MAKING A DIFFERENCE:

A LAW STUDENT’S GUIDE TO PUBLIC SERVICE

VOLUME II: GOVERNMENT CAREERS

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL
OFFICE OF PUBLIC SERVICE
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This primer will: 1) explain why you should consider a government career, 2) describe what government lawyers do, 3) look at practice settings in federal, state, and local government, including criminal prosecution and defense, and 4) provide resources for your government job search and tips to make your application a success.

I. Why Should I Consider a Government Career?

Whenever alumni come back to UMLS to talk about their government careers, they tell our students that government – be it federal, state, or local – is a fantastic place to work. Here are some of the things they routinely list among the advantages of a government career:

- **They have jobs!** – The federal government is the nation’s largest employer with 1.9 million civilian employees, so they are always hiring. Further, they are expecting large-scale retirement by nearly one-third of full-time federal employees in the next few years. For more information, read *Where the Jobs Are*, published by Making the Difference, a federal careers Web site operated jointly by the Office of Personnel Management and the Partnership for Public Service. And while no state or locality can match the size of the federal government, they also often hire at a time when private firms and nonprofits cannot.

- **Experience/Early Responsibility** – Government attorneys report a good balance between supervision/training and autonomy. They quickly manage their own caseloads, first-chair hearings, and handle other significant responsibilities, long before their counterparts in the private sector.

- **For the Public Good/Connection to your Work** – A recurring theme articulated by government attorneys is their contentment representing a client they generally believe in, as part of something larger than themselves.

- **Interesting, Rewarding Cases** – Government attorneys have an extremely large variety of cases, as the government is involved in a little bit of everything – from tort defense to consumer protection prosecution; as an employer and on behalf of employees; in all three branches of government; and in numerous capacities, including litigation, counseling lawmakers, drafting statutes and regulations, issuing administrative legal opinions, and much more.

- **Collegiality** – Most government employers tout their collegial offices and their mission-focused practice. That focus on mission rather than clients, attracts a certain type of person and gives the work a purpose that can be hard to find in the private sector.

- **Work-Life Balance/Flexible Schedules** – The government offers flexible schedules and reasonable hours unmatched by other employment settings, including, e.g., 10 hour days with every other Friday off, telecommuting, and part-time schedules.

- **Transferrable Skills** – The skills and experience gained in the government transfer well to both the private and the non-profit sectors. Further, for the federal government, any bar exam will work, which makes the bar exam choice a bit easier.

- **Salaries/Benefits** – The federal government offers the highest salaries in the public sector, as well as an attractive array of benefits (see, e.g., the DOJ salary and benefit information). While state and local salaries are not as high, they still often exceed those of the non-profit sector and have excellent benefit packages.

- **Loan Forgiveness** – You can also qualify for loan forgiveness, either through a particular agency’s program (see, e.g., DOJ and other federal student loan repayment programs), or via the recently passed College Cost Reduction & Access Act.

- **Not Just DC** – 85% of federal jobs are located outside of the Washington, DC area, and almost 50,000 federal employees work outside the U.S.

II. What Do Government Lawyers Do?

When most law students think of being a lawyer, they think of litigation – filing and trying lawsuits in court. But lawyers in the federal government are just as likely to conduct investigations, draft and interpret regulations, advise and counsel other federal employees, and write policy.

1. **Litigation** – If you know you want to litigate, consider the Department of Justice (DOJ). The DOJ is the litigating arm of the federal government, and the largest law firm in the world with more than 10,000 lawyers; they are comprised of a headquarters in Washington, DC, regional offices, and 93 U.S. Attorney Offices around the country. With few exceptions, the DOJ, not the individual agencies, handles both offensive and defensive litigation on behalf of the federal government. Instead, most agencies have “coordinate jurisdiction” with the DOJ, meaning that DOJ attorneys initiate lawsuits, conduct depositions, and handle all oral advocacy, while agency attorneys draft motions and provide subject-matter expertise. If you are interested in being a litigator, you should consider a career with the DOJ or another office with “independent litigating authority,” such as the Department of Labor, Office of the Solicitor and the Securities and Exchange Commission, Division of Enforcement. In addition, many agencies are tasked with enforcing discrimination and civil rights laws and have set up internal enforcement systems complete with administrative law judges to conduct hearings, see, e.g. the Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Department of Housing Development, Office of Hearings and Appeals. Litigators can find work in such agencies’ internal, but court-like, proceedings.

Within the DOJ, there are several divisions that are more likely to litigate than others. In particular, the litigating divisions are Antitrust, Civil, Civil Rights, Criminal, Environment and Natural Resources, National Security, and Tax. The investigating divisions include the FBI, the ATF, the Bureau of Prisons, the DEA, while the legal and policy offices include the Executive Office of Immigration Review, the U.S. Trustee Program, and the Office of Legal Policy.

