

**A
Beginner's
Guide to
Public
Interest at
Texas Law**

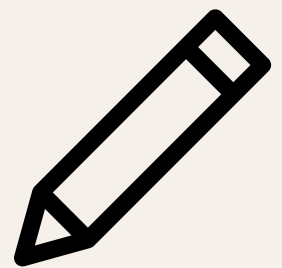


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Welcome!

Thank you for attending **Change It Up! 2024: Texas Law's Public Interest Orientation!**

As 2Ls, we would like to welcome you to the public interest community here at Texas Law. We've assembled a guide based on what current students wish they knew as incoming 1Ls interested in a career in public interest law.

Thank you to the amazing staff of the William Wayne Justice Center who supported us as we assembled this guide!

-2024 Change It Up! Planning Committee Members:

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What is Public Interest?

Public interest work involves advocating for persons or causes not typically served by the private legal sector. It can include working for different types of employers, such as legal aid, public defender offices, advocacy or nonprofit organizations, and private law firms devoted to serving the underrepresented.

Your public interest journey begins right as you start law school!

We highly recommend connecting with the [William Wayne Justice Center](#). This is a hub for all things public interest on the Texas Law campus. Their work includes:

- **Education:** Teaching students about public interest lawyering and the need to increase access to justice.
- **Pro Bono:** Creating opportunities for the Texas Law community to gain legal skills and serve the public through the Richard and Ginni Mithoff Pro Bono Program.
- **Programming:** Informing students, faculty, staff, attorneys, and the community about public interest legal issues.
- **Community Building:** Fostering a community of support for students and alumni engaged in public service.
- **Financial Support:** Awarding scholarships and fellowships to ensure that public interest law practice is accessible to and sustainable for all.

Be sure to check out the other centers at Texas Law that are oriented toward serving the public interest [here](#).

Connecting with Peers and Employers

Organizations on Campus

Several organizations on campus focus on public interest legal work or collaborate with public interest organizations to host exciting events. Getting involved with these organizations is a great way to immerse yourself in the public interest community on campus!

The Public Interest Law Association, the Public Defense Group, Getting Radical in the South (GRITS), the Environmental Law Society, If/When/How, Law Students for Black Lives, and Texas Law Fellowships are just a few organizations dedicated to public interest work.

You can find a complete list of Texas Law student organizations [here](#).

Public Interest Listserv

The Career Services Office (CSO) manages the public interest listserv, which sends information about summer internships, postgraduate opportunities, networking events, and public interest programming sponsored by the CSO, the William Wayne Justice Center, and the Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice.

You can stay up to date with public interest opportunities by signing up [here](#).

Public Interest Employer Interviewing Opportunities

You may have heard the term “OCI” thrown around by now. OCI stands for On-Campus Interviews, describing the period when employers come to campus to conduct in-person interviews. Despite its name, some employers choose only to conduct virtual interviews during this time.

Each fall, Texas Law hosts [Texas Talks: Public Service Expo](#), which allows students to informally meet with government agencies and public interest organizations to learn about the employers as well as available internship and job opportunities. This is a more casual setting, as students can filter in and out of the event and visit employer tables to chat, ask questions, and pick up promotional materials.

Each spring, Texas Law organizes the [Public Service Career Fair](#), the largest public service interview program for law students in Texas. During both PSCF days, public interest and government employers conduct interviews for paid and unpaid summer and postgraduate positions.

Some 1L public interest students get nervous at the end of their first semester because many private-sector job applications open in November and begin the interview process in December and January. **Keep in mind that public interest work is often on a different timeline from private sector work.** Not securing a summer job offer by the beginning of your second semester is normal!

Summer Internship Funding

You might already be thinking about where you would like to intern this summer and wondering how to finance it. Below are the main funding opportunities available at Texas Law for public interest students.

Summer Public Service Program (SPSP)

The [Summer Public Service Program](#) is run by the [William Wayne Justice Center for Public Interest Law](#) and offers \$800 per week to students working in unpaid or low-paying summer positions with nonprofit, government, and legislative offices. To receive this stipend, students must work full-time at eligible sponsoring organizations for a minimum of five weeks and a maximum of ten weeks.

