

Careers in Criminal Law and Policy



OFFICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST PROGRAMS
UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW

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ABOUT UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW

UCLA School of Law, founded in 1949, is the youngest major law school in the nation and has established a tradition of innovation in its approach to teaching, research, and scholarship. With a rigorous public interest curriculum, the school is a preeminent training ground for students committed to careers across a spectrum of public interest practice areas.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST PROGRAMS

The Office of Public Interest Programs strives to enhance UCLA School of Law's commitment to public service by offering an array of services to students and alumni. The Office's principal goal is to encourage students and alumni to embrace a career that incorporates an ongoing commitment to public service.

ABOUT THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAM

The Criminal Justice Program (CJP) serves as a central hub for research, education, and special projects in criminal law and juvenile justice at UCLA Law. The CJP has several key areas of focus, including police brutality and accountability, criminal law and immigration enforcement, pretrial detention and bail policy, collateral consequences of criminal convictions, youth justice and the family regulation system, restorative and transformative justice, and alternatives to policing and prosecution. Research undertaken by CJP faculty and staff help to inform criminal law and policy at both the national and local levels. The CJP also engages law students directly in research, policy advocacy, and legal advocacy in the fields of criminal law and youth justice.

INTRODUCTION

The United States not only has the largest incarcerated population in the world, but also has the highest incarceration rate in the world, relative to the population.¹ Issues surrounding the criminal and juvenile legal system are increasingly present in media and policymaking as the U.S. grapples with the impact of mass incarceration, particularly on communities of color. Laws, law-making, and lawyers are implicated in these calls for reform and transformation.

This Guide provides an overview of the various career paths in criminal law and policy. There are a plethora of ways that lawyers can influence the criminal legal system. Lawyers work to expose existing issues in the system, to assert the rights of people incarcerated after they are no longer entitled to appointed counsel, and to advocate for law and policy change based in data and research, to name a few. Each one of these areas requires a different set of skills and experience.

This Guide seeks to provide students with an overview of the diverse pathways to practicing criminal law and informing criminal justice policy and to provide students with some tips about how to navigate this landscape and find a fulfilling career path. The aim of this Guide is not to list every single career option in criminal law and policy, but rather to give students an overview and an idea of what to expect as they seek to make an impact in the criminal legal field. Students interested in working as a prosecutor or defense attorney should consult those respective career guides: [Careers in Prosecution](#) and [Careers in Public Defense](#).

As a primary matter, students considering career paths should consider what sort of advocate they would like to be and the kind of work that they enjoy. For example, in exploring impact litigation and advocating for the rights of people who are incarcerated, students will have the opportunity to develop litigation skills such as reviewing discovery, writing motions, and taking or defending depositions. Involvement in direct services work also means that students will develop client interviewing skills and have the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with clients. By contrast, policy- and research-focused positions will require a broad understanding of the politics and interactions among government stakeholders, national or international best practices in criminal law, and persuasive writing skills. These types of positions are unlikely to involve direct client representation, but they do provide an opportunity to work in coalition and across sectors to advance systems-wide change. If you are unsure where your strengths lie or what type of work is most compelling, you may opt for an externship or summer internship in more than one of these categories; this will help you develop your working style and discover how you wish to make an impact.

In order to highlight the various pathways for criminal justice careers, this Guide is divided into eight Parts. The first five Parts each cover a different type of advocacy work that is pursued by

¹ Peter Wagner & Wanda Bertram, “What Percent of the U.S. is Incarcerated?” (*And Other Ways to Measure Mass Incarceration*), PRISON POL’Y INITIATIVE (Jan. 16, 2020), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/01/16/percent-incarcerated/>.

lawyers in the criminal law field: litigation, direct client representation, academic institutions, policy and legislative advocacy, and organizing. Although we have grouped example sites under these categories, the organizations included here do offer a wide variety of services that could often fit under multiple categories identified in the Guide. In each of these Parts, we provide a general overview of the area of advocacy, followed by a selection of several job placements in this area, and ending with a narrative from one of UCLA Law’s alumni engaged in this type of work.

Please note that there are many organizations doing this type of work and only a small number are included in this Guide. Students interested in exploring careers advocating for the rights of people who are incarcerated should also consult UCLA’s Prison Law and Policy Program’s annual list of summer jobs.

I. IMPACT LITIGATION

Litigation is the process of suing and bringing a party to court to answer for their actions. Through impact litigation, lawyers, and their allies can bring change to society through affirmative suits, usually against a government or private actor. Famous examples of impact litigation organizations are nonprofit groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (“ACLU”) and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, both of which handle cases related to criminal law and policy. Private firms also sometimes participate in impact litigation via pro bono legal work. In addition, some [private public interest law firms](#) specialize in public interest litigation. One important area of litigation related to criminal law and policy is suits against law enforcement for violating an individual’s civil rights and challenging police misconduct, brutality, or killings. Other types of impact litigation include class action lawsuits challenging unconstitutional prison conditions, sentencing guidelines, and pretrial detention.