2. **Regulatory** – Regulatory lawyers are at the forefront of forming and enforcing new rules. Agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and many others are considered regulatory agencies, because they are empowered to create and implement rules and regulations.

3. **Advisory** – Most, if not all, agencies have attorneys who are available to provide advice to the rest of the agency on any matter that might arise, which is roughly analogous to in-house counsel at corporations (and having DOJ do their litigation is analogous to how corporations outsource litigation to private law firms). If you think you would enjoy working with clients to help them comply with the law, you should investigate “attorney advisor” or “counselor” positions. For example, lawyers at the Food and Drug Administration are divided into “counselors” and “litigators.” The counselors work on congressional inquiries, Freedom of Information Act requests, rulemaking and citizen petitions.

4. **Public Policy** – Individuals who want to work in public policy should look beyond “attorney” positions. Agencies that are engaged in a lot of policy work include the Department of State, Department of Commerce, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Communications Commission, and Congressional Research Service. An excellent entrée to federal policy-making is the Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF). For more information on PMF, please see below.

III. Practice Settings for Government Lawyers

At every level of government, from the local to the national level, there are opportunities for lawyers. Small local government units frequently hire private firms rather than their own city or county attorney; however, as the size of the governmental unit grows so does the likelihood that there will be positions available for lawyers. Governmental units include school districts, cities, counties, states, and the federal government.

Please note that if there is an agency or type of work that you are interested in at the federal level, you should see if there is a similar office at the state or local level and apply there too.
A. **Federal Government**

All three branches of the federal government employ attorneys: the **executive** (the President and his or her administration), the **legislative** (the Senate and the House of Representatives), and the **judicial**. In addition, the federal government includes many independent agencies such as the National Labor Relations Board, the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Reserve System and the Smithsonian. Among the three branches and independent agencies, the executive branch and independent agencies employ the greatest number of attorneys.

The federal government employs lawyers for a wide variety of tasks and in a wide variety of agencies and departments. Federal attorneys may be involved in administrative, regulatory, and advisory processes; brief and opinion writing; legislative drafting; research and review of special problems in contract, tort, criminal, and constitutional law cases; taxation, labor relations, or antitrust regulation. Federal attorneys practice at the administrative, trial court, and appellate levels.

Most positions in the federal government start out at the General Schedule (GS) 11 level, with a salary around $56,000 or more depending on your area of the country. To calculate federal government salaries using GS levels, go to the [General Schedule Salary Calculator](#). Graduates who have clerked prior to starting their government service start at a higher GS level. Also, some federal agencies pay more than the GS levels, including the Comptroller of the Currency ($90,000+), the Securities and Exchange Commission (between $75,000 and $96,000) and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation ($89,000+). Additionally, the federal government has a [loan repayment assistance program](#), in addition to the recently passed [College Cost Reduction & Access Act](#).

While government lawyers make less than their counterparts at private firms, the **benefits are excellent**, and employees often describe a more balanced work and home life, with agencies increasingly allowing flexible hours, telecommuting and part-time schedules. And the starting salaries are not the ending salaries; the average federal government attorney salary is $127,000+. Finally, government attorneys report that they take on responsibility much sooner than their private practice colleagues; for example, litigators might take depositions in their first year rather than waiting until their fourth or fifth year.

1. **Executive/Administrative**

There are over fifty federal executive branch agencies that employ attorneys as in-house counsel or in various other capacities. Most federal agencies have a General Counsel’s Office or an Office of the Solicitor where the bulk of attorneys are employed. However, most agencies also have some attorneys in other offices. And sometimes, the largest number of attorneys is found in another office altogether. For example, in the Department of Education, there are more attorneys in the Office of Civil Rights than the General Counsel’s office. To discover if a particular office employs attorneys, visit [www.fedscope.opm.gov](http://www.fedscope.opm.gov), where you can sort the data by attorney job series (every job within the federal government is assigned a series number; 0905 is the series number assigned to attorneys, while law clerks are job series 0904) and executive agency. See [Appendix A](#) for a chart demonstrating which federal agencies and departments employ the most lawyers. Each agency does its own hiring.

   a) **Entry-Level Hiring**

Most agencies hire attorneys via their “honors” programs, which is just another term for entry-level. Please note that “entry-level” usually also includes those coming off judicial clerkships and, in some cases, post-graduate fellowships. While grades are often a factor in such programs, they are by NO means the only factor, even for the most competitive agencies. Instead, many government employers may be looking for certain kinds of experience, which might offset a low GPA. If you automatically assume your grades will disqualify you from consideration, you may find that there are not many entry-level jobs available outside the honors programs, and even when there are openings, it will seem like everyone else has more experience than you. Thus, if you take yourself out of the one pool that is only for entry-level hiring – that is, only for those with no experience – you have
done yourself a large disservice. We recommend applying to every “honors” program that interests you.

