THE 1L SUMMER PUBLIC INTEREST JOB SEARCH

OVERVIEW
Many public interest employers hire first-year students as volunteers or, rarely, as paid interns for the summer. Public interest organizations tend to be motivated more by concepts of access to justice, fairness, and advancement of the public good than by commercial or personal gain. These organizations sometimes pursue justice on behalf of individuals (by providing direct legal services), engage in impact litigation (by bringing class-action litigation or mounting constitutional challenges to statutes), or both. Many such organizations also engage in policy work, community organization and education, and lobbying efforts.

Public interest law encompasses a wide array of legal issues, both domestic and international, including: human rights, civil rights, political liberties, religious liberties, environmental law, animal rights, immigration, employment and labor law, family law, criminal law, health care law (HIV/AIDS, mental health, etc.), elder law, juvenile justice, poverty law (including landlord/tenant law, consumer law, public benefits law), education law, micro-enterprise work, the creation of affordable housing, and the rights of children. Public interest organizations may be funded publicly, privately, or both, and come in the form of international nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and other non-profit entities.

BENEFITS OF WORKING FOR A PUBLIC INTEREST ORGANIZATION
Public service legal work offers a wide range of opportunities that are fulfilling on both a professional and a personal level. Summer internships with public interest organizations provide you with the opportunity to build substantive legal skills and to work on intellectually complex and fascinating matters, while honing your legal research and writing skills. In addition, you will be able to help people and organizations who might not otherwise have access to representation.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES IN WHICH YOU MAY ENGAGE
Public interest representation takes many forms: trial and appellate litigation in courts and administrative agencies, serving as in-house counsel for non-profits, writing amicus briefs, assisting in the client intake process, transactional work, legislative advocacy, developing public policy, community organizing, alternative dispute resolution, and managing non-profits. The specific activities you undertake may vary depending upon the organization you select. We encourage you to choose a subject area or client group important to you. In that context, you may provide direct legal assistance to individuals who need help with benefits, family law, or housing issues. Or, you may focus on an issue of public policy and spend your time on in-depth research and drafting reports or position papers for the organization.

WHEN TO APPLY
Deadlines vary by organization; some organizations will have a specific application deadline period, others will hire on an ad hoc basis, and others will hire if approached by an individual willing to volunteer or who has identified a compatible funding source.
Typically, public interest organizations hire first-year students during the spring semester. Because many public interest positions are unpaid, you should plan to apply for a grant from the WULAW Summer Public Interest Stipend Program and let prospective employers know about this program.

**On or after November 1, 2009:**

**Step 1:** Determine the range of opportunities that interest you, your economic needs and resources (i.e., salary, work-study funding, summer public interest stipend funding, or volunteer work), and think about where you might like to work. Could you live rent-free with a relative? Can you sublet your apartment? Can you afford plane fare and immunizations to travel to an international destination?

Identify personal interests, career goals for the near, intermediate and long term, and think candidly about the skills you need to develop to achieve those goals. This self-assessment will define the parameters for your search. A few questions to consider include:

- Do you want to perform civil or criminal work?
- Do you want to litigate? If so, in which courts? Or, are you more interested in transactional work?
- Do your current interests and background lead to any particular area of the law?
- What subject area or client group is important to you? Are there particular issues about which you feel passionate?

**Step 2:** Go to PSLAWNET at [http://www.pslawnet.org](http://www.pslawnet.org) and begin reading! PSLawNet is the clearinghouse site for public interest and government employment. The site was completely re-worked this summer and is infinitely more user-friendly and fun to use. We subscribe to the site on your behalf. Just select Washington University from the pull-down menu, enter your e-mail address, and they’ll send you a personal password.

In addition to job and internship postings and information about summer funding opportunities, the site is an easy way to access all the best, basic information about public interest careers. Explore it fully and check in often.

Other resources for researching public interest employers include:

- Information about organizations where students who were funded through the Public Interest Stipend Program worked in previous summers. See Carol Vizzier in the CSO
National Legal Aid and Defender Association – www.nlada.org/jobop.htm
Provides information on civil legal services organizations and defender organizations. It is searchable by state.

CSO Out of Town Research Guides for selected cities/states (23 total guides) – available in the CSO

Foundation Center – www.foundationcenter.org
Provides information on the majority of foundations, corporate grantmakers, and other nonprofit organizations.

The Public Interest Law Initiative http://www.pili-law.org/ funds students working at Chicago public interest organizations; single application covers 20 host organizations.

Equal Justice Works – www.equaljusticeworks.org
Review the list of organizations who participated in the October 2008 Conference and Career Fair.

Minnesota Justice Foundation – www.mnjustice.org

Gotham Gazette Classified – www.gothamgazette.com
An on-line listing of public service positions in New York City, includes many law-related positions.

Resource for international internships

Guide to international organizations, governments, private sector institutions, development agencies, universities, research and training institutions, NGOs, grant-makers, banks, microfinance institutions, and development consulting firms.

Step 3: Begin to explore funding sources, as funding for 1L summer public interest positions is limited.

Attend the upcoming program (date TBD) explaining the Public Interest Summer Stipend Program. Note: summer judicial internships and political internships do not qualify for this program.

Search the listing of national summer funding resources at http://www.pslawnet.org.

Step 4: On or after December 1, 2009, create your profile in Symplicity and begin applying for position announcements that may be listed there. Continue to check this site, as position announcements are regularly posted.

Step 5: Plan to attend the Midwest Public Interest Career Conference, which takes place in early February. Participating employer information and applicable deadline dates will be available in late November.

Step 6: Plan to attend the WULAW Government and Public Interest Career Fair held in late February. Local and regional employers, including public defenders,
legal services, local prosecutors, public interest organizations, federal agencies, and more will be on-hand to interview WULAW students.

Step 7: Network, Network, Network! If you will be seeking a position in your hometown or in a non-St. Louis location, try to arrange informational meetings and/or interviews for a time you will be in that location or during school breaks.

Also, consider attending public interest conferences that typically take place during the spring semester. For example, Yale Law School sponsors the “Rebellious Lawyering Conference” [http://islandia.law.yale.edu/reblaw/](http://islandia.law.yale.edu/reblaw/) February 19-21, 2010.

Attend lectures and events at WULAW and elsewhere whenever they are offered. Events sponsored by a myriad of cultural, political, educational, and social organizations in St. Louis may be listed in the newspaper or on an organization’s website. Introduce yourself to the speaker or to other attendees – you never know where you might make a connection.