

Careers in Immigration Law and Immigrants' Rights



OFFICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST PROGRAMS
UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW

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Land Acknowledgment

The UCLA School of Law, located in Los Angeles and founded in 1949, acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and South Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (ancestors), 'Ahihirom (elders) and 'Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

About The Center for Immigration Law and Policy

Founded in 2020, the Center for Immigration Law and Policy at the UCLA School of Law expands the law school's role as a national leader in immigration law and policy. The Center generates innovative ideas at the intersection of immigration scholarship and practice; serves as a hub for transforming those ideas into meaningful changes in immigration policy at the local, state, and national level; and empowers students with unique opportunities for experiential learning through work with academics, practitioners, policymakers, and activists. In addition to engaging in strategic litigation and policy advocacy, the Center will publish briefings and reports on immigration policy, host conferences and symposia featuring top national scholars, and launch immigration law training opportunities for judges and legislators.

INTRODUCTION

Many people who pursue a career in immigration law and immigrants' rights law embark on this journey without knowing where it will lead them, but one unifying value of this work is a focus on helping people navigate and/or change an immigration system that is at best confusing and overwhelming, and at worst oppressive and unjust. Helping can take many forms, from immigration counseling and defense, to community organizing, to imagining, drafting, and advancing legislation. The purpose of this UCLA School of Law Immigration Law and Immigrants' Rights Career Guide is to guide law students and graduates along this path, by offering information and advice, and by showcasing different routes that alumni and students in this field have traveled.

This guide is divided into seven parts. Part I explains the landscape of immigration law and immigrants' rights, outlining the roles of federal, state and local governments. Part II sets out an overview of different career paths. Part III contains narratives from UCLA School of Law alumni who now practice or are otherwise engaged with immigration law and immigrants' rights. Part IV suggests how UCLA School of Law students can prepare themselves during law school to apply their legal education in these fields, including through internships, clerkships, and fellowships. Part V provides interview tips based on information from law students and employers. Part VI introduces the UCLA Law faculty working on immigration law and immigrants' rights. Part VII concludes with narratives from current UCLA law students on their law school experiences and activities.

I. Landscape of Immigration Law

Federal Government

Immigration law is principally a creation of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government. Congress enacts and amends immigration legislation, mainly in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). This legislation is supplemented by executive orders and mandates, which are interpreted and enforced primarily by five executive branch departments: the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Labor. Federal courts also play a significant role in interpreting immigration statutes and regulations, reviewing agency decision making, and sometimes declaring immigration statutes and regulations invalid as inconsistent with the U.S. Constitution.

Department of Justice

The Department of Justice, led by the Attorney General of the United States, is home to the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). EOIR includes immigration judges, who preside over individual immigration cases that decide, for example, if a noncitizen is removable from the United States. Unlike Article III judges, immigration judges do not have lifetime appointments; instead, they are employees of EOIR within the Department of Justice. Noncitizens may appeal many immigration judge decisions to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), and many BIA decisions may be appealed to a federal circuit court.

Department of Homeland Security

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the part of the federal executive branch with main responsibility for the administration and enforcement of immigration law. DHS includes two agencies responsible for much of immigration law enforcement: Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE includes the trial attorneys who represent the federal government in removal proceedings. Also, part of DHS is U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the agency that decides applications and petitions, for example, to qualify in an admission category, or to acquire lawful permanent residence through adjustment of status, or naturalize as a U.S. citizen. USCIS is home to the Asylum Office, which decides asylum cases for applicants who are not in removal proceedings in immigration court.

Department of State

The Department of State (DOS) is the federal agency responsible, through U.S. embassies and consulates in other countries, for issuing immigrant and nonimmigrant visas for admission to the United States. The visa issuance process includes collecting supporting documents, checking compliance with various eligibility requirements, and vetting for any national security concerns. The DOS monthly visa bulletin shows the backlog in the availability of immigrant visas. Take a look at the current visa bulletin [here](#). The DOS also adjudicates passport applications.

