

LAW STUDENT ASSIGNMENT POSSIBILITIES

United States Attorney's Office
Judiciary Center Building
555 4th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

FRONT OFFICE

A law student in the Front Office will gain insight into the mechanics of the United States Attorney's Office as a whole. Clerks are expected to provide support to Principal and Executive Assistant United States Attorneys, Office of Professional Development, Special Counsel, and staff. Clerks will have an opportunity to get involved in a wide-array of projects that impact the legal system here in the District of Columbia. In providing support to the Office of Professional Development, law clerks will perform legal research and writing on a variety of topics relevant to criminal trial practice, observe criminal jury trials, participate in the development and presentation of training programs and assist in the production of a office trial bulletin.

OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Office of Professional Development is responsible for providing training to attorneys and administrative staff for attorneys in the U.S. Attorney's Office. OPD presents training programs for attorneys on a variety of subjects relevant to criminal trial practice, including constitutional law, trial advocacy and scientific and technical issues. Law clerks assigned to the Office will perform legal research and writing, observe and report on criminal trials, and participate in the development of training material. In addition, they will participate in the presentation of training programs and the production of an office newsletter.

VICTIM/WITNESS ASSISTANCE UNIT (VWAU)

The Victim Witness Assistance Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia is responsible for assisting victims and witnesses of crime by providing information on the criminal justice system and providing services to enable them to better cope with the consequences of crime. The U.S. Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecuting criminal violations of federal law as well as violations of the District of Columbia Code, therefore the VWAU provides assistance to victims and witnesses involved in cases in U.S. District Court cases and D.C. Superior Court. The VWAU provides victims with counseling, crisis intervention, referral services, and assistance with the court process.

The VWAU internship is designed to provide interns with exposure to all areas of victim services and advocacy, as well as an opportunity to focus on special projects. A highly motivated, self-directed person with a strong interest in victim's issues or advocacy work is required. Computer knowledge and writing skills are highly desirable.

The VWAU accommodates special victim populations, sex assault physical abuse adult and child victims, disabled victims, elderly victims, domestic violence victims, and survivors of homicide victims. The following are special emphasis areas on which interns may choose to focus their time and energies:

Assist with domestic violence intake/advocacy in conjunction with the new domestic violence prosecution unit.

Working with D.C. Superior Court and the Office of Corporation Counsel.

Assist with implementation of the KidsCourt, the U.S. Attorney's Office court orientation program for child victims and witnesses who must testify in court.

Assist the U.S. Attorney's Office Sex Offense Specialists with services for child victims, including escorting children to court, and to Child Advocacy Center. # Assist with the update and organization of VWAU resource library on victim witness issues.

Students will work with Victim/Witness Specialists in the following areas: Adult Sexual Assault, Child/Physical/sexual abuse, Violent Crime, Felony, Criminal Prosecution and families of Homicide victims, providing VUAU services explaining criminal justice issues, court escort, and referrals to community services.

DISTRICT COURT ASSIGNMENTS

APPELLATE DIVISION

The Appellate Division handles criminal appeals in both the District of Columbia Court of Appeals and the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Laws clerks must have excellent legal research and writing skills.

When they first arrive, law clerks will attend a half-day training session on the work of the Appellate Division, including researching and writing criminal briefs in the D.C. Appellate Courts. Each law clerk is assigned to an appellate attorney "mentor" with whom he or she may consult and obtain guidance. The Chief of the Appellate Division will select appropriate briefs for assignment to the law clerks, who will have responsibility for drafting the government's responsive brief. Briefs are reviewed by the supervisory staff and revised as necessary before being filed with the court. Most of our recent law clerks have been able to write at least two briefs per semester. If the case is scheduled for oral argument while the law clerk is still working in the Division, there is a possibility that the law clerk may present the argument, provided he/she is certified in accordance with the rules of the appellate court (Rule 48 of the Rules of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals or Rule 20 of the General Rules of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit). Law Clerks also will have the opportunity to participate in moot courts and to attend oral arguments in cases handled by attorneys of the Division.

