**Public Interest and Public Service Legal Practice**

Public interest and public service legal work often is values-driven, interest-driven, and passion-driven; do what you love, and you will do well at it. A career in public interest law practice accommodates who you are into what you do, making your work both professionally rewarding and personally meaningful.

To build a successful career in serving the public interest through legal practice, you must bring a passion for the practice of law and a deep respect for clients and their needs. Use your time in law school to develop legal practice skills and explore topics of substantive interest, in order to discover problems in the law and learn about methods of securing justice under the law. In their careers, public interest and public service lawyers do not just practice law; they use law and the legal process to benefit society, develop communities, and improve the lives of individuals by making and changing law.

**Becoming “Practice Ready”**

Aim to be “practice ready” upon graduation; public interest organizations and government offices often have fewer opportunities and resources available to train and mentor new attorneys. Government and public interest organizations look to hire students who have used their time in law school to gain “hands-on” experience working with clients, writing and researching significant legal issues, and advocating “real-life” matters for organizations or individual clients.

**Courses/experiences that provide Client Interaction:**

- **Clinics:** Clinical courses provide students the opportunity to play the part of “first chair attorney” on client cases with the oversight and guidance of an attorney supervisor/professor.

- **Externships:** Duke Law offers a number of ways students can engage in hands-on law practice through an Externship. Students may choose to participate in one of the “Integrated Externship” programs, which pair hands-on work experience with a seminar course on a related topic, including: Duke in DC, Duke in Raleigh, and the Raleigh Office of the Federal Public Defender externship programs. Students may also seek out their own unique and challenging practice experiences and design a full-semester externship (with faculty mentoring and associated research paper), which can be done in any geographic location, including internationally, with Curriculum Committee approval. Finally, students may opt for a 2-4 credit externship experience locally, with one of the many not-for-profit and government organizations in North Carolina with whom Duke Law has paired over the years for pro bono and externship placements.

- **Pro Bono:** students may volunteer their time in a pro bono activity in which they get to learn about, and often try their hand at, law practice on behalf of individual clients. To learn more about pro bono opportunities, see Kim Burrucker, pro bono coordinator, in the Office of Public Interest and Pro Bono.

**Courses/experiences that develop Writing Skills:**
• **Advanced writing courses**: Legal writing is an art and skill that improves with practice. Enroll in courses such as: Legal Writing 201, Contract Drafting, Legal Writing in Civil Practice, Writing for Federal Litigation, Writing for Publication, and Legislative Drafting to gain additional practice and exposure to methods and forms of legal writing.

• **Clinics**: Clinics provide students with an excellent opportunity to develop legal research and writing skills. Students in clinical courses are tasked with writing assignments such as drafting pleadings, interrogatories and affidavits. Students also must engage in significant legal research in order to advocate their clients’ cases.

• **Journals**: Student participation on a Journal provides an intense and invaluable legal research, writing and editing experience.

**Courses/experiences that develop Courtroom/Trial Skills:**

• Clinics, including: AIDS Law Clinic, Appellate Litigation Clinic and the Children’s Law Clinic

• Criminal procedure

• Ethics and the Law of Lawyering (with a focus on the Rules of Professional Conduct)

• Evidence

• Federal courts

• Mock Trial and Moot Court competitions

• Trial practice

**Developing Knowledge in the Law**

Any student who is considering a career in public service should take the Administrative Law course. Government law is central to the practice of public interest and public service lawyers, including poverty law (Medicaid, TANF, Social Security), regulatory law (EPA, SEC, DOT), public interest issue advocacy (immigration, civil rights, veteran’s rights, homelessness, education), and legislative advocacy.

In addition to courses and experiences that develop practice skills, and the course on Administrative Law, students interested in public interest or public service legal work also should choose courses related to their substantive areas of interest. Seminar courses provide an opportunity for students to deeply consider more discrete areas of law, from children’s rights to international environmental litigation. Seminar courses also often include a research and writing component, which provides an additional opportunity for students to practice legal writing skills.

Seminar course suggestions for various areas of public interest law practice:

**Civil Legal Services core**
• AIDS Law Clinic
• Children’s Law Clinic
• Civil Procedure
• Evidence
• Family Law
• Negotiation and Mediation
• Poverty Law
• Remedies
• Social Science Evidence in Law
• Trial Practice

Civil Rights core
• AIDS and the Law
• AIDS Law Clinic
• Appellate Litigation Clinic
• Children’s Law Clinic
• Constitutional Law I and II
• Criminal Procedure
• Employment Discrimination
• Employment Law
• Federal Courts
• First Amendment
• International Human Rights
• Labor Relations
• Race and the Law
• Wrongful Convictions Clinic

• Wrongful Convictions: Causes and Remedies

Community Enterprise Development/Social Entrepreneurship core
• Business Associations
• Community Enterprise Clinic

• Exempt Organizations

• Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Not-for-Profit Management
Criminal Prosecution/Defense core
- Appellate Litigation Clinic
- Criminal Law
- Criminal Justice Policy: Crime, Politics and the Media
- Criminal Law Procedure (Formal and Investigation)
- Evidence
- Federal Criminal Law
- Federal Public Defender (Raleigh) Integrated Externship
- Forensic Psychiatry
- Innocent Project Pro Bono Group
- Social Science Evidence in Law
- Trial Practice
- Wrongful Convictions: Causes and Remedies
- Wrongful Convictions Clinic

Environmental Law core
- Climate Change and the Law
- Environmental Law
- Environmental Law Clinic
- Environmental Litigation
- International Environmental Law
- Land Use Planning
- Natural Resources Law and Liability
- Ocean and Coastal Law and Policy

Family and Children’s Law core
- AIDS and the Law
- AIDS Law Clinic
- American Immigration and Nationality Law
- Children’s Law Clinic
- Community Property
- Education Law
- Estate and Gift Taxation
- Family Law
- Federal Income Taxation
- Negotiation and Mediation
- Social Science Evidence in Law
- Trial Practice
- Wills, Trusts and Estates

**Health Law core**
- AIDS and the Law
- AIDS Law Clinic
- Bioethics
- Exempt Organizations
- Genetics and the Law
- Health Care Law and Policy
- Legislation and Statutory Interpretation
- Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Not-for-Profit Management

**International Public Interest Law core**
- American Immigration and Nationality Law
- Comparative Law: western Legal Traditions
- Distinctive Aspects of U.S. Law
- Guantanamo Defense Clinic
- International Environmental Law
• International Human Rights

• International Trade Law

**Policy/Legislative Advocacy core**

- Duke in DC Integrated Externship
- Duke in Raleigh Integrated Externship
- Legislation and Statutory Interpretation
- The Congress
- The Congress: Government, Business and the Global Economy
- Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Not-for-Profit Management

Ultimately, when you are seeking summer and post-graduate legal employment in public interest or public service law practice, your résumé and transcript should demonstrate an in-fact and sincere commitment to the issues, and exposure to the types of practice, with which your target employers are engaged. Do not take courses because you think you “have to”. Rather, choose courses that will inspire and challenge you in ways that you hope and plan to be inspired and challenged in your professional career.