only increased my dedication to public interest work, and this passion would greatly benefit me at a public interest law firm.

My litigation experience, which has allowed me to hone my writing, research, and communication skills, will also be an asset to CRLF. At my clerkship in New Jersey, I drafted numerous orders and opinions and witnessed a range of legal advocacy that helped me discern the most effective ways to communicate complicated legal issues. After a break from practice due to health concerns from 2020 to 2022, my clerkship gave me the opportunity to dive back into litigation while learning a tremendous amount about presenting cases in federal court. LAS has further prepared me to be a litigator as I have researched and written many memoranda and motions, participated fully in discussions on strategy and meetings with opposing counsel, and attended court hearings on behalf of our clients.

I am confident that my passion and distinguished litigation experience make me a perfect fit for an associate role at CRLF. I have attached my resume, law school transcript, and writing sample. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like more information.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie Montenegro

## STEPHANIE MONTENEGRO

202 Main Street, Apt. 14, Jersey City, NJ 07302 • [smm123@columbia.edu](mailto:smm123@columbia.edu) • (202) 228-2297

### EDUCATION

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

J.D., received May 2019

Honors: Stone Scholar 2017-2018 (honors)

Activities: *Columbia Human Rights Law Review & Jailhouse Lawyers Manual*, Operations Director Research Assistant for Professor David Pozen  
If/When/How, Events Coordinator and Communications Chair

Note: *Intersectional Employment Discrimination: The Potential Cooperation of Title VII and the ADEA*

**THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY**, Ewing, NJ

B.A., *magna cum laude*, in Political Science, minor in Spanish, received May 2016

Activities: Phi Beta Kappa  
TCNJ Society for Parliamentary Debate, Vice President of Operations

Theses: (1) *Welfare Reforms and Gender Equality*  
(2) *African Americans and Financial Crashes*

### EXPERIENCE

**LEGAL AID SOCIETY SPECIAL LITIGATION UNIT**

New York, NY

*Justice Fellow*

Mar. 2023 – Present

Initiated class action and impact litigation to create systemic change for vulnerable New Yorkers. Drafted and researched complaints and motions for federal and state courts including an appeal to the Second Circuit. Strategized with lead attorneys to plan litigation and participated in discovery meetings with opposing counsel. Scheduled to participate in upcoming oral arguments in the Eastern District of New York.

**UNITED STATES, DISTRICT COURT OF NEW JERSEY**

Newark, NJ

*Judicial Law Clerk*

Aug. 2022 – Dec. 2022

Drafted opinions and conducted research on topics in civil and criminal law. Developed case theories in partnership with the Judge. Prepared the Judge for hearings by writing oral argument outlines and observed the federal judicial process. Managed two interns and trained incoming clerks as the Head Clerk.

**WHITE & CASE, LLP**

New York, NY

*Litigation Associate*

Sep. 2019 – Aug. 2022

*Summer Associate*

Summer 2018

Drafted legal documents including two pro bono appeals for the Supreme Court of the State of New York Appellate Division, Second Department. Honed research skills through work with legal databases to aid in litigation. Attended court hearings and client interviews to collect case information. Received award for pro bono work. Medical leave, Aug. 2020- Jul. 2022.

**SQUIRE PATTON BOGGS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT**

New York, NY

*Legal Extern at Columbia Law School*

Aug. – Dec. 2018

Gained experience in post-conviction relief and general appellate litigation through class discussion, readings, and fieldwork on present cases under the supervision of lead attorneys. Fieldwork included research of case law and social science articles, writing memos and sections of an appellate brief, and assisting in creating a parole packet.

### BAR ADMISSIONS

Admitted in New York State, Southern District of New York, and Eastern District of New York

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## Applying for Jobs: Putting Together the Application

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

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

### Sample Application Email

To: Jose Rivera  
Subject: Application for Summer Internship

Dear Mr. Rivera:

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

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

Best,  
Marty Plum

## Get Organized: Job Tracking Chart

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

**TIP:** [Download this chart template in Excel](#) on our job search tools page.

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



## Attachment Checklist

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

### TRANSCRIPTS

- Official transcripts can be obtained from Columbia University's [Office of the Registrar](#).
- Unofficial transcripts (which usually suffice) are available on [LawNet](#).

### REFERENCES

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

### WRITING SAMPLE

- The sample should be five to ten pages long unless otherwise requested and preferably on a topic that will interest the employer.
- Legal writing for law school or a job (memo, moot court brief, etc.) is almost always preferable. Choose something that shows your best writing.
- The writing sample must be your own and not something that has been heavily edited by others. Be sure NOT to submit a sample containing comments or edits. (This really happens!)
- You can attach a cover sheet (see sample) explaining what the writing sample is (for example, by including a short description of the case, question, or assignment that the writing sample was for). If you use an excerpt, make sure it can stand alone (and note on the cover sheet that it is an excerpt). Your name and contact information should appear at the top of the cover sheet. The formatting should be identical to that of your resume.

- If your writing sample is from a job, you must obtain permission from the employer and redact any confidential information.
- Make sure that your writing is clear and persuasive and that citations are correct. NO TYPOS!
- Be ready to discuss your writing sample during the interview.