CIVIL DIVISION

The Civil Division is primarily responsible for the defense of virtually all civil actions filed against the United States, its agencies, officers, and employees. The Civil Division, with its 37 Assistant United States Attorneys and Law Clerks, defends over 2000 cases per year, with heavy emphasis on cases involving Constitutional and common law torts, employment discrimination, the Freedom of Information Act, government contracts and review of agency action under the Administrative Procedures Act. The Civil Division also has an active affirmative litigation docket focused primarily on recovering monies from persons and corporations that defraud the United States.

A law clerk assigned to the Civil Division can anticipate intense work with an attorney on a one-to-one basis on significant problems in that attorney's major cases. In particular, the law clerk can anticipate original research and memo writing on issues at the "cutting edge" of the law relating to Constitutional torts, Federal employment problems and challenges to major governmental programs. Additionally, the law clerk can anticipate participating in the formulation of litigation strategy with regard to discovery and trial matters on significant cases.

A law clerk is also likely to have an opportunity to attend one or more depositions and various court proceedings connected with the attorney's caseload, as well as other proceedings handled by the Civil Division. Finally, the law clerk can anticipate aiding an attorney in defending against emergency requests to halt decisions made by officials of the United States. At the end of the semester, the law clerk will be familiar with civil litigation in Federal Court, with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, class actions, trials, and the Federal appellate process. The law clerk also will be familiar with the substantive areas of law handled in the Civil Division.

CRIMINAL DIVISION, FEDERAL MAJOR CRIMES SECTION

The Federal Major Crimes Section is responsible for investigating and prosecuting civil rights violations, bank robberies, immigration fraud, child pornography, environmental crimes, counterfeiting, assaults and threats on federal officials, theft from interstate shipments, routine gun prosecutions, standalone drug cases, and short term bank and credit card fraud.

CRIMINAL DIVISION, FRAUD AND PUBLIC CORRUPTION SECTION

The Fraud and Public Corruption Section is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of a variety of white collar crimes. These include economic crimes, such as tax violations, thefts, and embezzlements, as well as business, banking, securities, telemarketing, credit card, computer, identity theft, mail, wire, health care, and consumer frauds. In addition, this section prosecutes misconduct by officials of both federal and local governments for violations of the public trust, including improper use of office and improper personal enrichment. It also has responsibility to prosecute private individuals for aiding and abetting government officials in their unlawful conduct, and handles allegations of false statements to government agencies, obstruction of justice, and perjury.

Working with various law enforcement agencies, Inspectors General and regulatory agencies, Assistants in the Section conduct grand jury investigations, draft and obtain indictments, and try cases. Service in the Section offers Assistants the opportunity to investigate and prosecute offenders who have developed sophisticated financial schemes and as well as high profile cases against public officials. Although it is staffed primarily by senior attorneys, rotational positions have been created in the Section to provide junior attorneys with exposure to these complex prosecutions.

Law Clerks assigned to this Section can expect to perform legal research and draft motions in pending cases, to research legal issues for indictments and investigations, to participate in witness conferences and to observe hearings and trials of cases on which they are working.

CRIMINAL DIVISION, ORGANIZED CRIME AND NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING

Experienced Assistants are assigned to this section and are responsible for the investigation and prosecution of complex federal cases using conspiracy, continuing criminal enterprise and RICO statutes in order to target and disable the most significant violent gangs and major narcotics traffickers in the District of Columbia. The objective of this section is to stem the flow of narcotics and other dangerous drugs into the District of Columbia by eliminating the drug distribution networks at their sources.

The section is also compound of junior Assistants in rotational assignments. These Assistants prosecutes arrest-generated narcotics and firearms offenses that give rise to mandatory penalties under the provisions of the United States Code. These cases generally arise from undercover operations, the execution of search warrants, or the interdiction of drug couriers at public transportation terminals. Service in this section offers these rotational attorneys substantial experience in Federal criminal trial work.

Law clerks assigned to the Section can expect to do research and drafts for motions in pending cases; to research legal issues for indictments and investigations; to participate in witness conferences; and to observe at hearings and trials of cases on which they are working, or in which they are interested.

CRIMINAL DIVISION, NATIONAL SECURITY SECTION

The National Security Section (NSS) is responsible for the prosecution of a wide variety of crimes ranging from international terrorism, espionage, and violations of weapons export regulations, to assaults and threats on federal officials, immigration violations, child pornography and environmental crimes. Assistants in this Section work closely with agents from virtually all Federal law enforcement agencies. The NSS Section also has primary responsibility within the office for crisis response and crisis management.