EXAMPLE SITES

ACLU National Prison Project, Washington D.C. – Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, the ACLU National Prison Project works to reduce the incarcerated population, end cruel and inhuman conditions of confinement, and increase public accountability and transparency related to carceral facilities. They are involved in litigation nationwide, and have summer, fall, and spring full-time externship opportunities. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Civil Rights Corps, Washington, D.C. – Civil Rights Corps (CRC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to challenging systemic injustice in the US legal system. CRC works to shift power to community-led movements, particularly those led by Black and Brown people who are most affected by the legal system, so they can build sufficient power to create structural change. CRC has engaged in impact litigation to challenge cash bail in states across the country as well as the conditions of confinement for people incarcerated during COVID-19, among other impactful work. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Disability Rights Legal Center, Los Angeles, CA – Disability Rights Legal Center (DRLC) is an organization that champions the civil rights of people with disabilities. In his internship with DRLC, Dylan Lee, a member of UCLA Class of 2022, learned about the significant overlap of criminal legal issues and disability justice issues. Dylan described his internship as one generally geared toward litigation tasks, such as drafting and answering discovery requests, interviewing clients, and legal research. He also gained experience drafting FOIA requests and settlement terms. Dylan worked on one lawsuit on behalf of protesters with disabilities who were suing the Portland Police Bureau for various violations of their constitutional and statutory rights connected to protests in the summer of 2020. Dylan enjoyed that the DRLC was a small office that provided a lot of hands-on experience and permitted him to work directly with attorneys. He said the attorneys worked hard to make interns feel like a part of the team. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Lawyers for Civil Rights, Boston, MA – Lawyers for Civil Rights maintains a broad focus, encompassing many areas of civil rights law that may be of interest to students. They continue to add more practice areas to meet the evolving needs of impacted communities. One area of focus has been police accountability, and they have successfully sued the Boston Police Department for misconduct on multiple occasions. Internships are available with the broader organization or with their individual projects. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Southern Center for Human Rights, Atlanta, GA – Southern Center for Human Rights (SCHR) is an organization that gives students the opportunity to work on a variety of different types of legal work. Students have investigated COVID-19 in Georgia prisons, represented clients before the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles, and conducted legal research and writing tasks. Students who have spent the summer with SCHR felt like they were not only learning a lot but meeting a network of future peers within civil rights work. While other impact litigation positions can be detached from client work, students have reported that they worked directly with clients a great deal. Students should know that they may be required to be “on-call” for intake work once every few weeks, which can be a little stressful, but overall, students have had excellent experiences at SCHR. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Texas Civil Rights Project, Austin, TX – The Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) engages in community-informed impact litigation. The organization has close ties to its clients and people at the center of each of its campaigns and cases, and engages in a lot of organizing work outside of more standard impact litigation. The summer internship program was very carefully planned, and students are assigned a mentor attorney, generally are given writing assignments, and have opportunities to meet each member of the team. TCRP schedules lunchtime talks with different departments to highlight the Project’s successes and challenges and to provide resources regarding potential career paths. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

ALUMNI NARRATIVE—JOSHUA KIM '07

National Director of Litigation for Economic Opportunity, Root and Rebound, San Francisco, CA

"After graduation, I chose to work with ANWOL and build its legal department from the ground up, creating a legal clinic to serve as eyes and ears of the myriad problems faced by the community due to mass incarceration."

- Joshua Kim, National Director of Litigation for Economic Opportunity, Root and Rebound, UCLA School of Law Class of 2008

I became addicted to crystal meth while in law school. I had multiple encounters with law enforcement officers both on and off campus but never even an arrest. After I kicked my addiction and returned to school, it dawned on me that I had been treated differently from those in poor communities of color. A desire to challenge mass incarceration was a natural response. If I could become a licensed attorney after breaking the law, why aren't others allowed the same opportunity? Critical race theory provided the framework to help answer this question.

My final year in law school was consumed with an unpaid internship at A New Way of Life Re-Entry Project ("ANWOL"), a small nonprofit in South Central Los Angeles that focused on providing re-entry services to individuals returning from incarceration. I became friends with clients, got to know their life stories, and learned the devastating impact of the mass incarceration regime on their future. After graduation, I chose to work with ANWOL and build its legal department from the ground up, creating a legal clinic to serve as eyes and ears of the myriad problems faced by the community due to mass incarceration.

Initially, ANWOL struggled to pay my small salary of \$35,000 a year. As our focus became more "popular" with progressive funders, ANWOL's revenue became more secure, and my pay gradually increased. Earlier in 2021, I moved to Root & Rebound Reentry Advocates (R&R) and am now paid at \$100,000 a year, but the overall message remains. This trade-off between financial security and job satisfaction is quite real for many public interest lawyers.

My main responsibility at R&R is to develop and prosecute impact litigation cases to mitigate collateral consequences of a criminal record in accordance with a long-term strategy. I also try to stay informed of trends relevant to our movement by, for example, keeping up to date with the latest research on background check technologies and relevant social science. A class action with millions of class members isn't the only way to have an impact. Under right circumstances, we can also prosecute a small individual case and produce a meaningful impact—but only if we know what those circumstances are and how the case fits into the long-term strategy.

A typical case starts with multiple stories bubbling up through direct service work over months or even years. After identifying a pattern in consultation with other attorneys at R&R and elsewhere, I research the relevant laws and conduct factual investigation, if necessary, through the Public Records Act. I once spent three years working up a case prior to filing, but this pre-litigation stage typically lasts about six months. The litigation itself typically takes two to five years. My caseload varies between 15 and 30 and can include anything from class action to writ petitions to appellate work.

