

UNC School of Law
Public Defender Mentor Project

How to Get a Job as a PD:

1. Resumes & Cover Letters

a. *General advice:*

i. *Don't be humble: put your accomplishments out there!*

1. Emphasize and DESCRIBE honors and activities:

- a. law review editing and/or writing (what did you work on? What did you learn?);
- b. RA work (what areas did you research?);
- c. clinic involvement (describe & give details re specific cases);
- d. course work (what did you learn/read/explore and how does it help you prepare for PD work);
- e. previous summer jobs, externships, clinics (discuss specific projects/cases that you worked on);
- f. and other law school activities (e.g., Innocence Project, pro bono work, C-PILO): describe what you worked on and what you learned.

ii. *Don't give too much space to jobs/activities/interests that are completely irrelevant to PD work!*

1. Be willing to let go of the old stand-bys and to give more space to those experiences that have prepared you:
 - a. How someone else review your resume from the perspective of a PD;
 - b. Don't take constructive criticism personally.

iii. *Make the case for the SKILLS and ABILITIES that you have developed that will readily translate to PD work:*

1. Skills: client interviewing, investigation, written and oral advocacy;
2. Abilities: multi-tasking, organizational ability, prioritizing, time management;
3. Temperament: tenacity, commitment to the 'underdog,' independent worker, unafraid to ask questions/seek out help when needed.

b. *Always remember: the resume and cover letter are the first examples of your written advocacy that the PD employer will see. Make a good first impression!*

2. Interviews

- a. General advice:
 - i. Prepare/moot ahead of time;
 - ii. Brainstorm and get advice of others (faculty, CSO, peers);
 - iii. Learn about the organization/agency and imagine their ideal job candidate: personality, temperament, motivations

- b. How to handle the hard/sensitive questions:
 - i. Identify the 'trouble-areas' in terms of your previous work-experience and prepare a well-considered response:
 1. Previous work in prosecutor's office or for police department;
 2. Work for victims' rights organizations;
 3. Domestic violence advocacy;
 4. Work in a law firm/for-profit organization;

- c. Prepare yourself for the 'performance' aspect of the interview:
 - i. Remember how to issue-spot;
 - ii. Embrace the ROLE of public defender;
 - iii. Prepare for the question re defender 'ethics';

3. How to get your dream job

- a. Show your tenacity: apply, reapply, and apply again;
- b. Offer to work for free;
- c. Show that you are not fungible – you have unique skills/personality/commitment to offer;
- d. YET: be open to your own growth, and be flexible and willing to readjust your goals/objectives/judgments if the situation/circumstances require it.

4. Networking

- a. Make connections and maintain them!
- b. Don't be afraid to ask/seek out help and advice;
- c. Follow-up: say thank you (email, phone calls, hand-written notes);
- d. Be the squeaky wheel!