Law Clerks assigned to this Section can expect to conduct legal research and prepare memoranda for intra-office use; draft of pleadings in pending cases; assist AUSAs in examining issues relevant to investigations and the preparation of indictments; participate in witness conferences; and observe hearings and trials in cases on which Section AUSAs are working.

SPECIAL PROCEEDINGS SECTION

The Special Proceedings Section of the United States Attorney's office offers several unique responsibilities to law students who are interested in both writing and courtroom opportunities.

The Section handles a wide variety of post-trial matters in both U.S. District Court and D.C. Superior Court.

First, the Section is responsible for all collateral attacks on convictions, including claims of ineffective assistance of counsel, newly discovered evidence, or allegations that the government failed to disclose exculpatory evidence. The hearings in these cases often involve defense attorneys and prosecutors as government witnesses to rebut a defendant's claims.

Second, the Section has a unique responsibility in the field of forensic psychiatry, i.e., the relation of the mentally ill to the criminal justice system. The Section responds to all petitions for release by persons found not guilty by reason of insanity and deals with defendants who are found to be incompetent to stand

trial. The hearings in these cases often psychiatric or psychological testimony and give a law clerk in the Section the chance to observe expert witnesses, and learn about examination and cross-examination of these witnesses.

Third, the Section responds to all petitions for writs of habeas corpus. These petitions typically challenge actions by the parole or prison authorities and hearings on these matters may require the testimony of a wide variety of correctional officials.

Fourth, the Section responds to challengers under the Sex Offender Registration Act. These petitions often involve a wide variety of constitutional challenges to the requirement that sex offenders register under the Act and that the public be notified of the location of these offenders.

Finally, the Section responds to all motions for expungement of criminal records. These motions often require hearings at which the defendant has to show by clear and convincing evidence that he did not commit the offense for which he was arrested.

Law Students who work in the Section will be given substantial responsibility in conducting legal research and writing, and also will be given the opportunity to help Assistants prepare for hearings in both U.S. District Court and D.C. Superior Court. The Section is a small close-knit unit and those who work in the Section will likely have the opportunity to work on a wide variety of legal issues in both the federal and local court systems. The combination of writing and courtroom experience, combined with the wide range of legal issues handled by the Section, should insure a very rewarding experience for any law clerk who chooses to work in Special Proceedings Section.

SUPERIOR COURT ASSIGNMENTS

FELONY MAJOR CRIMES

The Felony Major Crimes of the United States Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecuting most serious felony offenses, ranging from property offenses to serious assaults in the Superior Court for the District of Columbia. The FMC is a vertical prosecution section and the assistants assigned to the section investigate and prosecute all cases which are assigned to them. FMC prosecutors are assigned to specific police districts in order to give them greater familiarity with the neighborhoods as well as the police officers assigned to the respective districts.

Law clerks are assigned to a team of three to four attorneys. The senior person on the team serves as the law clerk's mentor. A Felony Major Crimes law clerk is expected to have completed, or be taking classes in criminal law and procedure, evidence, and constitutional law. A law clerk's duties include, but are not limited to, assisting the attorneys in their trial preparation. In doing so, the law clerk will have the opportunity to prepare discovery materials for the defense, review transcripts and police reports, locate and/or interview witnesses, and interact with the Victim Witness Unit on issues relating to witness security and attendance. The law clerk will also strengthen his or her legal skills by being the primary drafter of responses to motions to suppress evidence and statements. The law clerk will also attend the suppression hearings to see the outcome of their research.

Law clerks in the Felony Major Crimes are often given a great deal of responsibility in assisting Section attorneys in the prosecution of assigned criminal cases. Law clerks will have the opportunity to become familiar with the criminal justice process, from arrest of an accused to prosecution and sentencing. Law clerks are often given the opportunity to be present during a trial, thus enabling them to actually participate in the litigation process from beginning to end.

GENERAL CRIMES SECTION

The General Crimes Section is comprised of two units: Felony Trial Unit and Misdemeanor Trial Unit. The General Crimes Section handles the majority of the cases prosecuted in D.C. Superior Court.

