

BOSTON COLLEGE LAW SCHOOL
Office of Career Services

Fellowships

IS A POST-GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP RIGHT FOR YOU?

Post-graduate fellowships are a great way to begin a career in public interest and to develop your expertise as a new attorney. Post-graduate fellowships are positions with time-limited funding. They may be one year positions with a second year option. Depending on financing, it is not unusual for fellows to make the transition to permanent staff at the end of the fellowship.

Generally speaking, a fellowship will either be: (1) offered by a non-profit agency to fill a specific need, often for a project funded by a grant from a charitable foundation to the agency, or (2) created by a grant made by a foundation in response to an application from you in order to fund a project that you yourself have devised. Typically in the second case, you will have to have a sponsoring agency agree to supervise your project and act as the charitable recipient of your funding (although there are some funders which will support you in creating your own non-profit agency.)

In the case of the first category of fellowships, your main concern is to be aware of their existence, their requirements and their deadlines, and to apply appropriately. This information is available from a variety of sources on-line including PSLawNet.org, and Idealist.org.

The second type of fellowship is more labor-intensive for you. However it offers the possibility of work that is perfectly tailored to your interests. For someone with a clear idea of the work they are committed to doing, this type of fellowship is an extremely attractive and useful alternative. For this reason, they're also extremely competitive and are considered prestigious in the public interest law community.

If this is of interest to you, you may find the following timeline helpful. It is not intended to be rigid – you can successfully compete for a fellowship without following these steps – but it is a suggestion on how to position yourself well for a fellowship application. Career Services is always happy to meet with you to assist in developing a plan for your law school career and to discuss each of the steps suggested below in more detail.

1L – Fall Semester

The beginning of your first year of law school is no time to worry about anything other than adjusting to a new environment, a new way of thinking, and a considerable amount of work. However, while you're acclimating yourself, check out the public interest organizations that are active at the law school. This will give you a good sense of the practice areas that are available

to public interest lawyers. If there is an organization that is dedicated to the topic of your interest, it can become a good source of information for you in the future.

Towards the end of your first semester you will begin considering your first summer job. This job will be your first opportunity to work as a lawyer in the public interest. Make a commitment to yourself that you'll spend this first summer working in your area of special interest.

1L – Spring Semester

Spend some time checking out appropriate summer job opportunities. You can do this by talking with Kate Devlin Joyce, attending informational programs put on by Career Services and by the student-run public interest organizations, talking with 2Ls, talking with professors who work in areas of law that interest you, observing organizations that are doing good work in your area of interest, etc. Then apply for and get a job that will offer you good exposure both to the work and to the people doing the work in the field of your choice. (How to go about doing that is beyond the scope of this pamphlet. There are many other sources of information available in Career Services on this topic.)

Consider getting involved with the Pro Bono Program, this is an excellent way to volunteer in an area of interest and gain practical experience.

This is also the time to apply for 2L clinicals that can give you good hands-on experience, particularly if there is a clinical that relates directly to your area of interest.

1L –Summer

See, "*Nine Tips on Making the Most of Your Summer Public Interest or Government Job*" available in Career Services. In addition to the advice offered there, you should also be assessing your summer placement from a long-term point of view. Is this an agency that can be effective supervisor for a fellowship? Is this an agency to which you want to commit several years of work? If you start to suspect the answer may be "no," then use this time to make contact with other nonprofits of interest to you. Then arrange visits and seek out informational interviews. When possible, attend conferences and trainings. Use these opportunities to connect with a national network of lawyers and to learn more about what is happening across the country in your public interest practice area. Your goal is to accumulate knowledge of, and develop contacts in, potential sponsors. You are also looking for an early lead on your own fellowship project. One of the best ways to devise a useful and interesting proposal is to ask people currently at work in the field, "What isn't getting done that you would do, if you only had the time and money?" If you then propose to apply for funding to do that work, you should have no trouble getting an agency to agree to sponsor you.