b) **Summer Positions**
Most government offices, especially federal ones, hire paid or unpaid interns for summer positions, which is a valuable way to demonstrate your interest in post-graduate positions with a specific agency or with government generally. A small handful of government agencies, such as the Department of State’s Office of Legal Adviser, use their summer program as a try-out for permanent, post-graduate positions (similar to law firms’ summer associate programs). For links to summer opportunities, visit our Government Practice Area page.

c) **Government Employers at On-Campus Interviewing**
Even if you are not interested in applying to private firms for summer or post-graduate employment, there are always some government employers who attend Early Interview Week and Fall On-Campus Interviewing. The Office of Career Services runs On-Campus Interviewing with Symplicity. More information on On-Campus Interviewing can be found in OCS’ Career Guides. Every year, there are some government employers who interview on-campus, and only on-campus, so you don’t want to miss your best or only opportunity to apply.

d) **The Department of Justice (DOJ)**
The DOJ dubbed by some the “Nation’s Law Firm,” is the largest federal employer of attorneys. Attorneys are hired into one of a number of divisions, including Antitrust, Civil, Civil Rights, Criminal, Environment and Natural Resources, or Tax. All entry-level hiring (for 3Ls, judicial clerks, and post-graduate fellows) is done through the competitive Attorney General’s Honors Program. Summer interns are hired via the competitive (and paid) Summer Law Intern Program (SLIP), the Volunteer Legal Recruitment Program, or by the individual component within DOJ, perhaps via a job fair or other posting. The application period for AG Honors and SLIP open in late July and close around Labor Day, so check for deadlines prior to the start of the fall semester.

For more information on the DOJ, read DOJ 101 and visit the government library.

e) **Other Federal Honors Programs**
The DOJ isn’t the only federal agency that will make offers to graduating 3Ls and summer positions to 1Ls and 2Ls. There are numerous other agencies who conduct honors programs. For more information, visit our Government Practice Area page.

**NOTE:** Don’t limit your search to the DOJ. If you want to do civil rights work, for example, such work is also being done at the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights, the EEOC, the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services Office, and the National Labor Relations Board. If you want to do corporate work, you should look at the SEC, the FDIC, the Department of the Treasury, the FTC, the IRS, the Commodity and Futures Trading Commission the Federal Reserve Board, the Small Business Administration, and the Comptroller of the Currency, to name a few.

**NOTE:** Similarly, don’t limit your search to just one government office; make sure to investigate whether your practice area is also represented in other offices, as it almost always is. Thus, if you want to do intellectual property work, don’t limit yourself to the US Patent and Trademark Office. You should also look at the Department of the Air Force, the CIA, NASA, the NIH, the Committee on the Judiciary (both the Majority and the Minority Office), the Department of the Navy, the Smithsonian Institution, the Office of the US Trade
Representative, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. If you want to do environmental law, look beyond the EPA and DOJ. Think about the JAG Corps, NOAA, the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, the Department of the Interior, the FAA, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Department of Transportation, the Office of the US Trade Representative, the Army Corps of Engineers, the FCC, and the US Agency for International Development.

f) **Criminal Law** – for information on U.S. Attorney and Federal Public Defender Offices, see below.

g) **Non-Attorney Positions**

Please keep in mind that even if an office does not have attorneys, they often hire JDs for non-attorney, policy-oriented, positions. If you are interested in a particular agency, you should seriously consider those non-attorney positions, too. Even if you are not originally hired as an attorney, should you wish to switch to an attorney position at a later date, it is easier to move around within the government once you are in the door. There are two excellent programs for entry-level, non-attorney hiring: (1) the Presidential Management Fellowship Program (PMF) and (2) the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP). All students who are thinking about working for the federal government should consider applying to the PMF program in the fall of their final year of study and should look for FCIP openings at various agencies throughout the year. There is also a resource from the University of Arizona, the **Public Policy Handbook**. The username/password is global/warming.

(1) **Presidential Management Fellowship**

The Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF) Program is a two-year fellowship designed to attract entry-level talent into government service, which places over 700 graduate students (including J.D. 3Ls and LL.M.s) in public policy and management positions with executive agencies.

All 3L and graduating dual degree students are eligible to apply. For example, for the PMF Class of 2011, one must complete a graduate degree between September 1, 2010 - August 31, 2011 to be eligible.