## Sample Attachment—References

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(917) 521-3691 | [sja1234@columbia.edu](mailto:sja1234@columbia.edu)

#### REFERENCES

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**Legal writing section instructor**

## Sample Attachment—Writing Sample

### **Madison Johnson**

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

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

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## Afterwards: Following Up

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

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

### Sample Follow-up Email

To: Juhu Thukral  
Subject: Application for Summer Internship

Dear Ms. Thukral,

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

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

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

Best wishes,

Milo Levinson

## GUIDE TO PUBLIC INTEREST INTERVIEWING

This section contains guidance on:

- [Preparing for an interview](#)
- [How to conduct yourself in the interview](#)
- [Common interview questions](#)
- [How to follow up](#), including [sample thank you emails](#)
- [How to negotiate an offer](#), including [sample emails](#)

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

There is no standard format for a public interest interview. An interview can be one-on-one (by itself, or with a half or full day of interviews back-to-back), or a group interview. It can be in-person, by phone, or by video (see below). You might have more than one round of interviews (for example, DA’s offices often have three or four rounds for permanent positions). Talking to other students and alumni who have interviewed at the same organization can help you get a sense of what the interview may look like—but do not be surprised if the format is different than it was in the past.

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

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## Getting Prepared

### Research the Employer

Read the employer’s website thoroughly, familiarizing yourself with the organization’s mission, reviewing recent cases and press releases. Search for the organization on the internet and check out their social media pages. Talk to people (such as former interns, professors, or PI/PS staff), and read about the employer’s work in Lexis/Nexis or other databases. If student evaluations of the employer are available, read them on [Simplicity](#). (Evaluations from internships prior to 2018 can be found on [LawNet](#).) If you know the interviewer’s name, research that person too.

## **Develop Your Narrative**

Think about and practice your answers to the following questions:

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

Be thoughtful and reasoned in your answers. The more you have thought about this, the more confident and enthusiastic you will sound. Convince the employer this is your dream job (without sounding cheesy or as if furthering your careers goals is all that you care about).

## **Practice Sharing Your Narrative**

Practice your answer to “Why do you want [this job] at [this organization]” until you are comfortable with your narrative. Some variation of this question is often the first question asked, and being comfortable with this answer can put you at ease for the rest of your interview.

## **Stay Abreast of Developments in the Field**

Read about current events and advocacy efforts/campaigns related to the organization’s work. Prepare a question or two that shows you have thought about how these developments impact the work of this organization (see below for more details).

## **Know Everything on Your Resume and Cover Letter...**

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

If you are transitioning to a new practice area or do not have experience in the field you are applying for, be ready to explain your interest in this type of work and draw connections to previous jobs or activities.

## **Identify Two or Three Facts You Want the Interviewer to Know about You...**

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

## **Prepare Two to Four Questions to Ask the Employer**

See [Your Questions for the Employer](#).

### **Schedule a Mock Interview with the PI/PS Office**

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

### **Prepare Explanations for Any Inappropriate Content...**

...that you have not deleted on your online profiles and social media. You can also adjust your privacy settings to prevent your accounts from appearing in an online search.

### **Become Familiar with the Basic Law in the Employer's Area of Practice**

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

### **If You Are Asked to Provide References...**

Alert your references so they expect to be contacted. Always ask your references before you list them on an application and give them the opportunity to decline.

Some employers will ask for references with an application, others will ask after a final round interview, and some will ask for them with an application and then again after the final interview. If it becomes clear that the employer is going to reach out to your references, follow up with them. Give your references details about the job you applied for and any particular areas you would like them to highlight as your reference. If you are using a reference that you are not frequently in contact with (such as a former employer), it can be helpful to remind them a bit about what you worked on together.

### **Obtain Information about the Interview Ahead of Time**

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

### **Prepare a Packet of Materials to Bring**

Include your resume and cover letter, as well as a writing sample, list of references, and copy of your transcript, if applicable. Many employers will already have a printed copy of your materials, but it is better to bring a packet and not need it, than need one and not have it.

### **Pick Your Attire Carefully**

Business attire is best, even if your interviewer dresses more casually. Suits are recommended for job fairs and postgraduate job interviews; dress for summer jobs can be slightly less formal (a blazer and pants, dress, or skirt) but still professional. If you need a suit or accessories, please visit the [CLS Financial Wellness webpage](#) (select Career Resources).



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## The Interview

### Logistics

For in-person interviews, arrive at least ten minutes early. Be polite to everyone. (You should always be polite to support staff like receptionists and assistants, in person and by email. Even if they are not involved in your interview, a rude interaction can quickly make its way to the hiring director.)

Your PI/PS adviser may have additional information about how specific organizations run their interviews or make hiring decisions. It never hurts to reach out by email or make an appointment to learn any “insider tips” before you interview.

### General Interviewing Tips

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

- Some interviewers may be put off by note taking, while others may not mind. In general, we recommend that you do not take or refer to notes during the interview, but if you need to, you should do so.

### Phone Interviews

When interviewing by phone, make sure to find a quiet location where no one will interrupt. Do not rustle paper or make other noises. If you plan to use headphones, test them ahead of time. If you do not have a quiet place to take an interview by phone, reach out to [the PI/PS Office](#) and we will help you find a quiet space at the law school.

Try to sound enthusiastic but focused. Instead of body language, read verbal cues. Some students find it helpful to stand during phone interviews to maintain alertness and formality. If it is a group interview, try not to be frustrated if you cannot tell who is asking the question, or if the group has conversations among themselves.

Some students will have notes available during their phone interviews, but make sure you are not reading your answers directly from the page—even over the phone, interviewers can tell.