Occasionally, I am asked to participate in policy discussions, which may or may not end up with a proposed legislative change. If they do, I generally stay involved in the legislative process to provide input as a subject matter expert. I do not enjoy this work as much. While I recognize the need for such work and respect those who engage in it, substantive compromises are often made among and by those not directly impacted by the proposed law. Besides, someone has to enforce these laws to make their promises come true.

My work is incredibly satisfying. Witnessing the positive impact of my work on an individual life is great. So is seeing a long-term shift in industry practices in response to my litigation efforts over the years.

Staying close to the actual lived experiences of my clients is important to me. So is a belief in the long-term mission of our movement against mass incarceration. Each of my cases is an attempt to use the former to advance the latter. Without either, I cannot justify why I work at a place like ANWOL or R&R.

II. DIRECT CLIENT REPRESENTATION

Direct client representation consists of legal advocacy on behalf of individuals to achieve their stated goal in their individual case. In the field of criminal law, this work covers a wide range of individual services on behalf of people who are incarcerated as well as people who are formerly incarcerated or who have criminal convictions. For instance, lawyers working in direct client representation in the field of criminal law may seek to address discrimination and the denial of medical care to incarcerated people. Lawyers may also seek *habeas* relief on behalf of their clients, a legal process by which persons in custody challenge the legality of their imprisonment. Organizations that provide direct client representation to individuals with a criminal record often focus on expungements or record clearing, legal processes that help to mitigate or eliminate the collateral consequences that stem from a criminal record. Attorneys may also help clients remove barriers to accessing employment, public benefits, and housing.

EXAMPLE SITES

A New Way of Life Reentry Project, Watts, CA – A New Way of Life (ANWOL) promotes healing, power, and opportunity for formerly incarcerated people by taking a multifaceted approach to mitigating the effects of— and ultimately eliminating— mass incarceration. ANWOL provides housing and support for formerly incarcerated women, restores the civil rights of formerly incarcerated people through legal services such as expungements and assistance accessing occupational licensing, and organizes formerly incarcerated people as advocates for social change. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

New York City Board of Correction, New York, NY – The New York City Board of Corrections is a nine-person oversight board that regulates correctional facilities in New York City. The legal department advises the board and executive director on legal issues and engages in rulemaking

to ensure humane condition in the jails. For more information, please visit [their website](#), which also links to other Prisoners’ Rights groups in the area.

Rights Behind Bars, Washington D.C. – Rights Behind Bars works alongside incarcerated individuals to challenge the cruel and inhumane conditions of their confinement. Their team of lawyers takes on appellate advocacy, partners with experts to draft *amicus* briefs, and brings affirmative suits to challenge trends of misconduct. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

UnCommon Law, Oakland, CA – UnCommon Law fights to ensure that all people incarcerated for violent crimes have access to healing, justice, and effective legal representation. UnCommon Law uses a trauma-informed model of advocacy to more effectively disrupt violence inside and outside prison by providing direct representation to people in their parole hearings, policy advocacy to fight long-term sentencing provisions, and other advocacy and community-based projects. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Uptown People’s Law Center, Prisoners’ Rights Project, Chicago, IL – Uptown People’s Law Center files lawsuits against the state of Illinois for unconstitutional prison conditions and assists people who are incarcerated in various legal matters from medical care to religious rights. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

ALUMNI NARRATIVE—SHAWN MEERKAMPER ‘13

Senior Staff Attorney, Transgender Law Center, Oakland, CA

“When I am working on litigation to make schools and workplaces more accepting, I know that that work enables TGNC people to thrive and hopefully avoid being funneled into criminal punishment systems.”

- Sean Meerkamper, Senior Staff Attorney, Transgender Law Center
UCLA School of Law Class of 2013

In 2011, when I transferred from Vanderbilt to UCLA Law in order to be a part of the CRS and PILP programs, I could not have imagined how valuable that education would be to the work I do every day at Transgender Law Center (TLC). Headquartered in Oakland, TLC is the largest national trans-led organization advocating for self-determination for all people. Grounded in legal expertise and committed to racial justice, TLC employs a variety of community-driven strategies to keep transgender and gender nonconforming people alive, thriving, and fighting for liberation. My education in PILP and especially CRS has been essential to me as a white

lawyer working in a majority-POC organization with a strong team of community organizers.

I wanted to be a social justice lawyer when I started law school, but I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do. Racial justice had always been important to me; I hoped to someday get to do constitutional impact litigation. But I didn’t have “one issue” that other public interest law students seemed to. Eventually, I ended up publishing a law review article in the Williams Institute’s *Dukeminier Awards Journal* on the rights of people with nonbinary gender identities—people like me. It started as a short paper for a seminar on LGBTQ legal scholarship, and I used an independent study to develop it further. That paper helped me to land a fellowship with TLC

where I practiced for about two years. I then spent just under a year as a staff attorney at the ACLU of Nevada before TLC hired me on permanently in mid-2015.

In the broadest sense, I know that all of my work at TLC is connected to the criminal punishment system, because transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) people, especially TGNC people of color, are criminalized and over-policed around the country. When I am working on litigation to make schools and workplaces more accepting, I know that that work enables TGNC people to thrive and hopefully avoid being funneled into criminal punishment systems.

