

THE EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS

GUIDE TO LAW SCHOOLS

You've made the decision to go to law school. Congratulations! Now how do you decide which law school will be the right one for you?

Choosing a law school is based on individual circumstances and preferences. For those considering a career in public interest law, your priorities may be different than those of your peers. *The Equal Justice Works Guide to Law Schools* contains comprehensive information and highlights some important considerations for public interest-minded students to think about when choosing which law school to attend.

Use *The Guide* to create side-by-side comparisons and see how schools measure up to your personal needs. Once you have narrowed your search to a handful of schools, continue your research by calling and/or visiting the school, talking to faculty and administrators outside of the admissions office and talking to current students and alumni to get a better sense of whether a school is a good fit for your educational and personal goals.

WHERE TO BEGIN AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE GUIDE

The Guide contains extensive data on the availability of clinical, externship and pro bono programs, financial aid and loan repayment assistance programs, the number of staff members dedicated to public service programs, and other criteria essential to students who plan to pursue public interest careers. It highlights opportunities to gain valuable public interest experience and lawyering skills while still in school and important factors like financial assistance and faculty support.

There are a number of different search functions so you can tailor your research to your specific interests and needs. You might begin by searching basic considerations such as geographic location or annual tuition, and then move on to more advanced searches such as the availability of specific public service programs and/or curricula. You can view schools individually, or review multiple schools in a side-by-side comparison.

TIPS ON HOW TO USE THE INFORMATION IN THE GUIDE

Evaluate specialty, experience and training opportunities

Specialized courses, hands-on clinics and professional skills training opportunities tailored to your interest area can provide valuable experience and will lay the foundation for your public interest career. With *The Guide* you can learn about:

- Public interest clinical courses and field placements (these are hands-on experiences where you work under the supervision of practicing attorneys);
- Faculty-run centers; and
- Non-clinical courses geared toward specific areas of law. These include trial advocacy courses (simulated courses that help you develop and hone your lawyering skills), traditional lecture courses and seminars.

These are opportunities that can give you valuable hands-on experience to help you jumpstart your career. You may get the chance to provide direct services to clients, draft trial and appellate briefs, simulate a trial or take part in a real one, and learn the standards and nuances in specific areas of law. Pro bono programs and requirements provide additional opportunities to gain experience.

If a school has a public interest course or pro bono requirement (look at First Year Curriculum, Pro Bono and Graduation Policies), this may indicate a strong dedication to supporting public interest work. Journals and periodicals dedicated to public interest topics may provide you the opportunity to hone your editing and writing skills while learning about issues in the practice of different areas of public interest law.

But don't just look at the raw data.

If you are evaluating clinical courses, look at clinical statistics to see how many students participate and at what clinics. If you want to practice housing law, look for clinics that will give you this experience. If you know you want to be a First Amendment lawyer, an advocacy course focusing on First Amendment litigation will help much more than one focusing on tax law.

Think about geography. If you want to practice law in Boston, a school nearby that focuses on Massachusetts law and is well-known in the local community may be preferable to one across the country that focuses on California law.

Always place the information for any school in the context of your priorities.

Look at indicators of professional guidance and public interest support

Many schools have a public interest law department; some even dedicate a public interest advisor to counsel students on courses and career opportunities. Smaller schools may not have the same resources but they can still offer tremendous support to students looking to enter public interest law.

Search *The Guide* for:

- Career counselors dedicated to public interest and public interest administrators, offices and committees;
- Student groups and community service programs (these provide great opportunities and support networks for public interest students);
- Public interest events (these range from seminars and panels to fundraising events and are great networking opportunities); and
- Career fairs and employment statistics.

The information you find may be a great indicator of a school's dedication to public interest, its relationship with the public interest community and its reputation within that community, all of which can be a great benefit when you are launching your public interest career.

Geography is a factor here as well. If you know where you want to practice, considering schools nearby will help you learn local law and practices and will provide opportunities in the community so you can start building your reputation and your career while still in school.

Also, when looking at career fairs, don't just look at the number of fairs that exist, look at the number of public interest employers that participate and how many recent graduates are in public interest positions.

Remember to consider everything in context. A small school may not have the resources for a full-time dedicated counselor but if it has strong ties to the public interest community in your chosen geographic area, or many of its graduates enter public interest careers or its entire curriculum is focused on public interest, you'll still get the support you need.

Evaluate the possibilities for financial assistance

Set cost as a priority throughout your legal career. Law school is not cheap and many public interest attorneys begin their careers earning around \$40,000, if not less. Be realistic, assess your financial situation and determine the availability of aid (including grants, scholarships and loans) as well as repayment options after graduation.

The Guide houses information on tuition and financial assistance programs. Evaluate:

- Tuition and fees (how much it will cost you to go to school); and
- Options that can help defray these costs such as:
 - financial aid
 - grants
 - scholarships; and
 - loan repayment assistance programs (LRAPs).

Consider financial assistance options side-by-side with tuition and fees

In addition to academic scholarships, many schools offer public interest grants, scholarships and opportunities for funding that can help with costs of attendance. Many schools have Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAPs) that provide funds to help graduates working in the public interest make monthly payments on their educational loans. Law schools with a comprehensive LRAP can help defray the high cost of attendance. Compare the LRAPs provided by the law schools you are considering and determine which will be the most helpful to you.

Be sure to look at summer funding opportunities, short-term grants, bridge grants and fellowships. These help students and graduates by funding public interest internships and externships while in school (during the semesters and the summers) and by funding public interest work after graduation. All of these opportunities will help you build experience and launch your public interest career in the face of high educational costs and the lower-paying salaries of public interest work.

BEGIN YOUR SEARCH

The Guide contains details on these programs and other opportunities at law schools across the country. Armed with the information you find in *The Guide* you can begin to identify the school that is right for you. Good luck!