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# Best Schools for Public Interest

For prelaw students weighing their options, public interest law offers more than a career; it offers purpose. The schools highlighted here make that commitment central, designing programs that connect students directly to issues of justice and equity. Clinics, externships, and fellowships provide real-world experience, while journals and centers push students to engage critically with pressing legal challenges. Student organizations expand the reach of this work, offering opportunities for leadership and collaboration. The result is an education that positions graduates to lead in advocacy, expand access to justice and strengthen the role of law in society.

Here are the Top 6 law schools that made our Best Schools for Public Interest.



## #1 City University of New York School of Law

City University of New York School of Law was founded with a singular mission: to train public interest lawyers. That commitment shows in its curriculum, community partnerships, and extensive clinic system operated through Main Street Legal Services. Students gain live-client experience in clinics like the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility Clinic (CLEAR), Defenders (criminal defense and parole), Human Rights & Gender Justice, and Community & Economic Development. These opportunities are selective and governed by eligibility and application requirements.

CUNY Law also supports one of the most robust externship programs among public law schools, giving students access to a wide array of field placements in New York City, such as agencies, nonprofits, and courts. A dedicated Bar Exam Support hub provides planning tools, timelines, and mentorship beginning in

the second year.

The school also publishes the CUNY Law Review, a student-run journal devoted to public-interest scholarship.

Beyond clinics and coursework, CUNY Law students stay deeply engaged through a range of organizations that reflect the school's public interest mission. The Public Interest Law Association (PILA) raises funds to support summer fellowships. Students also engage in advocacy through groups like the Police Accountability Organization, which focuses on reform efforts, and the Law and Political Economy Collective (CUNY LPE), which explores how the law can be reimagined to create a more just and equitable society. Affinity groups, including the Black Law Students Association, Asian Pacific American Law Students Association, and LGBTQ+ student organizations, create space for identity-based advocacy and networking. Even lighter groups, such as the Ping Pong Club, give students a chance to connect and recharge. Taken together, these organiza-

tions provide community, advocacy outlets, and practical training that complement the school's clinic-centered curriculum.

For students who want a purpose-driven legal education with deep local ties, CUNY remains one of the most mission-aligned law schools in the country.

## #2 Northeastern University School of Law

Northeastern University School of Law integrates public interest law into its very structure. The school is best known for its required Cooperative Legal Education Program (co-op), where every JD student completes three full-time placements during the upper years. These externships embed students in nonprofits, courts, government agencies, and firms with a public service focus, giving them extended, real-world experience as part of the curriculum.

Public interest is reinforced academically through the Program on Human



In addition, UDC Law supports students through a Summer Public Interest Fellowship program that funds qualifying placements after the first year. Fellows work at least 400 hours in public interest, government, or judicial offices, gaining valuable skills while serving communities that could not otherwise afford a lawyer. Funded by the DC School of Law Foundation, stipends typically range from \$5,000 to \$7,500.

The Service-Learning Practicum & Seminar also stands out as a signature experiential program. This spring course combines classroom preparation with a service trip during spring break, allowing students to partner with advocacy organi-

Rights and the Global Economy (PHRGE), which is now part of the Center for Global Law at Justice (CGLJ), which promotes human rights, humanitarianism, and democracy through interdisciplinary research and advocacy. The Center for Public Interest Advocacy and Collaboration (CPIAC) advances Northeastern's social justice mission by piloting projects that use design and data to address systemic issues and connect students with pro bono opportunities. While Northeastern does not offer a formal public interest certificate, it supports service-oriented students through the prestigious Public Interest Law Scholarship (PILS), a renewable full-tuition award.

Clinics provide practice in areas such as civil rights, community lawyering, immigration, and poverty law. Students also publish in the Northeastern University Law Review, which has strong ties to public interest issues.

On campus, student groups amplify the service culture. These include the National Lawyers Guild chapter and identity-based organizations such as the Black Law Students Association (BLSA), Asian Pacific American Law Students Association (APALSA), Law Students for Indigenous Liberation (LISL), and Queer Caucus (QC). The National Lawyers Guild chapter partners with attorneys and leads advocacy efforts ranging from legal observing to immigrant detainee sup-

port and abolition-focused events like the Week Against Mass Incarceration. The Law School Softball Team brings students of all skill levels together for scrimmages against Boston-area law schools and caps the year with a national charity tournament that raises more than \$20,000. Collectively, these outlets give students the chance to engage in advocacy, scholarship, and community building beyond the classroom.

### #3 University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law

At University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law, clinics are the centerpiece of the curriculum, reflecting the school's mission to provide hands-on service to underserved communities in Washington, DC. Every student participates in live-client work through offerings such as the Community Development Law Clinic, Criminal Defense & Racial Justice Clinic, General Practice Clinic, Housing Advocacy & Litigation Clinic, and Immigration & Human Rights Clinic.

Externships and field placements broaden those experiences, giving students access to government offices, nonprofits, and advocacy groups throughout the capital. The emphasis is always on practical lawyering skills connected directly to social justice.





zations around the country while exploring ethics, trauma-informed practice, and the lawyer's role in advancing justice.

The UDC Law Review publishes scholarship on issues affecting the District of Columbia, the National Capital Region, and the United States, with pillars that include constitutional democracy, civil liberties, the evolution of the legal profession, and social justice in the corporate world.

Student groups extend the school's public service mission. Organizations such as Law Students for Disability Rights, OUTLaw, the Muslim Law Students Association, and the Women's Law Society provide advocacy and community, while others, like the Evening Law Students Association and Greeks at Law, create space for camaraderie. Together, they complement the school's clinic-centered curriculum by offering additional ways to collaborate and lead.