I have particularly relished working on prison litigation and jail policies to reduce harm for incarcerated TGNC people, as well as supporting anti-mass incarceration activists through TLC's partnership with Southerners On New Ground (SONG), a regional group of intersectional LGBTQ organizers. I have worked on three prison litigation cases in federal courts in California and Colorado, fighting for incarcerated transgender women's rights to health care and to be treated as the women they are. In those cases I have predominantly worked on briefing and litigation strategy, but I have also taken depositions, participated in settlement talks, and argued in District court and at the Ninth Circuit.

Through my work with SONG, I've supported bail reform efforts by reviewing and analyzing proposed ordinances—and I've learned that breaking down legal issues, and making them accessible for leftist activists, is one of my favorite parts of being a lawyer. I have also enjoyed being a part of a SONG-led working group to strategize and make resources to support more effective court watch and participatory defense programs. SONG members in cities around the U.S. south operate programs that observe criminal courts to identify abuses and work to engage defendants' friends and family in the process to support pre-trial release and more lenient sentencing. As part of that working group, I've drafted resources to empower those activists to understand how judges think as well as the ethical obligations judges have under codes of judicial conduct and how to strategically file ethics complaints against judges who fail in those obligations.

Movements and organizations on the left increasingly have been recognizing their roles in—and the necessity of—fighting mass incarceration. Because of this, there are more and more opportunities for lawyers at civil rights organizations to incorporate work against the criminal punishment system into their dockets.

III. ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Careers in academia and with academic institutions are also an important site for informing criminal law and policy. Through research and data analysis, academic institutions support a range of policy work that can provide foundational to advocacy efforts that impact the criminal and juvenile legal system. Academic articles are a frequent source for Supreme Court jurisprudence, as well as for important reforms across a variety of types of law. Professors also teach, interact with students, and may lead research groups exploring solutions to complex problems. Academics and researchers are often called on to write *amicus* briefs on important

litigation, advise government leaders, and train NGO staffers on their areas of expertise. Many academic institutions have programs and centers who hire law student interns to do research and policy related work. Researchers who can capably engage in empirical analysis and present descriptive statistics have been crucial to enhancing the transparency of the criminal legal system. Researchers and academics have a multitude of options for where and how they do their work. Students can broaden their skills in this arena during their time at UCLA Law with the support of the [Empirical Research Group](#) at the law school.

EXAMPLE SITES

Criminal Justice Program, UCLA School of Law, Los Angeles, CA – The Criminal Justice Program (CJP) produces accessible research in the areas of pretrial justice, alternatives to incarceration, police budgets, and youth justice and diversion. Research is used to advance policy advocacy in these areas to support efforts for transformative change. CJP often has research assistant positions open during the school year and over the summer where students can engage in research and policy advocacy. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Policing Project, New York University School of Law, New York, NY – The Policing Project is dedicated to bringing democratic accountability to policing and works with communities and law enforcement agencies across the country to that end. Attorneys and faculty working with the Policing Project produce research reports, solicit public input on policy issues, and propose model policies and legislation. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Policy Advocacy Clinic, Berkeley Law, Berkeley, CA – The Policy Advocacy Clinic consists of interdisciplinary teams of law and public policy students and employs clinical teaching fellows to fight against systemic issues of racial, economic, and social injustice. Issues they tackle have included abolishing regressive and racially discriminatory fines and fees in the juvenile and criminal legal system. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Robina Institute of Criminal Law and Criminal Justice, University of Minnesota Law School, Minneapolis, MN – The Robina Institute is dedicated to engaging in original interdisciplinary research and policy analysis in the areas of sentencing reform and correctional policies and practices. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization, Yale Law School, New Haven, CT – Every summer, the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization has a fellowship program of approximately sixteen to twenty law students, both part- and full-time. Among the clinics in which students can participate are the Criminal Justice Clinic, the Criminal Justice Advocacy Clinic, and the Challenging Mass Incarceration Clinic. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

ALUMNI NARRATIVE—PRISCILLA OCEN '07

Professor of Law, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, CA

Growing up in Los Angeles, my experience led me to where I am today – a professor at Loyola School of Law. I saw the expansion of policing and incarceration, especially in local schools, and watched as arguments between children were escalated into felonies. The war on drugs wreaked havoc in Los Angeles communities. And then I watched the beating of Rodney King, cementing a belief that there was far more injustice than justice around me. I entered law school planning to become a practicing attorney in a civil rights / human rights field. I worked as a research assistant for two Critical Race Studies (CRS) faculty members, and later as the research coordinator for A New Way of Life Legal Clinic. My first summer was split between a private firm and the Southern Poverty Law Center, and my second summer split again between a private firm and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. I got to work on education cases and see what legal professionals were doing in the fields of juvenile justice and voting rights. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, so I focused on keeping my options open.

"I enjoy the flexibility of the academy—I feel like I am able to pursue topics and themes that are important and interesting, and I am not limited by an order of a judge in a courtroom or a partner down the hallway."

-Priscilla Ocen, Professor of Law,
Loyola Law School
UCLA School of Law Class of 2007

After law school, I clerked for a year at a federal appellate court and saw first-hand the way that the criminal legal system affected Black life in the Detroit metropolitan area. I realized that the violence of the justice system, as a response to violence in public, was not the holistic view that I had for a more just world. I moved back to California and worked for the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights in San Francisco, where I met other abolitionist activists and we worked on civil litigation on behalf of minority groups, like a class action for poor Black women who were being pushed out of their communities by rapid gentrification. It was here that I firmly realized that work needed to be done in the academy to empower lasting change, so I came back to UCLA through a CRS Fellowship and entered the teaching market.