2L – Fall

Now is the time to incorporate your personal mission into your law school life. Take on a pro bono project, be active in a student-led organization, focus your course selection, apply for a second semester clinical if appropriate. Your goals are to make a real contribution to your personal mission and to build your skills and resume. Also, watch for and attend relevant programs offered by the Law School and the student organizations. Network whenever you can; particularly get to know people who have held the fellowships if you can. Think about your second summer and agencies that might make a good host organization. Apply for summer positions.

2L – Spring

Apply for and get your 2L summer job. Begin a systematic review of the fellowships that are available and of interest to you. Determine deadlines, and collect application information. Continue to incorporate your mission into your work. Try, if you can, to attend a professional conference in your area of interest – a great way to meet people and get ideas.

2L – Summer

This is the time for serious consideration of your fellowship proposal, and some rough drafting. It takes a lot of time to polish an effective application. If you are working for the agency you hope to have as a sponsor, get as much input as you can into your ideas. If not, this is the time to reach out to potential sponsors and develop their interest in you and your project. For some fellowships, this is also a good time to get some initial, informal reaction to your ideas directly from the grantor.

3L – Late Summer/ Early Fall

Prepare and submit your fellowship applications. Prepare for interviews by the grantors.

3L - Spring

Celebrate your success!

Obviously, applying for a fellowship is a major commitment of time and energy. However, it is one of the rare opportunities available to pursue a individual interest purpose, tailored to the work that you think is important. If you have questions or would like more information about this, contact the Career Services Office.

SOME FAQs

(1) How do I find out about possible fellowships?

Good places to start are the guidebooks listing many legal fellowships, including: the *Harvard Law School Public Interest Job Search Guide*, available in the Career Services Library. Another

source is www.PSLawNet.org. Most organizations are going to on-line applications only, so the web is your best source for research.

(2) Some of the fellowships require me to design my own project -- where do I start?

Before you start, you may wish to review summaries of projects that have been funded or proposed in the past. Then, think about the subject areas that interest you. Spend some time researching the cutting edge issues in the field. Remember that research can include library research (e.g., law review articles), but should also include speaking with faculty members and practicing lawyers in the field. You should also research each funding organization as each fellowship has its own funding preferences and history.

You must then identify some organizations that may be interested in having you work with them if you obtain a fellowship. A good place to start is with an organization where you have previous contacts, perhaps through an internship or summer job. Another approach is to use alumni or faculty contacts. The sponsoring agency does not have to be a big name; however, make sure that it is respected, because the funders do take into account the reputation of your proposed sponsor when evaluating your application. Funders also consider the strength of your relationship with the sponsoring agency and how significant your proposed project is to the work that agency does. Remember to work with the sponsoring organization in developing your fellowship proposal.

(3) What are some of the best-known Fellowships?

The four best-known fellowships, discussed below are: The Equal Justice Works Fellowship, The Skadden Foundation Fellowship, The Soros Criminal Justice Fellowship and the echoing green (sic) Public Service Fellowship.

Skadden Fellowship

The Skadden Fellowships are funded by a charitable foundation of the international law firm of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom. The Program awards approximately twenty-five fellowships to graduating law students and outgoing judicial law clerks. The duration of a Skadden Fellowship is one year, with an option for a second year. Each Skadden Fellow's salary is \$37,500. The Program also pays all fringe benefits as well as all debt service on law school loans for the duration of the Fellowship.

Applicants must secure a potential position with a sponsoring public interest organization before applying for the Fellowship. The sponsor must be a 501(c)(3) organization which provides **civil legal services to the poor**, including the working poor, the elderly, the disabled or those deprived of their civil or human rights. Skadden does not consider projects focused on immigration, environmental or criminal.

BCLS Skadden Fellows

1999

Tara Twomey at Legal Services Center - Community Enterprise Project, Jamaica Plain, MA.

1994

Christine Griffin, Executive Director, Disability Law Center.

