

## Few legal jobs are as hard to win as those in public defenders' offices

Few legal jobs are as hard to win as those in public defenders' offices. The Law School's Senior Director of Career Services, Lois Casaleggi, explains: "The screening process for public defender jobs is as tough as anything our graduates encounter in the job-search process. There aren't a lot of those jobs and a lot of graduates throughout the country want them, and the people who do the hiring need to determine that a candidate has not just the skills but also the maturity, composure, and integrity to plunge directly into challenging and demanding situations."

Four 2006 graduates of the Law School made it through that rigorous evaluation and have been proving their worth in public defenders' offices for the past year. Ashwin Cattamanchi is with the Northern District of Indiana Federal Community Defenders, Matt Guerrero is with the DuPage County Public Defender's Office, and Joanna (Joey) Ingalls and Natalie James both work for the Miami-Dade County Public Defender.

The four graduates' reasons for pursuing their jobs vary, but chief among them are a commitment to service, the opportunity to gain a lot of practical experience very quickly, and a sense that they are assisting individuals who need and deserve their helping hands. Cattamanchi began volunteering at an organization that served jail inmates when he was in college, and while in Law School he worked as an intern at the Cabrini Green Legal Aid Center and in the office of the Illinois State Appellate Defender. "I've known for a long time this is the kind of work I wanted to do," he says. Natalie James's future vision was clear but less precise: "I wanted to do hands-on public-interest law, but it was my clinical work at the Law School in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice project that focused me in this particular direction. Randolph Stone and Herschella Conyers were great, inspirational teachers."

As for experience, it has been intense. Joey Ingalls, for example, handled eleven jury trials in her first twelve months on the job (with only one guilty verdict). At Miami-Dade where she and Natalie James work, the commitment to accelerating learning is so strong that there are attorneys on staff with no case assignments, whose explicit responsibility is to provide guidance and mentoring. Matt Guerrero says

he's done eight to ten trials, and he is well supported by other staff attorneys, too. "They'll do whatever it takes to help you succeed," he says, "including sitting as second chair with you if you feel you need it."

"Some of my clients may have done bad things," Ingalls says, in words that seem to reflect the sentiments of all these young public defenders, "but when I'm working with them I'm their best hope for being treated fairly by the system. It's a responsibility that has to be taken seriously, and it's also one I really enjoy." All of them anticipate extended tenures in their present roles and consider it likely that criminal defense work will be a big part of their futures.

With loan repayments looming, jobs like theirs—which can pay as little as one-fifth of what a law-firm job pays—can be hard to manage financially, but the Law School makes every effort to help out with loan-repayment programs that are constantly expanding in their dollar value and in their sophistication. "We want to do everything we can to make it possible for our students and graduates to handle the financial consequences of public-interest jobs and careers," says Michael Machen, the Law School's Director of Financial Aid, noting that last year the Law School helped underwrite 62 students in public-interest summer jobs.

Financial assistance, great classroom training, and clinical and other learning opportunities are among the ways in which the Law School has helped these four graduates succeed at what they want to do. The values that motivate them seem to be summed up well in an observation by Ashwin Cattamanchi: "Professor Harcourt said something in a criminal law class that has really stuck with me. I can't quote him exactly, but what he communicated was that even though it's important to know the statutes and the procedures and all the technical things, the most important thing you need for practicing criminal defense is a strong moral compass. If you maintain your sense of right and wrong and let it guide you, you'll find the issues you need to raise and you'll do a good job. From what I've observed so far, I believe he was right about that."

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