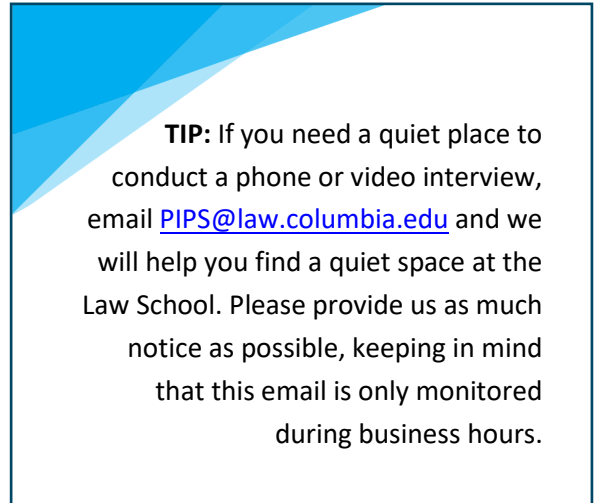
### Video Interviews

When interviewing via video using Zoom, Teams, Skype, WebEx, or FaceTime, make sure that your application is working properly and your onscreen name is appropriate and professional. Wear full professional attire. Choose a location that is quiet and office-like (or at least not messy) and that whatever is in view of the camera is appropriate.

Make sure the lighting does not cast shadows on your face. Look at the camera, and do not have other distractions up on your screen like notes or your web browser. Close any programs that might generate noise during the interview (e.g., Outlook chiming as emails arrive in your inbox). Try not to get frustrated or distracted by the time lag or by interviewers' off-screen conversations. Remember that everything you do can be seen on their screen, so general interviewing tips apply

## ***Six Common Areas of Questioning***

Every organization has a different interview style, but public interest employers often cover similar subject areas.



As much as you can, illustrate your answers to the questions below with examples from your previous experience. (If you have previous legal experience or have worked with clients, take care to maintain their confidentiality; use general details, leaving out names and other identifying information.)

Throughout the interview, be sure to listen as well as speak.

### 1) Questions Assessing Your Commitment to the Issue Area

Often the interview will start with questions such as:

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

*These are the hardest questions to answer, but they are usually the most important.* To answer well, you need to understand the organization's work and mission. You also need to have thought about what you bring to the table and why you want work at this particular organization. You need to be confident and thoughtful but not arrogant.

Practice your answer to “Why do you want [this job] at [this organization]” until you are comfortable with your narrative. Some variation of this question is often the first one asked, and being comfortable with your answer can put you at ease for the rest of the interview.

For interviews in an office with an elected or appointed official (including offices of the district attorney, the public defender, and the attorney general) be sure you know the name of the official. Similarly, if applying for a role that serves an elected official, take the time to learn not only about that elected official, but also about the elected officials who represent *you*. For example, if interviewing with a member of Congress, not only should you learn about that member's priorities, but also your own local representative and issues important to your community. Doing so will demonstrate a passion for politics and general knowledge of the field.

Other questions you might be asked (these are more likely when interviewing for a permanent position than a summer job):

- *What do you think is the most pressing issue in our field today [such as international human rights, environment, civil rights, poverty law, etc.], and how would you resolve it?*
- *Do you think we should continue to emphasize our priority issues, or should we revamp our approach? (Be careful!)*

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

## 2) Questions About Your Resume

Before your interview, think about the story you want to tell through your resume. What have you learned from your previous positions—both what you liked and disliked—that has led you to want the job you are now interviewing for? How has your experience in law school and through extracurriculars informed your interest in this type of work? How does this position fit into your overall career narrative?

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

Consider that the public interest world can be small. If your interviewer mentions someone they know from your prior employer or school, take note! They may be contacted about you whether or not you list them as references. If you know the person, reach out to them afterwards and let them know about your interview and current job search.

### 3) Questions Assessing You as a Person

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

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

### 4) Questions Assessing Your Legal Mind

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

- *Tell me about your writing sample.*

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

This last question is less likely to occur in interviews for summer positions than those for permanent positions at organizations like public defender offices, DA’s offices, city law departments, or impact litigation organizations. To prepare for this question, have a basic familiarity with the main constitutional principles, statutes, and cases that the organization focuses on. Remember that there is not necessarily a “right” answer; more often, they want to hear how you approach legal or factual analysis, whether you have a basic familiarity with the law that applies, and whether you stand your ground when challenged. If it is clear that the hypothetical requires knowledge in an area of law (e.g. rules of evidence) that you are not yet versed in, note that for the interviewer and explain what assumptions you are making in your answer.

### **5) Questions Assessing Your Ethics**

Certain legal organizations, such as prosecutor offices and public defender offices, are quite concerned with a candidate’s ethical code and will pose interview questions (usually hypotheticals) that test a candidate’s ability to weigh their obligations to the client or office against other concerns. Reviewing the state’s code of professional responsibility can help prepare a candidate for these types of questions, although some questions will rely simply on the candidate’s judgment and ability to discern right from wrong. If you are preparing for an interview with a public defender office or a prosecutor’s office, reach out to the [specialist advisers](#) in the PI/PS Office to help you prepare.

### **6) Other Questions You May Encounter**

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

### **YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER**

You should have two to four questions prepared to ask the interviewer. Be ready to ask them (and any follow-up questions) at any point in the interview—not all interviewers wait until the end to ask if you have questions. You do not need to ask all your questions, but you want to prepare enough questions so that if the employer answers some of them during the course of your discussion, you are not left empty-handed.

You should know everything on the organization’s website, so do not ask basic questions that make you look ill informed.

You can ask questions such as:

- How do you choose your cases/projects/clients/priorities/advocacy agenda/communities served/legal mechanisms? How do you staff your cases/projects/advocacy efforts? Is the work done in teams? Does the same staff member stay with a project from start to finish?
- How does your organization work with others in the field?
- How do different departments work together? Is there coordination among your various advocacy efforts?
- How have your priorities changed over time? Why?