#### **#4 University of California Davis School of Law**

University of California Davis School of Law, housed in King Hall and named for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is known for its commitment to public interest law and the ideals of social justice and equality. Students can pursue a Public Service Law Certificate Program that recognizes those with a dedication to serving the public. The program, paired with post-graduate

fellowships, helps support careers in public service.

Experiential learning is central to the public interest concentration. Students gain direct client experience in the Immigration Law Clinic, Civil Rights Clinic, or the Domestic and Sexual Violence Law Clinic. Many also join advocacy groups such as the Humanitarian Aid Legal Organization (HALO) and the ACLU at King Hall.

The King Hall Legal Foundation (KHLF) further sustains the school's service ethos as a student-run nonprofit that raises funds to provide summer grants for public interest fellowships, allowing students to serve communities without adequate access to legal services.

The UC Davis Social Justice Law Review is the school's dedicated public interest journal. Inspired by the legacy of Dr. King, it publishes legal analysis on cutting-edge issues of equality and justice while giving students the opportunity to engage deeply with public interest law.

Student organizations also anchor the school's public service culture. Alongside KHLF, groups such as the National Lawyers Guild, the Black Law Students Association, and the Jewish Law Students Association create avenues for advocacy and leadership. Together, these opportunities ensure UC Davis graduates leave with both the skills and values needed for public service careers.



#### **#5 Yale Law School**

Public interest is embedded in Yale Law School's identity through the Jerome N. Frank Services Organization, students have access to more than 30 clinics covering areas such as criminal justice advocacy, veterans' legal services, immigration, and civil rights. Even first-year students participate in live-client work, making experiential learning central from the start.

The Arthur Liman Center for Public Interest Law anchors Yale's public interest programming, with fellowships, research opportunities, and national convenings that bring students, scholars, and practitioners together to address pressing issues in public service law. Student-led initiatives deepen this commitment, including the Capital Assistance Project, which aids public defenders in capital cases; the Temporary Restraining Order Project, which supports survivors of domestic violence; and the Immigrant Justice Project, which advocates for asylum seekers and immigrant communities.

While Yale Law does not offer formal concentrations or certificates in public interest, its extensive network of centers and clinics provides multiple pathways to specialization.

Students contribute to numerous journals with public interest relevance, including The Yale Law Journal, the Yale Journal of Law & Feminism, the Yale Law & Policy Review, and the Yale Journal of Law & Liberation. These publications give students the chance to shape national conversations on equality, policy, and reform.

Student organizations further enrich Yale's culture of advocacy. These include the Green Haven Prison Project (GHPP), the Yale Law Women+ group, the Korean Law Students Network (KLSN),



OutLaws, and social groups such as the Pickle(ball) Society (PBS) that creates balance alongside advocacy work. Together, they form a robust network of support that complements the school's clinical offerings and public service ethos.



## #6 Roger Williams University School of Law

Roger Williams University School of Law is Rhode Island's only law school and has built its reputation on preparing lawyers committed to service and justice. Students can pursue a Public Interest Law Concentration, which offers a structured pathway of courses and experiential opportunities for those committed to advocacy careers.

The school's Feinstein Center for Pro Bono & Experiential Education anchors public service programming. Every student completes at least 50 hours of pro bono legal work before graduation, often through placements that serve underrepresented individuals and communities.

Clinics further this mission by giving students direct client experience. In the In-House Clinic, students work in the Providence Law Clinic under full-time faculty supervision, often handling cases from start to finish as certified student attorneys. Field Clinics place students in outside organizations with adjunct faculty oversight, offering the same opportunity for client representation. Clinical Externships deepen skills through projects in public interest offices, corporations, or judicial chambers. They can expand into a Semester-In-Practice, a full-time placement approved by the school for an immersive training experience.

Academic research also plays a role in shaping service-minded lawyers. The RWU Law Review publishes articles on constitutional, criminal, and social justice issues while giving students the chance to develop editorial and analytical expertise.

Student groups reflect the school's community-centered ethos. Organizations such as the Association for Public Interest Law (APIL), the Multicultural Law

Students Association, and the Justinian (Italian-American) Law Society provide advocacy and leadership opportunities. At the same time, other student-run initiatives organize fundraisers and pro bono projects that serve Rhode Island communities. Together, these outlets ensure graduates leave Roger Williams prepared to practice with purpose.



### MORE INFORMATION FROM THE SCHOOL

## RWU Law: #Changemakers Welcome

At Roger Williams University School of Law, we believe the law is a powerful tool for change—and we welcome changemakers who won't settle for the status quo. As the only law school in Rhode Island, RWU Law offers unmatched access to the state's legal community, including the bench and bar, along with deep ties to regional and national justice networks.

Our community is built for #Changemakers—students who want to align their passion for equity, service, and innovation with the legal education to bring it to life. With small classes and accessible, socially engaged faculty, students find a learning environment where they're seen, supported, and challenged to grow.

RWU Law's commitment to social justice runs deep. Courses like "Race and the Foundations of American Law" reflect our forward-thinking approach to legal education. Experiential learning through clinics, externships, and public interest work ensures students graduate practice-ready and impact-driven.

Set along the beautiful shores of Mount Hope Bay, our Bristol campus offers an inspiring setting to launch a legal career with purpose. Whether in marine law, public interest, or private practice, our graduates leave equipped to lead and serve.

If you're ready to use the law to make change—you're already one of us.