Fellows are hired by more than 80 Federal Agencies, such as the Department of Commerce, the State Department, the Agency for International Development, the Department of Veteran’s Affairs, the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, NASA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Elections Commission, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and many others. Students with experience in public policy and international relations may be well-positioned to apply for positions, as would students with background in finance, environmental issues, the sciences, public health, refugee issues, and many other fields.

Please note that law students are welcome and eligible to apply (and represent the largest number of nominees), BUT attorney positions for PMFs are not readily available. Most often, law students selected as finalists obtain appointments in positions such as policy analyst, budget analyst, tax law specialist, or other non-attorney positions. Some of our past PMFs who wanted to have an attorney position, have entered the program as a non-attorney and then rotated into a legal position. Thus, as long as you are somewhat flexible about whether you practice law right away, PMF can be a wonderful place to start your government career.

A recent alum reports that very few government offices at the PMF job fair consider a student’s grades when making hiring decisions; thus, PMF is an excellent opportunity
for students who believe their grades might be a barrier to other types of federal government employment.

The PMF program is a very good fit for those students with strong public interest credentials; in addition, however, the program has historically had trouble filling PMF positions in the following fields: IT, Engineering, Human Resources, Business, Statistics, Science and Health, which are areas that intersect the offerings at Michigan Law and the experiences of our students.

The selection process for the Presidential Management Fellows Program consists of four parts:

1. **Application** – submit your application via [USAJobs](https://www.usajobs.gov) once the application period opens, typically for two weeks in October. *Make sure your resume is linked from USAJobs to Application Manager*, which is the system PMF uses for applications. We've had past nominees disqualified from the program for failure to complete this step. Take a screen shot of your confirmation page in case you need to prove that the documents were linked.

2. **Nomination** – Michigan Law's nomination official, MaryAnn Sarosi, Assistant Dean for Public Service, will complete the nomination process by the deadline.

3. **Assessment and Finalist Selection** – if you are nominated, you must complete a written assessment (at various locations around the country, but usually in Chicago for UM students) by the PMF program. If you pass the assessment, you will become a Finalist and be invited to a spring job fair for finalists. Finalists have 1 year to secure a placement with a participating agency; there is no guarantee of a job if you are named a Finalist.

4. **Agency Placement as a Fellow** – if you secure a placement with a participating agency, you will become a Fellow.

**Please note that you will not be named a finalist until March, and the job placement process will not begin until April and could continue for up to a year.** Thus, you should think of PMF as a backup plan to many other avenues for seeking government employment. Law students are often disappointed that the PMF selection process runs much later than most other opportunities for law students, creating some anxiety at a time when many classmates have already secured positions. However, it is quite common for students from non-law graduate programs to graduate without having a position secured, and PMF runs on that timeline instead.

More information about the selection process is available online at [www.pmf.opm.gov](http://www.pmf.opm.gov).

**Federal Career Intern Program**
The [Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP)](https://www.opm.gov) is designed to help agencies recruit and attract exceptional individuals by bypassing the normal civil service process. It was created under Executive Order 13162, and is intended for positions at grade levels GS-5, 7, and 9 or other trainee positions. In general, individuals are appointed to a 2-year internship. Upon successful completion of the internships, the interns may be eligible for permanent placement within an agency.

Unlike the PMF Program, there is no centralized hiring process for FCIP. Thus, individuals interested in Career Intern opportunities must contact specific agencies directly. However, like PMF, there are not many (if any) attorney positions available.

To find FCIP opportunities, visit an agency’s Web site or [USAJobs](https://www.usajobs.gov) and search for “career intern.” For a list of agency FCIP programs, view the [Federal Career Intern Program Directory](https://www.opm.gov) (you’ll find it on this site in the menu to the left). Please note that
some agencies do not call the program FCIP; e.g. the Department of Health and Human Services calls their FCIP program the Emerging Leaders Program.

For more general information on FCIP, visit the Office of Personnel Management’s Q&A.

2. Military

All of the service branches have numerous opportunities for lawyers in two main capacities: 1) as a civilian in the Office of the General Counsel for the Department of Defense, as well as each military branch, and 2) as a commissioned officer in each military branch’s Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps.

a) Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

Every government agency has a general counsel’s office, and the Department of Defense, Department of the Navy, Department of the Air Force, and Department of the Army are no exception. They typically employ civilian attorneys to assist with an extremely diverse set of issues. Because it is civilian, the work at OGC is much closer to general government agency work than military law issues that JAGs perform. Because you work for the Department, not the military itself, all the civil service protections apply (i.e. Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell is not a policy at the OGCs).