Also, ask about:

- Specific legal issues or policies related to the work they do.
- The effects of a recent Supreme Court ruling (or a federal or state court ruling, recent legislation, or a current event) on the work they do or on their future agenda.
- The balance between litigation and policy work (or other advocacy mechanisms that they employ).
- The summer program, but only if your questions have not answered in the interview and the information is not readily available. For example, does a summer intern work with one supervisor or multiple supervisors? How does a summer intern get assigned work? Questions about supervision, training, and expectations are fair, but also ask probing questions that show you have given thought to the organization and their work.
- Ask about the hiring timeline if they do not mention it. (This does not count as one of your two to four questions.)

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

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

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

## INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

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

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## After the Interview

### Send a Thank You Note

Opinions vary as to whether you should send these for every internship interview, but our general advice is to do so. The protocol for postgraduate jobs is clearer: you should definitely send a thank you. A handwritten note is not expected; indeed, email is best. Assume your emails will be forwarded to everyone who participated in the interview, as well as any other hiring managers.

Email the people who interviewed you a brief note thanking them for taking the time to meet with you, reiterating your interest in the position, and perhaps highlighting something specific from the interview that reinforced your enthusiasm for the role. Do not try to correct mistakes you made at the interview. If something has come to your attention since the interview that you think will interest them (like a news article), attach it to the email and mention it in the text.

Send either one email addressed to all your interviewers (especially if it was a group interview) or separate emails, making sure they are not form letters and are directed to that specific person. (See the [samples](#) that start on the next page). Send the note within 24 hours. Check for typos and errors.

If you do not have the email addresses for everyone you interviewed with, see if you can find them on the organization's website or figure out the email naming conventions (e.g. `firstname.lastname@org.org` or `firstinitial.lastname@org.org`).

### GRAD TIP

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

### Do Not Make Promises You Can't Keep

In thank you notes and follow-up emails, reiterate your interest in the position but chose your words carefully. If, after your interviews, one job stands out as your top choice—meaning you would definitely accept an offer—tell that employer so explicitly. But do not say it (“you are my top choice”) or even suggest it (“this would be my dream job”) to more than one employer. Doing so can damage your professional



reputation and that of Columbia Law School. You will be in a very bad position turning an employer down after you have told them they were your first choice. (See “Negotiating Offers,” below, for more information.).

### **Maintain a Professional Relationship**

Do not connect with your interviewers on social media, including LinkedIn.

### **Follow Up**

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

### **After Accepting an Offer...**

Once you accept an offer, you **must** withdraw your applications with all other employers. Accepting an offer and then later turning them down reflects poorly on you and Columbia Law students as a whole. If you feel you have truly extraordinary circumstances that will require you to turn down a position you have previously accepted, immediately contact a PI/PS adviser.

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

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

### **Tip: Use a Tracking Chart**

Using a tracking chart like [the one included in this toolkit](#) can be invaluable for tracking your different job applications.

## ***Sample Thank You Notes***

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

To: Margie Howardson; Dee Dee Weber  
Subject: My Interview

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

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

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

#### **Email #1**

To: Jane Sykes  
Subject: Thank You

Dear Ms. Sykes,

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

Again, thank you for speaking with me.

All the best,  
Leslie Schorr

**Email #2**

To: Clarence Wood  
Subject: Thank You

Dear Mr. Wood,

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

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

All the best,  
Leslie Schorr

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## Negotiating Offers

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

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

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

Then contact the organization in which you have greater interest, explain that you have another offer but that their organization is your first choice, and ask them if there is a timeline for them to make a decision. If they have already indicated to you the date by which they expect to make decisions, you can ask if they can give you a decision before your offer deadline. ***Remember: only do this with one organization (see above).***

You can also reach out to any other organizations where you have interviewed to let them know about your offer and your deadline for accepting. You can ask those organizations if it is possible to have an update on your application by the deadline for answering your offer, but do not tell them they are your top choice. It is reasonable for an applicant to want as much information as possible prior to accepting an offer and withdrawing from all other opportunities—just as it is reasonable for an organization to be unable to advance their timeline based on another offer.

Remember to get back to the first organization within the timeframe you have identified—do not ask for additional time!

If you apply to corporate law firms for summer positions, you are likely to receive an offer from one or more of the firms before you hear from public interest employers. If you are actively pursuing positions with public interest or government employers, you may request a firm to extend its offer acceptance deadline until as late as April 1. Firms are not obligated to grant an extension. Please note: you may hold open only one law firm offer in such circumstances. See advisers from the [Office of Private Sector Careers](#) and the [PI/PS Office](#) for further guidance.

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

Once you have accepted an offer, you should not change your mind; ***accepting a job or internship is a final decision***. Please remember that the legal marketplace is a small world. Public interest employers speak to each other, and the public interest and the private sectors are not as separate as you might think—so you do not want to burn any bridges. Additionally, poor behavior on your part may hurt the chances of other Columbia Law students to be considered for employment with that organization in the future. If you have questions, please see a [PI/PS adviser](#).

### **GRAD TIP**

The Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers encourages graduates, especially women and people of color, to negotiate their salaries from a place of knowledge about the job market. To that end, we have collected data from graduates who report their salaries from public interest, government, and international nongovernmental jobs. The Salary Survey includes class years, geographic regions, employer descriptions, salaries, benefits, and links to select employers' salary schedules. Find the [Salary Survey](#) on the [Financing Your Public Interest/Public Service Career](#) page, under Planning Resources. Questions? Contact Grace Shim at [ghc2102@columbia.edu](mailto:ghc2102@columbia.edu).

