



Public Interest Law Concentration

Julia Vázquez

Director of Public Interest Law Concentration

Since its founding, Southwestern has held public interest as a central component of its curriculum and philosophy. Southwestern encourages public service through a rich selection of programs, courses, activities, and individual pursuits. Located in the “public interest corridor” in Los Angeles, Southwestern provides students with numerous opportunities to serve the community. Students participating in public interest work during law school is not only a rewarding way to make a difference in the community but also an opportunity to learn and cultivate lawyering skills of value in any practice area.

Eligibility

To receive optimal advising, students are encouraged to register for the Concentration at the end of their first year (end of the third semester for part-time students), or as soon as possible thereafter. To register for the Concentration, students must be in good academic standing.

A student who completes the Concentration program with at least six graded units of core and elective courses and graduates with a Concentration grade point average of 3.33 or higher will receive the following designation on the student’s transcript: “Concentration in Public Interest Law with Honors.” A student’s Concentration grade point average will be calculated at the time of the student’s graduation in the following manner:

- every graded course a student has taken on the list of core and elective courses below is included in the Concentration grade point average and weighted in accordance with the number of units of that course; and
- a student’s grade in Constitutional Law I & II and Legal Profession courses will also be included in the Concentration grade point average and weighted in accordance with each course’s units

Curricular Requirements

To obtain a J.D. Concentration in Public Interest Law, a student must take at least 15 units of Core and Elective Courses from the list below.²

In addition, to obtain the Concentration, a student must provide at least 75 hours of pro bono or public service during law school.

To qualify as public service, a student’s pro bono or public service work:

- Must be performed under the supervision of a licensed attorney
- Must be performed without receiving any form of compensation or academic credit
- Must be public interest / public service-related

Public interest is broadly defined to encompass interests underrepresented by the private sector, including the interests of the poor, ethnic minorities, and broad-ranging advocacy interests of public concern.

Public service is law-related work in the broader category of the public sector, which does not otherwise meet the definition of pro bono.

Examples of pro bono and public service include:

Direct Legal Services: under the supervision of an attorney, students providing direct legal assistance to an individual through interviewing individuals seeking legal assistance, conducting factual investigation, legal research and writing or legislative analysis and policy interpretation.

Student-led Projects: volunteering with Southwestern student organizations – such as Homelessness Prevention Law Project, National Lawyers Guild, Teen Court, Mass Incarceration Awareness Law Society, etc. – through which no cost legal assistance, services or education for underrepresented groups is provided.

Legal Education: under the supervision of an attorney, staffing legal information hotlines, California Superior Court Self-Help Centers, assisting in the development of legal education materials, presentation of legal education workshops and/or volunteering in law-related education programs – i.e. Mock Trial programs.

Students can obtain a list of suggested opportunities that qualify for pro bono and public service by enrolling at Southwestern's Public Service Program Canvas page, visiting Southwestern's Legal Clinics, or contacting the Public Service Program at publicservice@swlaw.edu. Other public service work will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

1. CORE COURSES

A. Foundational Substantive Courses: Students must take at least one course from the following courses:

Employment Discrimination Law (2 units)
Environmental Law (3 units)
Family Law (2 units)
Immigration Law (2 units)
Public International Law (3 units)
Public Interest Law Practice (2 units)

B. Clinic, Externship, or Practicum Courses: Students must take at least two courses and at least six units total from the following courses:

Advanced Children's Rights Clinic (1 to 3 units)
Advanced Community Lawyering Clinic (1 to 3 units)
Advanced Family Law Clinic (1 to 3 units)
Advanced Immigration Law Clinic (1 to 3 units)
Advanced Street Law Clinic (1 to 3 units)
Amicus Project Practicum (2 units)
Appellate Litigation Clinic (5 units)
Children's Rights Clinic (5 units)
Community Lawyering Clinic (5 units)
Entertainment & the Arts Legal Clinic I & II (3 units)
Eviction Defense Clinic (5 units)
Externship (approved sites related to public interest only)
Family Law Clinic (5 units)
Immigration Law Clinic (5 units)
Street Law Clinic (3 units)
Youth Offender Parole Clinic (6 units)

C. Skills Courses: Students must take at least one course and at least two units total from the following courses:

Advanced Legal Writing (2 units)
Alternative Dispute Resolution (2 or 3 units)
Appellate Process and Brief Drafting (1 unit)
Art of Persuasion (1 unit)
Cannabis Law, Evolution of (1 unit)
Capstone: Employment Law (3 units)
Civil Pretrial Practice (3 units)
Courtroom Procedure 101 (1 unit)
Interviewing, Counseling & Negotiation (3 units)
Moot Court Honors Program (up to 3 units may apply)
Negotiation & Dispute Resolution (2 units)
Negotiation Honors Program (up to 3 units may apply)
Small Law Practice Management (2 units)
Trial Advocacy (2 or 3 units)
Trial Advocacy Honors Program (up to 3 units may apply)

2. ELECTIVE COURSES

To the extent that the required 15 Concentration units are not satisfied by a student's taking additional Core Courses from the courses listed above, students must satisfy the remaining Concentration units by taking Elective courses from the following list:

California Civil Procedure (2 units)
Children and the Law (2 units)
Community Property (2 units)
Criminal Law Seminar: Contemporary Issues (2 units)
Crimmigration (2 or 3 units)
Critical Race Theory Seminar (2 units)
Employment-Based Immigration Law (1 unit)
Employment Law Survey (3 units)
Family Law Procedure & Practice (3 units)
Federal Indian Law (2 units)
International Labor & Employment Law Seminar (2 units)
International Protection of Human Rights Seminar (2 units)
Labor Law (3 units)
Land Use Regulation (3 units)
Law & Religious Institutions Seminar (2 units)
Legal Arguments about Moral & Political Issues Seminar (2 units)
Legislation (2 units)
Media as an International Human Right (2 units)
National Security Law (3 units)
Perpetual Foreigners: The Civil Rights Journey of Asian-Americans from the Yellow Fever to COVID-19 (Asian-American Civil Rights) (1 unit)
Race and the Law Seminar (2 units)
Remedies (2 or 3 units)
Restorative Justice (1 unit)
Special Education Law Seminar (2 units)
Survey of Federal Income Tax (3 units)
Trial of Jesus Seminar (2 units)
Wage Theft in the Underground Economies (1 unit)
Women & the Law Seminar (2 units)
Youth at Risk (2 units)