The DOD has 100 in its direct OGC. The Army has about 40 lawyers in its OGC. The Air Force has about 100 lawyers. The Navy has 750 worldwide. Because of this size, Navy OGC probably has the most diverse set of issues to deal with. For example, in the Department of the Navy, OGC, you might practice corporate law, government contracts, transactions/acquisitions, property law, employment law, ethics matters, transportation law, admiralty and maritime law, tax, bankruptcy, base realignment, litigation, and patent and trademark law. That said, all of the Department OGCs have extremely wide-ranging practice areas compared to other agencies, so you should look closely at all of them to see if your favored practice areas are represented.

It should be noted that the Navy OGC also hires about 6 to 8 entry-level attorneys from its previous summer class (of about 10 clerks) through its Advance Commitment Program. Thus, if you are interested in the Navy OGC, be sure to apply to their summer program as a 2L. Similarly, the Army has an Honors Program for entry-level attorneys, but it is not offered every year, and it requires a commission as an officer.

All of the general counsel’s offices hire summer interns. Check each branch’s website for specifics on how to apply.

b) JAG Corps

The other way to be a lawyer with a military practice is through the JAG Corps for each branch, which all hire both entry-level and experienced attorneys: United States Air Force JAG Corps, United States Army JAG Corps, United States Coast Guard JAG Corps, United States Marine JAG Corps and United States Navy JAG Corps. The members of the various JAG Corps are commissioned officers, not civilians.

The various JAG Corps have a very diverse practice, as they serve as the counsel for all legal issues, both civil and criminal, that arise on a base. That means that JAGs are doing criminal

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1 The Department of the Navy also administers the Marine Corps, so the Navy OGC deals with Marine Corps issues as well. The Coast Guard is administered by the Department of Homeland Security, and they do not have their own OGC. Finally, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce is another uniformed service, and they have an OGC, as well.
prosecution, criminal defense, labor law, government contracts, admiralty law, aviation/space law, environmental law, international law, tort law, and operations law, just to name a few potential areas of practice. Potential assignments include: military criminal justice, JAG advisor to base commander, environmental law, or employment issues with civilians.

While each branch has slightly different processes for hiring, generally speaking, an interested person applies through the Direct Appointment Program (DAP) or Direct Commission Program (DCP) during their 3L year (or anytime thereafter until they are too old to be commissioned, which ranges from between your 35th and 42nd birthday). The Navy and Marines have programs that accept 2Ls, while the Air Force has a program that accepts 1Ls and 2Ls. Since thousands of people apply to the DAP, if you are sure that you want to do JAG, the early programs are often much less competitive and offer a higher rate of acceptance.

Each branch holds a certain number of selection boards (committees that meet to decide who to hire) during the year, from 2 to 6, where the new JAGs are selected. You can apply as many times as you would like, and, in fact, you are encouraged to continue to reapply if you remain interested. Far from being some sort of negative factor, the fact that you were denied by a prior board and have chosen to reapply shows your dedication and is seen in a very positive light.

The application process consists of an application and an interview, which you schedule at your convenience at an EARLY date, as they may run out of spots. All of the branches require some test of physical fitness/medical exam, but only the Coast Guard requires it before you apply; the rest of the branches do the physical fitness testing and medical exams after you are selected.

The various JAG Corps are looking at the "whole person," and there is not a particular background that is prized over another. Instead, they generally look for someone with a demonstrated interest in the military (even if it is a new interest), leadership, candor, and integrity. Each branch asks for a personal statement, and it should be very different than the one that you submitted to law schools, since they are trying to understand why you want to work for JAG, rather than why you want to be a lawyer/attend law school/or whatever you wrote three years ago. Be sure to address what you have to offer rather than discussing what you will get out of the service. You should also address why you want to be in a particular service. Finally, keep in mind that they are trying to get a sense of you as a person. Writing something like, "I can’t imagine not being in the Coast Guard," and then explaining why that is so is one way to approach the essay.

During the interview, it is very important to be unfailingly polite to everyone you meet, as they are looking for how you interact with those who would be both above and below you in the chain of command – be genuine about it. One of our students reported that she was asked the following questions at her interview for the Air Force:

1. Why JAG?
2. Leadership questions (describe a time when you were a leader, and so on)
3. Be prepared to discuss whether you are in shape/physically active. It’s fine if you are not, but you need to share a plan to become in shape.
4. Are you willing to carry a gun?
5. Have you thought about the consequences of being deployed?
6. Do you have any problem prosecuting someone for a crime?

You are subject to a background check for each branch. One tip: as the application process continues, you will be working with a recruiter. If at any time your recruiter tells you that you are disqualified, usually due to some sort of background issue such as a prior DUI, ask if
you can apply with a waiver. You have to ask because you may not be told that such a thing is available.