The Felony Trial Unit is responsible for the post-indictment prosecution of most felony cases brought in the Superior Court. The Section's attorneys handle a variety of cases involving narcotics trafficking, weapons offenses and stolen vehicles. Interns are generally assigned to a team of two attorneys and a paralegal. The intern's primary duty is to assist the attorney and/or paralegal to prepare for trial. These duties include organizing files, assisting with witness conferences, copying witness statements, providing discovery material to defense counsel, tracking down a defendant's criminal record, and supervising the preparation of trial exhibits. Interns will also be given an opportunity to observe hearings and trials.

The Misdemeanor Trial Section prosecutes most misdemeanor crimes in the District of Columbia, including offenses involving narcotics and weapons possession, theft, prostitution, animal cruelty, illegal dumping, destruction of property, threats and simple assault. The Section is divided into teams which typically include four attorneys, a paralegal and a legal assistant. Each team is assigned to one judge sitting on the Superior Court misdemeanor calendar. Members of the Section are in court every day trying cases. The Section also administers various diversion programs.

An intern selected to work in this Section is assigned to a team. Work will entail ensuring that the calendar for the team is ready and that all court jackets and other materials needed are in order. Additionally, interns assist the attorneys in preparing their cases for trial by arranging witness conferences, sending out subpoenas, researching criminal records on defendants and in a wide variety of evidence gathering duties. Interns will be given the opportunity to observe hearings and trials. The experience gained from being in the courtroom when hearings and trials are taking place, as well as from working with prosecuting attorneys, often is invaluable in helping interns decide whether to pursue a legal career.

HOMICIDE SECTION

The Homicide Section is responsible for the prosecution of virtually all crimes committed within the District of Columbia, including homicides and other violent crimes. The Homicide Section frequently assigns its attorneys to specific neighborhoods (also known as patrol service areas). As a general rule, each attorney assigned to this Section investigates crimes occurring there, whether it is a murder, a robbery, or a federal drug investigation, from arrest through final disposition. The Section also works in combination with the General Crimes and strives to handle its cases in such a way as to improve the quality of life for the residents of the area and to better our working relationship with citizens, civic groups, and other city and Federal agencies.

Law clerks in this Section are considered part of the General Crimes team and receive practical, hands-on experience in all aspects of criminal law. Working in the Section provides the student with the opportunity to assist in the interviewing of police officers and witnesses, analyzing factual situations, doing research on legal issues, and drafting motions and responses concerning some of the most complex and challenging issues confronting AUSAs in the Office. In addition, students are called upon to assist attorneys in trial preparation and are frequently asked to attend a trial to support the litigation effort. The degree of responsibility given to students will depend upon their performance and ability to gain the confidence of attorneys. A student will find his or her work in the Section to be an unforgettable educational and real-life experience.

SEX OFFENSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SECTION

"The Sex Offense and Domestic Violence Section is an advanced component of the Superior Court Division, responsible for the prosecution of homicides in certain categories (murders of children, murders arising from domestic violence situations, and murders arising from rapes or other sexual assaults,) as well as all other felony sexual assaults (including rape and child molestation,) child physical abuse, and domestic violence—along with associated crimes such as burglary..."

The Sex Offense and Domestic Violence Section prosecutes each case vertically, that is one prosecutor is responsible for the case from the initial interview of the victim, through the investigation and charging process, to trial, plea, or other disposition.

The Sex Offense and Domestic Violence Section has two primary Units. The Sex Offense Unit currently handles all felony sex offense cases. The Domestic Violence Unit is responsible for the prosecution of all misdemeanor intrafamily offenses ranging from assaults to property crimes. The Domestic Violence Unit is committed to aggressive prosecution of all forms of domestic violence including spouse abuse, partner abuse, intra family child abuse, and elder abuse.

Law clerks working with this Section will find their research, analytical and interpersonal skills challenged. They may assist in the interviews of victims and witnesses (including police officers), prepare case jackets, help write motions and other pleadings, and provide trial support. The nature of caseload in the Sex Offense and Domestic Violence Section lends itself to a variety of research topics including voir dire, witness competency, admissible hearsay, search and seizure, DNA evidence, evidence of a victim's prior sexual history or drug use, evidence of other similar crimes committed by the defendant, AIDS testing, expert witness testimony, testimonial privileges, and jury instructions. The combination of a compelling caseload and intriguing research issues yields an invaluable experience for law students interested in the practical aspects of criminal prosecution with a special emphasis on violence against women and children.