At UCLA, I was part of the CRS concentration, which taught me the normative grounds for the law that justify racial exclusion. It was here that I started to realize that knowledge production can work as a source of justice. Lawyers in the courtroom are limited by precedent. They rely on the academy to define issues, identify structural problems, and of course, they are educated in the first place at law school. I wanted to help students figure this out themselves, and marry practice and theory. One of the best parts about my job is that there is no "typical day," instead it depends on my class schedule, office hours, what I am writing or reading, or if I have speaking engagements or other events to attend. Through my work I have received a Fulbright scholarship and spent time in Uganda researching women's incarceration and gender-based violence. I work with an NGO looking into police violence, I am writing articles about Black feminist theory and abolition, and I am working on a book about reproductive justice and the carceral state. I enjoy the flexibility of the academy—I feel like I am able to pursue topics and themes that are important and interesting, and I am not limited by an order of a judge in a courtroom or a

partner down the hallway. I would encourage all students to keep an open mind – it might not seem like academia is the move immediately after law school, but academia is a great place to make a positive impact on the criminal legal system.

IV. POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

A variety of nonprofit organizations throughout the nation are engaged in crucial policy and legislative advocacy work, seeking to enact reforms within the criminal legal system. These organizations, including the example sites listed below, consistently seek ways to encourage lawmakers and government stakeholders to support and protect the rights of system-involved people. Of course, another important sector for work related to criminal law reform is within the government itself. States and localities are responsible for funding law enforcement agencies, prosecutorial offices, and indigent defense organizations. At the state level, students interested in criminal law could look to the state Attorney General office, serve as legislative or policy directors for state or federal representatives, or even consider running for office as a way to specifically write legislation geared at criminal law reform. At the local level, municipalities offer a range of programs to residents. For example, Los Angeles County has an Alternatives to Incarceration Initiative that looks to support “care first, jails last” in the County. Students may look to UCLA Law’s [Careers in Government Guide](#) for more opportunities.

EXAMPLE SITES

The Criminal Justice Program, ACLU of Northern California, San Francisco, CA – The Criminal Justice Program at the ACLU of Northern California seeks to dramatically reduce incarceration, criminalization, and police abuse by ending unjust and oppressive laws, policies, and practices that target and disproportionately harm Black, Brown, and other marginalized communities. They advocate for transforming the criminal legal system and work in partnership with organizations that are led by people who are directly impacted by systems of criminalization and oppression. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

D.C. Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, Washington, D.C. – The Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) aims to develop, fund, and coordinate programs that improve public safety, enhance the administration of justice, and create systems of care for crime victims, youth, and their families. OVSJG coordinates and funds community-based and District agency services. For more information, please visit [their website](#). Other counties and states have similar programs – interested students should search local government websites for “Justice Deputy” or other similar positions.

Fair and Just Prosecution, multiple locations nationally – Fair and Just Prosecution (FJP) brings together newly elected local prosecutors as part of a network of leaders committed to promoting a justice system grounded in fairness, equity, compassion, and fiscal responsibility. These bold elected leaders are supported by FJP’s network through ongoing information sharing, research and resource materials, opportunities for on-the-ground-learning, in-person convenings, technical assistance, and access to national experts. FJP hires summer interns that are placed at

reform-minded prosecutor's offices around the country, but who also work with FJP on related policy matters. Please visit [their website](#) for more information.

Justice Policy Institute, Washington, D.C. – Justice Policy Institute (JPI) conducts research and analysis with an eye toward finding solutions to problems in the juvenile and criminal legal systems. JPI coordinates with government officials, media outlets, and reform advocates to amplify their findings and recommendations. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

National Immigration Law Center, Los Angeles, CA – The National Immigration Law Center defends and advances the rights of low-income immigrants. One of their issue areas focuses on immigration enforcement and the intersection between criminal and immigration law. This piece of their work focuses on information sharing between various law enforcement agencies and the pipeline between the criminal legal system and immigration detention and deportation, amongst other areas of convergence between these systems. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

National Police Accountability Project, New Orleans, LA – The National Police Accountability Project (NPAP) is a project of the National Lawyers Guild and aims to promote the accountability of law enforcement officers and their employers for violations of the Constitution and the laws of the United States. NPAP supports legislation in a variety of states, as well as lobbies for legislative fixes to remove the barrier of qualified immunity. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Prison Policy Initiative, Northampton, MA – The Prison Policy Initiative (PPI) researches the harm caused by mass incarceration and overcriminalization and supports advocacy to reduce both. PPI is especially effective in documenting and publicizing the society-wide effects of mass incarceration, collecting and analyzing difficult-to-find national and state data. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Vera Institute of Justice, New York, NY – The Vera Institute of Justice has a precise mission: to end the overcriminalization and mass incarceration of people of color, immigrants, and people experiencing poverty. Their work combines research and activism and seeks to partner with government leaders as well as impacted community members. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

ALUMNI NARRATIVE—MIRIAM ARONI KRINSKY '84

Executive Director, Fair and Just Prosecution

After three years in private practice, I found myself wanting more from my legal career and decided to enter public service. That desire to make a difference in my community led me to the US Attorney's Office, where I was honored to spend fifteen years as a federal prosecutor working with committed public servants.