For more information on JAG,

- Review this PowerPoint presentation put together by recruiters from 4 of the 5 JAG Corps.
- Several of our graduates who joined JAG after graduation have contributed to this mini-FAQ.
- There is an online forum full of information on JAG that past applicants have found helpful at http://www.top-law-schools.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=31543.
- There is a chapter on Military Judge Advocates/JAG in the NALP publication "The Official Guide to Legal Specialties; an Insider's Guide to Every Major Practice Area," which answers questions such as, what is Military Practice? Where do Judge Advocates Work? What type of cases do they work on? How do people become judge advocates? What skills are most important to judge advocates? And so on. We have several copies in the OCS/OPS library in 210 HH.

Finally, keep in mind two things: 1) some, if not all, of the branches hire law students for the summer, which can be a great way to see if JAG might be for you (and you do not have to be a commissioned officer), and 2) we have a number of alumni and students who have worked/do work for JAG, so be sure to check the Public Service Network.

### 3. Legislative

The legislative branch also offers opportunities to pursue public service legal work. Lawyers working in offices of legislative counsel, on legislators' personal staffs, and as staff attorneys for legislative committees draft legislation, render legal advice regarding proposed legislation, and investigate matters of interest to the legislator or committee. Attorneys in these positions become experts in the political process and shape legislation.

Job listings on the Senate-side can be found here. On the House-side, job listings can be hard to come by, as most jobs are found through word of mouth, though the U.S. House of Representatives site offers some postings and phone numbers. Further, some Hill staffers maintain electronic job lists, including Tom Manatos and Brad Traverse (monthly fee). Young Democrats of America has a web page listing organizations and listservs for left-leaning job and internship seekers. Also, The Hill, Congressional Quarterly and Roll Call have job listings.

Finally, here’s a note from an alum regarding Congressional Affairs Offices within agencies, which serve as a link between the executive and legislative branches:

> If you've got anyone with Hill experience, an interesting place to have graduating students look to apply might be in the Congressional Affairs office of any agency. [The Health and Human Services] office is called the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Legislation. It's called something different elsewhere. . . [T]hey tend to be small-ish office of about 20-30 people, about half of whom are attorneys. Attorney-advisors in our ASL office do a lot of work in preparing officials for congressional hearings, responding to congressional investigations, working on drafting legislation, working on regulations, etc. Not something I would have thought about when I was a law student -- but being on the inside, I can see how it would be a great place to be. That said -- definitely requires some Hill experience, at any level.

### 4. Judicial

The judiciary provides additional public service opportunities. Post-graduate clerkships, as well as staff attorney positions with the courts, exist at the state and federal levels, and in trial and appellate courts. In addition, magistrate and bankruptcy judges hire law clerks, as do the judges of
the various “specialty courts” such as the U.S. Tax Court, the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veteran Claims. Some tribal courts hire law clerks. International clerkships offer a unique experience as well. Examples of these types of courts include the International Court of Justice in The Hague, and the European Court of Human Rights, to name a few. Last, but not least, there are clerkship positions available with Administrative Law Judges (ALJs). ALJs adjudicate conflicts arising out of government agency decision-making. Over 30 U.S. government departments and agencies have ALJs.

Clerkships can be for a specific duration – typically one or two years – or for an indefinite time period. Increasingly, judges are using first- and second-year law students as volunteer clerks over the summer as well as during the school year.

Clerkships are highly coveted positions that serve as an invaluable launching pad for a career in government and public interest law. A clerkship with a judge or court affords an insider’s view of judicial decision-making and our system of justice. Clerkships give recent graduates added credentials and stature; receiving a clerkship is a sign of ability and intellectual substance. A law clerk receives substantial research and writing experience under the tutelage of a judge and without the pressure of clients. Furthermore, the fact that a judge can attest to your writing and research skills is a handy reference in the very tight public interest job market. Most public interest and government employers consider a year clerking a year of “litigation experience” which gives judicial clerks an edge over lawyers applying straight out of law school or after one or two years at a private firm. Clerking is also a great way to transition into a new geographic location and provides a positive work experience during the time it takes to pass and get sworn into the bar. If nothing else, a clerkship provides recent graduates with a year to think about, research, and apply for other public interest jobs.

The Office of Career Services has an attorney-advisor dedicated to helping you find a judicial clerkship at the federal, state, or local level. To make an appointment, call 734.764.0546. For more information, please see the Judicial Clerkship section of the Office of Career Services’ Web site.

B. State Government

Each of the fifty states and the District of Columbia maintains a staff of lawyers under its Attorney General, the attorney for the state, to litigate suits for and against the state. This is usually the largest legal office at the state level. There also may be legal positions within various state agencies. Using New York as an example, job listings for New York executive branch agencies, which can be found here and here, have openings for attorneys in numerous offices, including the Office of Children and Family Services, the Department of Health, the Technology Department, the City University of New York, the Division of Human Rights, the Insurance Department, and the State Commission on Judicial Conduct. This list is not exhaustive, nor does it include jobs with the State Senate, the State Assembly or the Courts (click on each for information on the various fellowships and internships available to graduate students). For internship opportunities in NY State Government, visit here. Finally, non-legal positions may exist in many state agencies for which a law degree is helpful but not required.