## **Sample Email Asking for More Time**

To: Mark Farrell  
Subject: Summer Internship Offer

Dear Mr. Farrell:

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

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

Best Regards,  
Kaori Lim

### Sample Email to Follow Up on Outstanding Application (with no other offer)

To: Ronen Goldberg  
Subject: Summer Internship Application

Dear Mr. Goldberg,

I am a second-year student at Columbia Law School who recently applied for a summer internship with your office. I wanted to confirm that you received my application materials and follow up on the status of my application. I remain very interested in Advancement Project's work and the opportunity to intern in your office. If you need any further information from me, please let me know.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Dermot

### Sample Email to Follow Up on Outstanding Application (with another offer that is not your top choice)

To: Edith Kim  
Subject: Summer Internship Application

Dear Ms. Kim,

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

I remain very interested in the chance to work at NYLPI this summer and am hoping you could let me know if my application is still being considered. If so, I would very much appreciate the opportunity to interview with your office before mid-December.

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

Sincerely,  
Suraj Patel

## Sample Email to Follow Up on Outstanding Application, After an Interview (with another offer)

To: Ben Weiner  
Subject: Summer Internship Application

Dear Mr. Weiner,

It was wonderful to meet with your team last week and learn more about the summer internship program at the Center for Appellate Litigation. I am writing because I have received an offer for another position for the summer and I have been asked to respond by December 15th. I remain very interested in spending my summer with CAL. Would it be possible to have a decision on my application before December 15th?

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Shaina Barrett

## Sample Email to Follow Up on Outstanding Application at Your Top Choice Employer (with another offer that is not your top choice)

**IMPORTANT:** Send only one email like this to a first-choice employer, and do not state that an office is your first choice if it is not (see discussion above). Also, it may be better to speak by phone. Consult with the [PI/PS Office](#).

To: Paula Williams  
Subject: Summer Internship Application

Dear Ms. Williams,

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Elliot Green

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

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

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

To: Jennifer Alvarez  
Subject: Summer Internship Offer

Dear Ms. Alvarez,

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

Best,  
John Lee

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

To: David Blake  
Subject: Summer Internship

Dear Mr. Blake,

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

Sincerely,  
Jasmine Butler



# GUIDE TO NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

This section contains guidance on:

- [How to network](#)
- [Setting up an informational interview](#) (including [sample emails](#))
- [Preparing for an informational interview](#) (including [questions to ask at the interview](#))
- [Following up on an informational interview](#)
- [Acing table talk at a career fair](#)

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

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

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

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

## ***How Do You Network?***

The easiest way to network is to talk to contacts you already have (such as other law students, professors, PI/PS Office staff, family members, and former employers) about your interests and professional goals. In

turn, those individuals may be able to give you job leads, offer you advice and information about a particular organization or position, and/or introduce you to individuals at that organization or in the field, which will allow you to expand your network. Take advantage of our office, Columbia alumni, fellow students, professors, internship and pro bono supervisors, and speakers who come to campus.

Doing informational interviews is probably the most important part of networking. Although it may feel awkward, the process is quite straightforward: it simply requires making contact (usually via email) with individuals at organizations or in fields of interest and asking to meet with them informally to learn more about their work. You can suggest meeting at their office or over coffee or lunch, or you can ask what they prefer. Some individuals may only be willing to speak via telephone or videoconference (e.g., Zoom). Even though remote meetings are not ideal because they may make it harder to establish rapport, they still allow you to introduce yourself and obtain information.

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

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

### ***Other Tips***

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

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

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

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## Setting Up an Informational Interview

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

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

Make sure to follow up by phone within a few days of sending your request for the interview.

### ***Responding to Introductory Emails***

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

## Sample Email 1: Response to an Introductory Email

To: Jacob Varna  
Bcc: Professor Yang  
Subject: Connecting about Housing Work

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

Mr. Varna,

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

Best,  
Shannon Brown

## Sample Email 2: Request for Informational Interview

To: Miranda Hayes  
Subject: Meeting this summer

Dear Ms. Hayes,

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Lester Aboye

### Sample Email 3: Request from a Student to a Recent Graduate

To: Emily Brown  
Subject: Referred by Columbia PI/PS Office

Dear Emily,

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

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

Rosa

### Sample Email 4: Networking Email

To: Hon. Claudia Damasceno  
Subject: Follow-up to our conversation

Dear Judge Damasceno,

I enjoyed meeting you today at the New York State Bar Association Committee on Women in the Law meeting. Thank you so much for your offer to brainstorm with me about new career directions and would like to set up a time to do so. Would you be available to meet in the next week or two for a quick coffee?

In the meantime, I will contact Professor Kirby at Columbia, as you suggested, for any contacts she may have, as well as Lynn Hecht Schafran at Legal Momentum to learn more about the National Judicial Education Program and the intersection between the courts and women's rights advocacy.

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

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

## Sample Email 5: Networking

To: Anne Finder  
Subject: Legislative Affairs/Advocacy

Dear Ms. Finder,

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

Best,  
Igor Klovkov

## Sample Email 6: Email to a Columbia Graduate

To: William Mwangi  
Subject: Columbia alum interested in immigration advocacy

Dear William,

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

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

Warmest regards,  
Cynthia

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## Preparing for an Informational Interview

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

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

Aim to impress contacts with your knowledge of the area of law and of their organization's work, as well as the individual person's work, if possible. Do background preparation, and do not ask about things readily ascertainable on their organization's website. Be ready to answer questions about your interest in the area of law or their organization and about your background and goals. The contact will be assessing you in addition to providing you with information.