The SPSP application typically opens up at the end of the fall semester and is due towards the end of the spring semester. Students can submit their applications once they have accepted an offer from an eligible sponsoring organization. Don't worry about accidentally missing this opportunity, as information on how to apply is offered throughout the year. You will receive several reminder emails, and the Justice Center and Financial Aid Office will host an informational session to explain the application and answer your questions. The application process is straightforward and completed online.

Justice Center Named Fellowships

The Justice Center also oversees [several named fellowships](#), including Baron & Budd Public Interest Summer Fellowships, G. Rollie White Trust Public Interest Summer Fellowships, the Stuart Henry Environmental Law Fellowship, and Whitehurst Public Interest Summer Fellowships.

Named fellowships provide the same stipend and have the same requirements as the general SPSP funding. However, they offer special recognition, which can be helpful for students aiming to demonstrate a commitment to public interest work. The named fellowships application will be posted on the Justice Center website and is usually due earlier in the spring semester than the general SPSP application. Many emails will also go out to remind you of the named fellowship deadline. You can't miss them!

Rapoport Center Summer Human Rights Fellowships

The [Audre and Bernard Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice](#) offers [Summer Human Rights Fellowships](#) to Texas Law students interested in transnational or international work in human rights or social justice issues. The Rapoport Center oversees the Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Law and the Charles Moyer Human Rights Fellowship.

These fellowships provide a \$8,000 stipend for 400 hours of service (a 10-week internship).

Unlike the general SPSP funding, the Rapoport Center Fellowships require a separate application that is not completed on Canvas. The application is found on the Rapoport Center's website and is due in the spring. As mentioned, you will receive many emails reminding you of the deadline and the separate application process.

Texas Law Fellowships (TLF)

[TLF](#) is a student-run organization that supports public interest at Texas Law by providing \$2,000 summer stipends to students engaged in unpaid public interest work. Eligible students must work full-time in a 10-week internship at a qualified public interest organization. TLF raises money through several events and fundraisers that have become Texas Law traditions, such as the Fall Auction and TLF Tailgates.

Those interested in a TLF stipend must apply through the TLF Google Form in the spring. TLF will host an informational session to explain the entire application process. TLF stipends are not part of the SPSP funding, and students may receive funds from both SPSP funding and TLF.

Equal Justice America (EJA)

[EJA](#) offers summer fellowship grants of up to \$5,000 to law students working full-time for a civil legal aid or civil rights organization. Applications must be submitted through the EJA website. While this is an outside organization, many Texas Law public interest students secure summer funding through EJA.

Clinics

Texas Law offers [seventeen clinics](#) covering a range of legal issues. Joining a clinic is a great opportunity to provide legal services directly or work closely with faculty members on active cases. You cannot participate in a clinic in your first year of law school. However, it's always wise to use 1L year to research clinics and ask around to see if one interests you! A clinic and internship informational session is held each semester, which allows students to visit each clinic's table to ask questions, pick up materials, and learn about their projects.

1Ls apply for clinics in their second semester during registration week. Students use one application form to apply to up to three clinics, with questions unique to each clinic. Students must also rank their options. Attending the clinic and informational session can be very useful, as some clinic faculty offer advice on strategically ranking your clinic options.

Pro Bono Projects

While students cannot participate in a clinic until they become 2Ls, they can participate in pro bono projects as 1Ls. The [Richard and Ginni Mithoff Pro Bono Program](#) housed within the Justice Center hosts several pro bono opportunities for students to practice their legal skills and serve the community.

Students can check for current pro bono opportunities [here](#). Students can also sign a voluntary [Pro Bono Pledge](#) to provide at least 50 hours of pro bono service by the end of law school. Signing the Pro Bono Pledge enrolls students in Texas Law's pro bono listserv so they can receive early notice of new pro bono opportunities.

Those subscribed to the listserv will receive an email **every Sunday** with a list of ongoing pro bono projects, the required training, and the dates and times. Students can choose among projects ranging in topic and duration-- some of these projects are commitments for the entire school year, while others are one-off commitments. Some of these pro bono projects tend to be reserved quickly, so you should keep an eye out for projects that interest you!