"I knew we could do better for young people and families locked into cycles of incarceration. We just needed to employ the right starting point. Having worked as a prosecutor and as an advocate, I knew there was no more powerful voice to change the criminal legal system than elected DAs."

- Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director, Fair and Just Prosecution
UCLA School of Law Class of 1984

During those years, however, I grew increasingly troubled by the mounting "tough on crime" approaches of the late '80s and early '90s. I watched as the punitiveness of our system increased and mandated penalties became harsher and more inflexible. Too often I saw a pattern of prosecution of young people of color from fractured families dealing with intergenerational cycles of contact with the criminal legal system. And in many instances, the offenses charged were the manifestations of poverty, substance use or mental illness. In short, our system offered various ways to mete out harsher punishments while limiting opportunities for justice based on the actual circumstances of the individual.

After fifteen years as a federal prosecutor, I left the field to move into an arena where I hoped to positively impact the trajectory of the many young people I saw falling into the criminal legal system. For over a decade, I worked on children's advocacy and juvenile justice reform as an academician, a national policy reformer, and as the head of a legal services organization that represented over 20,000 young people. What I saw in this work was equally troubling – nearly half a million children nationwide growing up in a foster care system that moves them from placement to placement and school to school, while often separating them from all that is familiar, including siblings who may be the only support system they have. For these children, the outcomes are dire. Nearly one-third will become homeless in their first year after leaving the foster care system. Many will never graduate high school and thus lack access to a brighter future. And far too many will fall into the juvenile justice or criminal legal system.

I knew we could do better for young people and families locked into cycles of incarceration. We just needed to employ the right starting point. Having worked as a prosecutor and as an advocate, I knew there was no more powerful voice to change the criminal legal system than elected DAs.

With this recognition, in early 2017, I founded Fair and Just Prosecution (FJP) and committed myself to shrinking the justice system footprint. While I understand the public safety imperative that at times necessitates incarcerating those who break the law, I have also seen that incarceration alone does not make us safer. Indeed, in some cases it makes us *less* safe -- by destabilizing families and communities – and also unjustly criminalizes conduct that is the byproduct of mental illness, drug addiction or poverty. At the end of the day, what makes – and keeps – communities safe and healthy is a smarter, more holistic approach to serving justice that supports strategies to prevent crime before it happens, while addressing the underlying concerns that often lead to criminal conduct.

FJP works with elected prosecutors who embrace this different starting point for our criminal legal system – one grounded in compassion, fairness, and equity. These leaders hail from offices around the nation, and while they face tremendous challenges, they are a beacon of hope for what our justice system can be. FJP helps these DAs overcome barriers, address ongoing

challenges, and drive reform by connecting them to the latest thinking from respected experts around the country and beyond. Furthermore, we provide them with a support network where they can share their successes, collaborate with each other, and see themselves as agents of change advancing a criminal legal system that prioritizes treatment and prevention over indictments and jail cells.

I am inspired daily by the diverse collection of men and women who in recent years have set the world of prosecution on fire! They are leading new thinking and engagement on bail reform, how we address young people who come into contact with the criminal legal system, and how we better respond to mental illness, poverty, and substance use, just to name a few.

V. ORGANIZING

Organizing means coordinating the efforts of communities to build grassroots power toward the promotion of a specific cause. There are many organizing groups that are informal as well as nonprofit organizations whose primary mode of advocacy is through organizing campaign. Many of these groups work with lawyers either within their organization or in coalition with legal organizations. This Part includes a few organizing groups in Los Angeles County that focus on criminal and juvenile legal reform.

EXAMPLE SITES

Dignity and Power Now, Los Angeles, CA – Dignity and Power Now is a grassroots organization founded in 2012 that fights for the dignity and power of all incarcerated people, their families, and communities. Their mission is to build a Black and Brown led abolitionist movement rooted in community power towards the goal of achieving transformative justice and healing justice for all incarcerated people, their families, and communities. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, Los Angeles, CA – The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition is made up of individuals and organizations aiming to dismantle government-sanctioned spying and intelligence gathering and who reject all forms of police oppression. The Coalition hosts webinars and meetings addressing a wide variety of Los Angeles-specific issues. The Coalition does have one attorney on staff. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

Youth Justice Coalition, Los Angeles, CA – Youth Justice Coalition (YJC) works to build a youth, family, and formerly and currently incarcerated people’s movement to fight mass incarceration—and particularly juvenile incarceration—in Los Angeles. YJC uses direct action organizing advocacy, political education, and activist arts to agitate, expose, and pressure the people in charge in order to upset power and bring about change. The organization also hosts a legal clinic and engages in participatory defense work. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

VI. POINTS OF ENTRY

There is no singular path to finding practical experience in the field of criminal law during your law school career and after graduation. Listed below are some of the best ways to learn about available jobs, network with individuals in your field(s) of interest, gain relevant experience, and ultimately secure available positions.

ON-CAMPUS RECRUITMENT

Students interested in criminal law careers should make sure to stay apprised of the Annual Southern California Public Interest Career Day, which takes place in February. PICD will invite representatives from multiple nonprofits and firms that work on issues related to criminal and juvenile law like re-entry, parole advocacy, death penalty work, impact litigation, and youth education rights. Information about PICD is available through the [Office of Public Interest Programs](#).