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

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

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## After the Interview

At the meeting's close, ask for a business card so that you can follow up. People expect to be asked. Send a short thank you (email is fine) immediately after the interview. (See [samples](#).)

Keep in contact without being imposing or invasive. Build on the interview—for example, reach out to contacts the interviewee provided or follow their suggested tips. If the interview leads to a job or something else significant, let them know and thank them again. It may be helpful to schedule a follow-up email in your calendar.

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

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## Tips for Table Talks

Employer information tables at career fairs (“table talk”) allow you to learn about employers and lay groundwork for future applications. Table talk *can* result in an internship offer, so take advantage of the opportunity.

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

#### **MAKE A PLAN**

- REVIEW the list of employers attending the fair, identify those that interest you, and check the days they will be holding table talk.
- PRIORITIZE—select eight to twelve employers to target.
- PLAN to visit employers you did not get an interview with—slots are usually assigned by lottery, so you do not view it as a rejection. For virtual fairs, try to get a table talk slot with employers.

#### **DO YOUR RESEARCH**

- RESEARCH each employer, using the job fair listings and the employer's own website.
- LEARN about its mission and work.
- CONSIDER which of the employer's divisions, units, or projects are of particular interest.

#### **HAVE AN APPROACH**

- OUTLINE what you will say and practice with someone.
- “My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am a 1L/2L/3L/LL.M. at Columbia Law School seeking an [internship] for next [summer, fall, spring]. I am particularly interested in your organization because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- BRING plenty of copies of your resume.



- BE PREPARED to discuss anything on your resume, but highlight three experiences/skills that are your most attractive credentials.
- CRAFT four questions to demonstrate your interest in and knowledge of the organization.
- ASK the interviewer about their work and career.
- DRAFT an individualized cover letter for your top-choice employers.
- GET THE BUSINESS CARDS/CONTACT INFORMATION of the people you met.

### **ARRIVE EARLY AND BE FLEXIBLE**

- VISIT tables at in-person fairs when you see they are free, not necessarily in order of priority.
- CREATE an inclusive conversation if an employer representative is engaging several students at once (rather than just you). This will show your ability to lead and to work with others.

## ***Taking the Lead in Table Talk***

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### **Create the interview.**

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

### **Be the interviewer.**

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

### **Be interested and enthusiastic.**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Wrap it up.**

The employer is there to talk to many students, so be aware of the time limitations. If you initiate the wrap-up, do not be shy about reiterating your interest, asking if you may leave a resume, and inquiring

about the process you should follow if you wish to submit a formal application. Make sure you have all the information you need: the hiring attorney's name and contact information, the materials required, and the timeframe. Then ask for their card, shake the representative's hand firmly, smile, look them in the eye, and thank them for their time.

**Follow up.**

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

# APPENDIX

## **An Overview of Public Interest Work**

This is a broad overview of public interest, government, and human rights work. Please make sure to consult our webpages and additional PI/PS Office resources for more information.

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

To assist you in this process, we identify the most common practice settings, with descriptions of work types and examples of issue areas identified for each one, in the next section. (Be aware, though, that in many organizations these categories will overlap.) In the final section, we provide a general list of public interest issues areas.

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## **Practice Settings and Advocacy Approaches**

### ***Nonprofit Legal Services Organizations***

Civil legal services organizations (referred to as “legal services” or “legal aid” in some jurisdictions) provide services directly to individual low-income clients, at no cost or on a sliding scale. This work is often referred to as “direct service work” or “direct legal services” because the lawyers work directly with their clients, on their individual legal needs. Areas of practice include, but are not limited to, housing, family, domestic violence, consumer, government benefits, employment, health, immigration, and education. Most legal services offices focus on a range of practice areas, although some specialize in one area or one specific population. In some areas, public defender offices (see below) will also have units that provide civil legal services.

Legal services providers have substantial contact with clients. Lawyers do significant client interviewing and counseling, investigation, meeting with witnesses, case preparation, out of court advocacy, negotiation, and litigation. Legal services lawyers appear in housing court, family court, immigration court, and civil court and before administrative agencies. In some offices, lawyers are involved in related law reform efforts and self-help and community education.

When assessing the practice areas and organizations, consider things like caseload size, average length of case, utilization of oral advocacy versus written advocacy, procedural posture of the cases you would take on, etc. Talk to attorneys who work in different types of direct services to get a sense of their working lifestyle and what resonates most with your own desires.

## ***Nonprofit Law Reform Organizations***

Law reform organizations focus on efforts to bring about social change that will impact more than one person. Generally, they focus on a particular issue area or on a particular group of people. Lawyers in these organizations tend to use a variety of advocacy tools, including “impact litigation” (litigation on behalf of selected clients, aimed at changing the law for many people rather than an individual client), “legislative advocacy” (to influence lawmaking bodies to enact or reform the law or help lobbyists and other advocates in their work), investigative reporting and media work (to publicize a legal problem or reform efforts), “policy advocacy” (which can take many forms but is generally geared at identifying legal problems and advocating for solutions such as legislative change or legal reform), and legal education (usually focused on helping individuals learn their rights and how to exercise them).

Lawyers in law reform organizations generally do significant amounts of legal research, writing and analysis. Many are involved in large-scale litigation. They tend to become specialized in a particular subject area. Law reform organizations focus on a wide range of issues (such as immigration, the environment, women, First Amendment, voting or other constitutional issues, civil rights, human rights, and so forth) and can work on both domestic and international platforms. See more about [international public interest work](#), below.