C. Local Government

Many local units have a city attorney; the larger the city the more likely that there will be a department rather than a single attorney. This office represents the city in lawsuits or works with outside counsel much like a corporate legal department does. It advises the other city departments and personnel on legal matters and drafts ordinances when necessary. For example, New York City employs nearly 700 attorneys in its Law Department, which has 17 different divisions, and they often hire out of the summer internship pool. Further, depending on the size of the city, attorneys can be found in numerous other non-obvious local offices, so it is a good idea to do some research beyond the city attorney’s office, too.
D. **Criminal Law**

1. **U.S. Attorneys’ Offices**

   The U.S. Attorneys share responsibility for the prosecution of federal crimes with the DOJ. U.S. Attorneys also handle selected federal law civil cases. Each federal judicial district has at least one U.S. Attorney Office. Salaries are comparable to those offered at the DOJ. These offices almost never hire directly out of law school and generally require new hires to have at least 2-5 years of litigation and/or investigative experience. Though, please note that in 2009, there were three U.S. Attorney’s Offices participating in the DOJ Honors Program for entry-level attorneys (only those who have already graduated from law school): [U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California](#), [U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California](#), and U.S. Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico (open to 3Ls also).

   Most U.S. Attorneys Offices tend to hire attorneys who have worked in prosecutors’ offices, State AG Offices, or federal agencies. Alumni who are Assistant U.S. Attorneys have told us that it’s helpful to apply to the DOJ Honors Program (if you’re rejected the first time and you subsequently take a clerkship or a fellowship, apply again; they love to see the commitment), the SEC, IRS, Consumer Product Safety Commission, FTC, FDA – any federal agency in which you can get either trial experience of experience building an investigation. Additionally, when you are looking to move to an AUSA Office, be geographically flexible. If there is an opening at an AUSA Office in a city that is less desirable than another city, it’s better to take the long term view and pursue the less desirable city. Once you are in the AUSA system, it’s easier to transfer after 2 years or so.

   Keep in mind that AUSA candidates must fill out questionnaires which ask about drug use in the past five years, defaults on student loans and tax returns, and other questions meant to weed out unethical or unlawful behavior. For more information on background checks, visit [insert our document on that here](#).

   As far as quality of life and work, Assistant U.S. Attorneys generally report that they enjoy their jobs, citing interesting work, control over their caseloads, early responsibility, and a manageable number of trials. Most U.S. Attorneys’ offices have volunteer summer intern programs.

2. **Federal Public Defender Offices**

   If you are interested in the defense side of criminal matters, you may be able to practice federal criminal law at a federal defender organization, of which there are 79 employing more than 2,800 lawyers across the country. There are two types of federal defender organizations: federal public defender organizations and community defender organizations. Federal public defender organizations are federal entities, and their staffs are federal employees. The chief federal public defender is appointed to a four-year term by the court of appeals of the circuit in which the organization is located. Community defender organizations are non-profit defense counsel organizations incorporated under state laws. Community defender organizations operate under the supervision of a board of directors and may be a branch or division of a parent non-profit legal services corporation that provides representation to the poor in state, county, and municipal courts. For more information, please visit the [U.S. Courts](#) Web site and the [Office of Defender Services](#), which also has [job postings](#).

   Like U.S. Attorneys’ Offices, Federal Public Defender Offices usually require its attorneys to have a few years of experience. However, many offices will accept summer interns, which is a good way to ascertain whether federal criminal law is of interest to you.
3. **Prosecutors**

Assistant District Attorneys and Assistant Attorney Generals prosecute state criminal cases. Like public defender offices, prosecutor offices also provide new attorneys with a tremendous amount of trial experience in a very short period of time.

It is important to note that most prosecutor offices only hire lawyers after they have passed the state bar exam. Attorneys with criminal litigation, moot court and/or clinical experience will be most competitive.

4. **Public Defenders**

The Public Defender Offices are generally locally or state funded offices that provide representation to accused persons in criminal cases who are financially unable to retain their own lawyer. Because caseloads are high, these positions provide a unique opportunity for young lawyers to get a great deal of experience, particularly trial experience, very quickly. Attorneys in defender offices often begin trying misdemeanors immediately and may move up to trying felonies in a year or two. Most jurisdictions separate trial and appellate criminal defense and opportunities often exist in both divisions.

It is important to note that most public defenders only hire lawyers after they have passed the state bar exam. Attorneys with criminal litigation, moot court and/or clinical experience will be most competitive. Median salaries for entry-level defenders is around $45,000.