UCLA Law sponsors a number of programs and events that can help students connect with potential summer employers. Interview programs bring organizations that recruit both for full-time summer and post-graduate legal employment positions. UCLA Law also hosts two public interest-focused fairs each year: the Annual Fall Government and Public Interest Information Fair in the fall semester and the Annual Southern California Public Interest/Public Sector Career Day in the spring semester. Both fairs target government agencies, private public interest firms, and nonprofit organizations, many of which have opportunities for working on criminal legal issues. For more information, please contact the [Office of Public Interest Programs](#) and the [Office of Career Services](#).

UCLA Law students can also participate in other job fairs and events across the country, such as the Midwest-California-Georgia Consortium (MCGC) Interview Program, the Equal Justice Works Career Fair, Public Service Jobs Directory, and others. For more information, please check the OCS [Job Fairs and Events page](#).

DIRECT APPLICATION

Many students who have spent summers in criminal legal positions report that these placements are not difficult to find. Of course, many organizations can be highly competitive, but students generally have been able to find positions without needing to “know someone” within the office. Students interested in a specific organization or group should reach out to counselors, professors, or alumni (through the Criminal Justice Program, Office of Career Services, Office of Public Interest Programs, or the Prison Law and Policy Program) for advice on applications.

CLERKSHIPS

A judicial clerkship after graduation can play a role in helping applicants stand out to an employer, including in the areas of law covered by this Guide. For more information regarding

judicial clerkships, please consult the [Judicial Clerkship Handbook](#) and contact the Director of Judicial Clerkships.

EXTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Your 1L and 2L summers are not the only times available to gain practical experience and gauge your level of interest in different potential career choices. Fall and Spring externships for credit are a great way to learn more about a potential employer and to explore the variety of options in the field of criminal law. Consult student reviews of previous externship sites and supervisors and ask to meet with the Director of Externs. You may opt for an established externship experience or seek to create your own externship with an organization that interests you.

FELLOWSHIPS

Students interested in careers in criminal law should consider applying for a post-graduate public interest fellowship. Fellowships are especially worthwhile because they give new attorneys an opportunity to gain valuable experience in their chosen field while continuing to make contacts and strengthen networks. Included below is a non-exhaustive list of exceptional fellowship opportunities for recent law graduates. These fellowships generally do not fund students who want to go into public defense or prosecutors' offices. Instead, students can be creative about their pathway into the criminal legal field. Just a few examples of the type of work that graduates have pursued on a fellowship include working to ease the debt burden of criminal fees, direct representation to clients facing immigration consequences due to criminal convictions, and litigating barriers to community re-entry. Creativity and specificity are rewarded when it comes to fellowship applications.

EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS FELLOWSHIP

EJW provides more than fifty two-year fellowships annually to recent law school graduates who undertake various public interest projects at a sponsoring nonprofit host organization. EJW's innovative fellowship initiative is motivated by the need for effective legal advocacy on behalf of individuals who are not adequately represented within the legal system. For more information, please visit [their website](#).

JUSTICE CATALYST FELLOWSHIP

The Justice Catalyst Fellowship is a one-year project-based fellowship for graduating law students or students up to two years out of law school, with the opportunity to renew funding for another year. They accept projects with existing legal organizations as well as projects with partner organizations looking to hire their first lawyer. For more information, visit [their website](#).

SKADDEN FELLOWSHIP

The Skadden Fellowship is a two-year fellowship. Though the application process is competitive, many UCLA students have received the fellowship. Students interested in applying should seek

out alumni who are current or former Skadden Fellows to discuss this opportunity. For more information, visit [their website](#).

THE SOROS JUSTICE ADVOCACY FELLOWSHIP

The Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowship funds lawyers to undertake projects that advance reform, spur debate, and catalyze change on a range of issues facing the U.S. criminal justice system. For more information, visit [their website](#).

THE BARRY P. HELFT APPELLATE FELLOWSHIP – CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF THE STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER

The Helft Fellowship provides graduates an opportunity to work on complex appeals in the California Court of Appeal and the California Supreme Court. Fellows also assist in drafting amicus briefs on matters crucial to the development of criminal law, as well as with OSPD's systemic litigation efforts. For more information, visit [their website](#).

VII. PREPARING FOR CAREERS IN CRIMINAL LAW AND POLICY

1L Year – During the first year of law school, students should focus on building a resumé that demonstrates interest and dedication in the field of criminal legal work. As noted below, 1L students have considerable extracurricular opportunities at UCLA that will bolster their resumé prior to their summer job search. It may seem intimidating, but 1Ls should not hesitate to reach out to professors with specific questions about their research, suggestions for summer employment, and related concerns. Drafting memoranda and conducting legal research are key components of every summer position, so 1Ls should take care to develop their writing and research skills in the year-long LRW course.

1Ls should also know that, generally speaking, it is not crucial to spend the first summer seeking a “career.” Organizations understand that 1L students are seeking to build out their skills in their first summer. It is common for offices to hire students who have spent a summer and/or semester with them, but there are plenty of opportunities in the second summer as well as in a for-credit externship where students can make these connections. 1L students might be best suited by using their first summer to explore the field, getting a feel for the types of practice that interest them (or, perhaps, for the types they would prefer to avoid later in their careers).