## ***Government Practice***

There is an extraordinary array of legal jobs in all branches and at all levels of government across a variety of topic areas. As a rule, government legal jobs offer attorneys the opportunity to work on interesting and novel legal problems that impact the public. Even relatively junior attorneys frequently are able to assume great responsibility quickly and, in most cases, enjoy job stability. Government attorneys have the chance to serve the public while maintaining (with some notable exceptions) a satisfying work/life balance.

Lawyers work at all levels of government: local, state, federal and multinational. In fact, the United States is the largest legal employer in the world/. The Department of Justice serves as the nation’s law firm, employing more than 10,000 attorneys nationwide in a variety of areas including litigation (both criminal and civil), policy, and rulemaking. In most states, the Office of the Attorney General serves a similar function—representing the state and its officials in many civil and criminal proceedings. Of course, types of practices and areas of jurisdiction vary from state to state. Local law departments and municipal agencies also provide important legal services on behalf of the public. If you are interested in a particular state or municipality, you should research the practice of the offices in that area to understand the function of the office.

Government agencies at the local, state, and federal level employ attorneys in many different capacities. For example, many agencies have departments that engage in the following types of practice: litigation, rulemaking, law enforcement, and coordinating legislative and regulatory priorities. At a general counsel’s office, an attorney may focus on litigation, ethics, labor and employment, or procurement, or serve

as a general legal advisor to the agency and its principal. Government agencies focus on an enormous array of subject areas, from both the affirmative and defensive sides—including environmental, antitrust, labor, health, reproductive rights, housing, civil rights, national security, monetary policy, and international issues. They also do “corporate” transactional work, such as real estate, contracts, and economic development.

The legislative branches of local, state, and federal governments also have lawyers who advise on legislation and other legal issues, formulate public policy, and represent lawmaker or institutional interests on committees or in other forums. For example, members of Congress employ lawyers in their personal offices. Additionally, members of Congress sit on a diverse array of committees, and those committees employ lawyers to advise members of the committee.

While legal jobs in the judicial branch are most often thought of as short-term clerkships, there are opportunities for lawyers to serve as staff attorneys or career clerks or in judicial administration.

The government legal world is vast and can be difficult to navigate. Students interested in government should consult with [PI/PS advisers](#) and our relevant [publications](#) to determine the best path.

## ***Criminal Defense***

Funded by the government, privately as nonprofits, or through a combination, these offices provide defense attorneys for indigent defendants in criminal cases. Some offices will also have attorneys handling appellate work or providing legal assistance for the civil consequences of criminal cases (for example, housing, immigration, and family issues). A public defender often has a varied caseload that can include misdemeanors like DUIs and low-level assaults as well as felonies ranging from weapons possession and narcotics to homicide and sex crimes.

In some jurisdictions, parents facing removal of their children are also provided an attorney at no cost to them. Generally, these offices are called “family defense” or “parental representation” offices and function similarly to a criminal public defender.

Federal defenders defend indigent defendants in federal courts. These include financial fraud, national security, weapons-dealing, organized crime, trespassing on federal land, and many other areas. Federal defender offices typically do not hire directly out of law school, but rather hire attorneys who have practiced for several years as defense lawyers in government or private practice.

As a general matter, public defenders—including new lawyers—are responsible for all phases of representation, including interviewing clients, investigating charges, interviewing witnesses, motion practice, legal research and writing, trial strategy, negotiation and plea bargaining, and preparing for and conducting hearings and trials. Some defense organizations employ an interdisciplinary approach and include social workers or other non-lawyers as part of the team helping each client.

Students interested in public defense should consult with [PI/PS advisers](#) for more information.

## ***Criminal Prosecution***

There are local, state, and federal government offices that prosecute criminal cases. Prosecutors enforce criminal laws of the local, state, or federal jurisdiction they serve (some offices that are traditionally involved primarily in criminal prosecution also undertake certain civil work on behalf of the jurisdiction). Unlike criminal defense attorneys, prosecutors do not have individual clients.

At the local level, the district attorney's (DA) offices prosecute criminal cases and enforce the criminal laws of their jurisdiction. A notable exception to this general rule is Washington, DC, where general crimes are prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office. DA's offices are organized by county. Junior attorneys at a DA's office generally assume significant responsibility from the outset. Depending on the structure of an individual district attorney's office, an assistant district attorney is responsible for some or all phases of a criminal case, including the complaint, plea negotiations, arraignment, presentation to a grand jury, investigation, interviewing of witnesses, issuing of subpoenas, conduct of hearings, questioning of defendants, cross-examination of defense witnesses and, ultimately, trying of a case. An assistant district attorney often has a varied caseload that may include homicides, narcotics, fraud, identity theft, cyber-crime, hate crimes, violent crimes, domestic violence, sex crimes, larceny, child abuse, weapons possession, and more.

State attorney general offices will usually have a criminal division that investigates and prosecutes cases of statewide significance. Depending on the state, a state attorney general's office may focus on any number of issues, such as insurance fraud, public integrity issues, organized crime, or tax fraud.

U.S. attorney's offices prosecute federal crimes in federal courts. These include financial fraud, national security, weapons dealing, organized crime, and illegal entry to the United States. U.S. attorney caseloads are often lighter than at the local level; however, the cases tend to involve longer and more complex investigations and trials. U.S. attorney's offices usually do not hire directly out of law school, but hire attorneys who have several years in government or private practice.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) shares responsibility for the prosecution of federal crimes. The Criminal Division of the DOJ has specialized sections in areas that include fraud, narcotics, organized crime, and terrorism. In addition, lawyers at the DOJ provide policy and logistical support to U.S. attorney's offices.