For more specific information on public defender jobs, hiring timelines, more detailed job guides, interview tips, and so on, visit Michigan Law School's *Guide to Public Defender Careers*, as well as these further resources.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** the OPS Web site has comprehensive lists of federal government web sites and resources in the Government Practice Area page. To join the student public service job e-mail group, use this link and send the automatically generated e-mail or send an e-mail to mls-ps-jobs-request@umich.edu with Subscribe as the subject.

### IV. Resources for your Government Job Search

In this section, we’ve collected a few quick notes where the government information differs slightly from the information related to a public interest job search. The in-depth explanations for each subsection below to our Web site, as they will be resources you might consult again and again throughout your law school career and beyond.

**A. Where Are the Government Jobs?**

For a list of resources to get you started, visit our Government Job Search Resources section of the Government Practice Areas web page, which has job search information for 1) federal government entry-level positions, 2) federal government summer internships, 3) prosecution, 4) defense, 5) the Hill, and 6) state and municipal positions. These resources do not include every possible agency, so use it as only part of your search.

For entry-level hiring, while USAJobs is an excellent starting place, please note that only about 20% of jobs are posted there. Instead, you should also be regularly checking any agency’s Web site that interests you. Further, you should make an appointment with an OPS attorney-advisor to discuss 1) creating a target list of 20-30 offices (not agencies, but the individual offices within the agency) that most interest
you, and 2) sending a targeted mailing to those offices expressing your interest in any openings that might arise. Finally, you should network, network, network with any Michigan Law alumni, professors, former employers, friends, and so on to ensure your network knows what jobs you are looking for and are able to alert you to any internal openings. For more on networking, see Networking 101.

For summer internships, please go “beyond the job posting!” While job posting web sites are quite helpful, you can contact ANY government agency (after checking their Web site and finding no information) to see if the office can use legal interns for the summer. Of course, be sure that you will be doing legal work; you can do so by ensuring that you will be supervised by at least one lawyer.

B. The Government Resume

- For a complete look at the Public Service Resume, please visit this link.
- For federal government resumes, USAJobs provides some advice. Federal resumes require more detail than traditional legal resumes; applicants must specify dates and number of hours worked per week, for example. Candidates should use the key words in the job description, or “Duties,” as labeled in USAJobs, in their resumes to describe prior experience. Applicants can save up to five different resumes on USAJobs to use for varied job announcements, and you should tailor your resume specifically to each job for which you apply.

C. How to Navigate KSAs or Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Applicants to federal jobs are often required to write Knowledge, Skills & Abilities (KSAs) or narrative statements addressing the selection factors for the job. Whether the application requires KSAs or narrative statements, applicants should write first person descriptions of their experiences, with specific examples and quantitative measures when possible. The Partnership for Public Service provides advice on KSAs, and suggests that candidates use the “CCAR” approach – Context, Challenges, Approach, and Results – to describe experiences and demonstrate skills and success. See KSA Writing & Federal Resumes and A Guide to KSA Writing for more information from the Partnership for Public Service.
- Please note that President Obama released a memo to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on May 11, 2010 that directed them to switch from the long-standing Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) essay form of application to a resume and cover letter based system, and they are supposed to do so by November 1, 2010. While the switch might not occur on-time, KSAs are in the process of being phased out in the near future. GovernmentExecutive.com had a good summary of this and other coming changes here: http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0510/051110e1.htm?oref=rellink.

D. The Government Cover Letter

- For a complete look at the Public Service Cover Letter, visit this link.
- Government employers are mission-driven (rather than profit-driven) and are, therefore, looking for candidates who understand that and “buy into” their mission. Thus, be sure to demonstrate that:
  1. You understand the mission of the employer;
  2. You understand what the lawyers at the organization do;
  3. Your background and interests tie to their mission and legal work; and
  4. You would bring the employer specific skills and knowledge to serve their mission and legal work.

E. The Government Interview

- For a complete look at the Public Service Interview, visit this link.
- For government interviews, have an answer for the question “why government service” and “why x employer.” You will almost certainly get asked some variation of at least one, if not
both, of these questions. If you are not asked these questions, you should still find a way to work the information into your other responses.

F. **How to Select and Use References**
   - For complete information on references, see Other Commonly Requested Documents in *Creating the Public Service Cover Letter*.

G. **Networking**
   - For complete information on networking, please see *Networking 101*. 
## Which Federal Agencies and Departments Employ the Most Lawyers?

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<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Number of Lawyers</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>Average Length of Service (yrs)</th>
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<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<td>Department of Treasury</td>
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*Information from Fedscope, Office of Personnel Management, data from June 2009*