2L/3L Year – Criminal law-related courses are a key component of upper-level education at the law school for students looking to enter criminal law practice. Students should aim to take clinical courses that involve either policy work or direct client representation. In addition, the Law School regularly has courses that outline a wide variety of specialty topics in this space, such as criminal punishment and immigrant rights. Core criminal law courses are also essential for anyone considering a career in the field, including classes in evidence, criminal procedure, and criminal adjudication. As with any other potential career field, students should aim to balance

bar preparation courses with courses focused on examining the criminal system more critically and abstractly.

Extracurricular Programming – Students looking to join the ranks of criminal law practice would do well to hone their client-facing skills during their time at law school. 1Ls at UCLA Law have the opportunity to participate in the El Centro volunteer program, where there is a variety of affiliated groups that work in a wide range of projects, including re-entry work for recently released individuals and U-Visa petitions for noncitizen victims of serious crime.

At the end of 1L year, students also have the opportunity to join the staff of law. While the *Criminal Justice Law Review* is an obvious choice for students interested in criminal law, other publications such as the *UCLA Law Review*, the *UCLA Women’s Law Journal*, and the *Asian Pacific American Law Journal* can also provide the chance to work on scholarship that informs the ongoing conversations in the criminal law field. Interested students should reach out to law journals in their 1L year for more information.

Research Assistant, UCLA School of Law Library – Students can be hired to provide research assistance to faculty members on projects while receiving training and supervision from the reference librarians. Working as a research assistant is a great opportunity to not only hone your research and writing skills, but also to forge relationships with professors and gain in-depth knowledge on pressing issues in the criminal legal field. Generally, the Library looks for upper-division students with research experience and the interpersonal and communication skills to work well with faculty. Research assistant positions are paid.

On-Campus Organizations – Students interested in learning more about becoming members or on the leadership of on-campus organizations at the law school should join the email list for the Prison Law and Policy Program, the Criminal Justice Program, and the Office of Public Interest Programs mailing list. Additionally, student groups like the Criminal Justice Society are excellent networks that can connect students to potential jobs, interested alumni, and a host of other resources.

Volunteering – Students interested in doing volunteer work during the school year should be proactive and seek out positions. Nonprofit and public interest law groups have more work throughout the year than they can manage, and there are a lot of areas where law student assistance is valuable. The pro bono coordinator with the Office of Public Interest Program can help students identify these opportunities.

VIII. INTERVIEW PREPARATION

When hiring for summer or post-graduate positions in criminal law, organizations and firms will look for experience in and commitment to this area of law. Experience and commitment can be demonstrated on your resumé through many of the aforementioned options for engagement, such as volunteering, clinics, externships, and relevant course work. For additional tips on preparing your public interest resumé, see the UCLA [Public Interest Resumé Guide](#). In your cover

letters and during job interviews for jobs in this field, it is important to explain why you are interested in the organization or firm's particular area of criminal legal practice.

The remainder of this Part provides sample questions that students may encounter in job interviews in the field of criminal law and policy.

GENERAL QUESTIONS ON CRIMINAL LAW

- Why are you interested in working in criminal law (or the particular narrow issue within criminal law addressed by the firm/organization with which you are interviewing)?
- What about your background has led you to want to pursue this career path?
- What experiences have you had in law school that contribute to your desire to do this work?
- Can you tell us about your previous job experience? What did you enjoy the most? What did you learn from it?
- What is one issue within criminal law that really interests you at the moment?
- How do you think about criminal law in the broader context of racial and economic justice? Do you believe that someone can work to effect change in the criminal legal system without considering issues like racism and wealth inequality?

QUESTIONS ABOUT WORKING AT THE INTERVIEWING ORGANIZATION

- Why are you interested in working for this organization?
- How did you find out about this organization?
- What interests you about working in this particular city/county/state?
- What kind of work environment do you prefer?
- Are you comfortable in a (small/large) office?
- How do you feel about working on a team/collaborating on research and writing projects?

QUESTIONS ABOUT SPECIFIC SKILLS

- Can you tell us about your research and writing skills?
- Do you work well juggling multiple coinciding and fast-paced deadlines and projects?
- What is your approach to working with clients?
- Describe your experience in working with populations who have experienced trauma or may be mistrustful of lawyers or authority?

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICULAR TOPICS RELATED TO THE PRACTICE AREA

- In an interview for a position related to pretrial justice: Do you think anyone should be held in custody pretrial?
- How would you approach a situation in an impact litigation setting where you think the best way forward is to settle, but your clients don't want to?
- What are some alternatives to incarceration that you think are promising and why?
- What experience do you have with communications and messaging? What do you consider the best ways to influence the public narrative?
- What is your approach to working with communities that have different lived experiences from you?

- If you're working on policy reform initiatives, what will you do to remain organized and motivated despite a potentially long timeline for potential change?

CONCLUSION

We hope that this Guide provides students with a better understanding of the variety of career paths under the umbrella of criminal law. In this Guide, we have sketched some broad categories of criminal legal practice, offered examples of what the work can look like, and shared suggestions on how to navigate this growing area of practice. There are many ways to make change in the field of criminal law and policy and this Guide can help you navigate the various options as you consider which path suits you best.