Judicial Clerkships

A [judicial clerkship](#) offers law school graduates the unique opportunity to work directly with a trial or appellate judge in a state or federal court. These one-to-two-year positions can be among the most rewarding in a legal career. They are prestigious positions that often serve as a springboard to permanent positions with law firms or in the public sector.

A judicial clerkship is different from a judicial internship, which provides the opportunity to gain exposure to the judicial process and the inner workings of a court *while you are still in law school*. **If you want to set yourself up for a clerkship, check out [1Ls: Becoming a Successful Judicial Clerkship Candidate](#).** 2Ls, 3Ls, and Alumni should click [here](#).

2024-2025 Events Calendar

While there will be more events that you'll want to look out for, here are some of the most important events to remember this school year!

- **[Intro to Government and Public Interest Summer Jobs](#)**
 - ***September 17 from 11:50am to 12:50pm***
 - Learn more about summer internship opportunities in the government and public interest sectors, including application procedures, hiring criteria, and general internship descriptions. This program will feature a panel of students discussing their summer internship experiences in the government and public interest sectors.
- **[Public Service Expo](#)**
 - ***October 8 & 9 from 11:30am to 1:00pm***
 - Presented each fall by the Career Services Office, the Public Service Expo offers Texas Law students an opportunity to informally meet with government agencies and public interest organizations to learn about the employers and available internship and job opportunities.
- **[Justice Center Open House](#)**
 - ***October 10 at 12pm***
 - Learn about the Justice Center and the support and resources we provide for students interested in nonprofit, government, and legislative service. Chat over lunch with Justice Center staff and students who are involved in our projects.
- **[Clinic and Internship Info Session](#)**
 - ***October 22 from 11:30 to 12:45pm***
 - Faculty and staff will be on hand to discuss clinic and internship courses for spring 2025.
- **[Mock Interview Program: Public Sector](#)**
 - ***November 8 from 9am to 5pm***
 - The Career Services Office hosts a public-sector Mock Interview Program (government, public interest, and public defense) each year to introduce ILs to the legal interviewing process.
- **[Public Service Career Fair](#)**
 - ***February 6 & 7 from 9am to 5pm***
 - Public interest and government employers will conduct interviews for paid and unpaid summer and postgraduate positions.

Some Final Advice

Angelina's advice

Each legal field has its own culture, timelines, and opportunities. The public interest field is no different. Don't compare yourself to other people, and especially not to people pursuing totally different paths! Even as a 1L who knew I only wanted to do public interest work, I started worrying about seeing my peers in other legal fields securing their summer jobs in December while I was barely completing my interviews at the Public Service Career Fair in February. However, it all worked out, and I realized the timelines were simply different. Instead of comparing yourself to others and getting caught up in the 1L stress spiral, I recommend seeing what 2Ls and 3Ls in the public interest space are doing that interests you!

Many people emphasize the importance of 1L grades and success, but staying happy and sane is critical!!! Do not give up routines, hobbies, or anything that makes you feel fulfilled or can give you a break from the 1L craziness. For me, pro bono work reminded me of my reason for being in law school when I felt very removed from what I wanted to do: serve my community. I hope you find something, public interest-related or not, that can do the same for you. Please remember that law school is only the beginning of your legal journey.

My advice is to not forget why you came to law school and how you got to be where you are. Be curious about the experiences of those around you but never forget who you are which can be difficult at times in law school!

MaKenna's advice

Shelby's advice

Experiential learning has been key to helping me figure out the kind of lawyer I want to be. While making time can sometimes feel difficult the first year of law school, Texas Law makes experiential learning very accessible to 1Ls through the pro bono program.

Working with the people I assisted in my pro bono work was extremely meaningful and was my favorite thing about my 1L year. Also, as someone who worked for a public interest employer before coming to law school, I guarantee that your willingness to seek out experiential opportunities and work directly with people as a law student is going to stand out far more to a public interest employer than just your grades alone. Law school gives you the opportunity to try different things and explore different practice areas that is not as easy to do once you are working in the real world, so take advantage of these experiences while you can!

Lastly, foster and value the relationships you make with those around you who are similarly committed to enacting change. Your public interest community is here to support you!