Interested students should consult with [PI/PS advisers](#) and [publications](#) for more information.

## ***International Public Interest Work***

Types of international public interest work vary widely, as do the settings in which attorneys practice. See the [International Public Interest Job Search Toolkit Supplement](#) at [law.columbia.edu/careers/public-interest/job-search-tools](http://law.columbia.edu/careers/public-interest/job-search-tools) for a more detailed overview. International public interest practice can include human

rights and public international law work. Settings include U.S. government agencies working on international issues (such as the Department of State or the Department of Commerce); intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) (such as the United Nations, the World Bank, or the Organization of American States), international tribunals (such as the African Court of Human and People’s Rights or the International Criminal Court); nonprofit organizations in the U.S. (such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International); and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) abroad (focusing on such areas as sustainable development, human rights, or transitional justice).

Again, the type of work varies greatly, though international employers generally require proficiency in at least one foreign language and demonstration of an ability to live and work within different cultures. It is important to take steps to define the area of international work that interests you: location (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America/the Caribbean, Middle East, United States/Canada), type of organization, and area of law. Often—for a summer internship—you will be able to draw on experiences you had prior to law school.

### ***Private Public Interest Law Firms***

Public interest/civil rights law firms are mission-driven private law practices that focus on litigation to address social or economic justice problems. These firms may range in size from a few lawyers to more than 50. Some firms focus very specifically on an issue (for example, employment discrimination, civil rights, labor law, police brutality, or immigration) while others have a broad range of cases and matters, sometimes even including a small docket of private sector matters to finance the work. The litigation can range from direct representations to large class actions. The [specialized tools](#) section of our job search tools webpage includes

[Public Interest/Civil Rights Law Firms FAQs](#) and a [list](#) of firms throughout the country, along with the names of alumni who are happy to speak about their experience. (The list requires UNI login.)

### ***Alternative Public Interest Lawyering***

A number of public interest organizations emphasize nontraditional approaches to law reform. These nonprofits deemphasize litigation in favor of such strategies as community organizing, coalition-building, media, education, and developing alternatives to litigation. While public interest organizations invariably

**IMPORTANT NOTE  
ON PUBLIC INTEREST FIRMS:**

The inclusion of a law firm in PI/PS Office resources does not guarantee that it will qualify for Columbia Summer Funding (CSF) or the Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP). Past eligibility for CSF and/or LRAP does not guarantee that a firm will qualify in the future.

To verify a firm's current eligibility, contact [CSFhelp@law.columbia.edu](mailto:CSFhelp@law.columbia.edu) and/or [LRAP@law.columbia.edu](mailto:LRAP@law.columbia.edu) before applying or accepting an offer.

use a variety of strategies to advance their work and the interests of the clients and communities they represent, some are designed to favor such nontraditional approaches.

For organizations that do community organizing and education or collaborate with community groups, lawyers work closely and frequently with community members. Other organizations may focus on project development, in which case research, collaboration with stakeholders, writing, and coalition-building would comprise much of the work. Another example of alternative public interest lawyering is serving as in-house counsel to nonprofits, such as hospitals, museums, universities or advocacy organizations. Serving as in-house counsel in this capacity would entail mostly transactional work in a range of areas impacting the organization—employment, tax, contracts, etc.

### ***Alternatives (Altogether) to Traditional Public Interest Lawyering***

Of course, lawyers can and do work in many areas and organizations where they do not practice law at all. Legal training and skills can be useful in a range of positions that may not require a law degree, such as policy analysis, journalism, nonprofit management, foundation work, economic development, and alternative dispute resolution. Other skills and expertise would be important as well: for example, skills such as writing, program management, languages, or mediation, and expertise in financial or other technical areas. In almost all situations, however, we would encourage you to do legal work for at least your first summer, and—if you are so inclined—pursue non-legal positions later. Legal internships can be found at a range of organizations that would expose you to non-legal work as well. Only jobs that make full-time use of a law degree qualify for LRAP.

### ***Courts***

Working for the courts—such as clerking for a judge or serving as a court staff attorney, or eventually serving in the judiciary—is another potential legal path. For information, please contact the [Office of Judicial Careers](mailto:judicialcareers@law.columbia.edu) at [judicialcareers@law.columbia.edu](mailto:judicialcareers@law.columbia.edu).

### ***Academia***

Teaching at a law school is another career option. For more information, visit Columbia's Careers in Law Teaching Program site, [law.columbia.edu/careers/academic-careers/careers-law-teaching](http://law.columbia.edu/careers/academic-careers/careers-law-teaching).



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## Legal Issues

There is a vast array of legal topics and legal subject areas that you can pursue with your law degree. Below are some examples of these issues.

AIDS/HIV  
Animal Rights  
Arts  
Bankruptcy  
Children/Youth  
Civil Rights  
Community Development  
Consumer  
Criminal (Prosecution, Defense, Death Penalty, Prisoners' Rights)  
Disability  
Domestic Violence  
Economic Justice  
Education  
Elder Law  
Employment/Labor  
Environment/Energy/Environmental Justice  
Family Law  
Farmworker  
Financial Regulation  
First Amendment  
Gender Rights  
Government Accountability  
Health  
Housing/Foreclosure  
Human Rights  
Immigration/Refugee  
LGBTQIA+  
National Security  
Native American Rights  
Nonprofit Law  
Poverty  
Racial Justice  
Reproductive Rights  
Transitional Justice  
Transportation  
Voting/Campaign Finance  
Women's Rights