Equal Justice Works Fellowships

The Equal Justice Works Fellowships are two-year fellowships which provide a salary and loan repayment assistance to lawyers who advocate on behalf of individuals, groups, or interests that are not adequately represented by the civil legal system. The Fellowship accepts applications from experienced as well as recent law school graduates. Their primary interest is to "launch public interest careers." The individual applies along with a proposed non-profit host organization.

The fellow's salary is set by the host organization at a level comparable with that of an entry-level attorney. Equal Justice Works will contribute up to \$37,500 toward that salary, with the sponsoring agency responsible for the costs of standard fringe benefits.

www.equaljusticeworks.org

BCLS Equal Justice Works Fellows

2006

Rebecca Brink at Health Law Advocates, Boston, MA

2003

Mary Holper at PAIR, Washington, DC

2002

Kathleen Devlin at Refugee Immigration Services of Greater Boston Catholic Charities, Somerville, MA.

2001

James Eldridge at Merrimack Valley Legal Services, Lowell, MA.

Beth Werlin at the Legal Action Center of the American Immigration Law Foundation, DC.

2000

Gretchen Hunt at Center for Women and Families, Louisville, KY, working with immigrant populations.

1999

Patricia Mejia at the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights, Florence, AZ, working with immigrants held in detention centers.

1998 Jennifer Nye at Southern Arizona Legal Aid, Tucson, AZ, working with battered women.

echoing green Graduate Public Service Fellowship

echoing green is a private foundation applying a venture capital approach to giving. The Foundation awards fellowships to "individuals to create new autonomous public service projects or organizations that catalyze positive social change." Projects may national or international and can address any social issue area including, but not limited to, human rights, the environment, arts, public health, education, criminal justice or community development. This is a two-year fellowship of \$30,000 for each year. Applicants must first submit a concept paper providing a synopsis of the proposed project or organization within a 3-5-page limit. They are then notified if the Foundation will accept a formal application for the project. Details are available at www.echoinggreen.org.

Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowships - Postgraduate Fellowships

The Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowships “support outstanding individuals working in law, organizing, public health, public policy, and other disciplines to initiate innovative projects that will have a measurable impact on issues underlying the U.S. Justice System.” The program seeks to identify and nurture new voices and agents-for-change at either the local or national level. Advocacy Fellowships are two years in duration and support projects designed by the individual to be implemented in conjunction with large or small not-for-profit organizations or government agencies. Fellows are expected to work full-time on their projects during the term of the fellowship.

Applicants must have substantive first-hand knowledge of and/ or up to three years experience with the issues and communities with which they propose to work. Applicants can but are not required to have an undergraduate or graduate degree in law, public policy, social work or other fields related to criminal justice. If the applicant is currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate degree program, he or she must have completed the degree at the start of the fellowship (either March or August), as the fellowship is full-time. Applicants may not currently be employed by their proposed host organization and must demonstrate that the project does not duplicate the host organization’s existing efforts. Fellowship awards cannot be used to supplement funding for activities or projects that are already being carried out by the host organization or another group. Prospective applicants who are currently receiving compensation for the proposed project from an organization are not eligible to apply.

Details can be found at www.soros.org.

BCLS Soros Fellows

2001

Rebecca Young at MA Correctional Legal Services, Boston, MA.

1998 BCLS Soros Fellow

Barbara Kaban at the Children's Law Center, Lynn, MA.

(4) What do the fellowship applications consist of?

Most programs require personal statements and essays by the applicant, recommendations from professors and/or former employers and transcripts. Some require a statement from a sponsoring organization; others require a legal writing sample.

(5) How do I prepare my application?

By the time you sit down to write, you should have a pretty good idea of what you want to say. Make sure that you leave yourself plenty of time to prepare your application. Most fellowships will require you to write one or more essays describing your project and your background. Edit and edit again! Ask others to give you feedback on the essays. In some cases, such as the Skadden Fellowships, you can actually get some early feedback directly from the program when you are at the preliminary stages.

Fellowship funders look at your application to see how well you convey the goals of your project, how concrete and specific your strategies are, and how well you display the particular skills and experience you bring to the work. Demonstrating your commitment to the public interest and your enthusiasm is essential.