Department of Health and Human Services

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is responsible for much of the immigration policy relating to unaccompanied minors and refugees in the United States. HHS includes the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Unaccompanied minors apprehended by CBP or ICE must be transferred within seventy-two hours to the ORR, which then should place the minors in the custody of a family member, family friend, or other responsible adult. In some cases, ORR maintains custody of unaccompanied minors for longer periods of time in a network of facilities that it oversees across the country. ORR also administers resettlement programs and public benefits for refugees admitted from outside the United States.

Department of Labor

The Department of Labor (DOL) plays a role in employment-based admissions to the United States. Employers who petition for immigrants in certain employment-based admission categories must obtain a labor certification from DOL showing that the noncitizen will not be taking a job from a U.S. worker. DOL has a similar gatekeeping role for some temporary employment-based admissions.

State and Local Governments

Attorneys can play a substantial role when they engage with immigration law and immigrants' rights in state and local settings. For example, advocates play a large role in separating state and local criminal prosecutions from federal immigration enforcement. Similarly, community groups and lawyers have limited state or local efforts to prosecute various aspects of migration as crimes. State and local advocacy may also address what are sometimes called "sanctuary" laws or policies, which shield noncitizens from federal immigration law enforcement or integrate noncitizens into state and local communities regardless of immigration status.

Immigration attorneys may find themselves advising state and local elected officials and administrators on whether federal law allows or prohibits state and local laws or policies affecting noncitizens. Immigration attorneys may create information, resources, and know-your-rights materials for members of immigrant communities. For example, the Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs helps noncitizens recognize predatory or fraudulent immigration consultants.

II. Paths Within Immigration Law and Immigrants' Rights

Part II outlines several of the many types of work that graduates of the UCLA School of Law do in immigration law and immigrants' rights. But these categories are not bounded nor exhaustive. Many practitioners engage in several of these areas of work over the course of their careers. Given the variety of work in immigration law and immigrants' rights, common themes include treating all people, including noncitizens, with dignity and respect, and in accordance with basic principles of justice.

Types of Work

Immigrants' Rights

Immigrants' rights work considers rights, legal protections, and integration opportunities for noncitizens, based on laws and policies that range from the U.S. Constitution to local ordinances. This advocacy can include litigation, administrative advocacy, community organizing, and more.

Immigrants' rights attorneys may also use their immigration law knowledge to advance community education. Some attorneys offer know-your-rights presentations and help people know what to expect in immigration court. For example, Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project in Los Angeles gives free informational classes to unaccompanied youth and their sponsors about their rights and possible forms of immigration law relief.

Litigation

Litigators can hold legislators and law enforcement agencies accountable. Impact litigators may challenge the constitutionality of immigration statutes, regulations, and policies, or they may challenge the government's interpretation or implementation of such texts. Immigration litigation can also challenge federal agency interpretations of congressional statutes as well as the processes through which a federal agency adopted rules and regulations. Litigators may also contest local and state laws and policies as inconsistent with federal law and therefore invalid.

Removal Defense

Immigration defense attorneys represent noncitizens in removal proceedings in immigration court. Typically, practitioners in this field defend their clients from deportation by explaining why a client is not removable, or even if removable, how they may merit relief from deportation. The law on removability and the forms of relief are very complex, and outcomes can vary greatly depending on whether, for example, the noncitizen is a child, is in immigration detention, or has a criminal history.

Immigration Benefits

Immigration attorneys may represent clients who are not at immediate risk of removal from the United States, but who seek affirmative immigration benefits. These benefits may include asylum, lawful immigration status in an immigrant or nonimmigrant admission category, and citizenship through naturalization. Attorneys may also help noncitizens obtain an immigrant or nonimmigrant visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate outside the United States. Attorneys do this type of work in private practice, nonprofit organizations, in businesses and other entities of any size that seeks to hire noncitizens, and at universities with international or undocumented students.

Whether sought in defense of removal or in the affirmative benefits context, immigration relief that lets an otherwise removable noncitizen stay in the United States often is based on trauma that the noncitizen has experienced. For example, asylum applicants typically must show a well-founded fear of persecution if returned to their home country; and T visas can lead to lawful permanent residence for survivors of human trafficking. Immigration law imposes requirements that call upon immigration defense lawyers in these settings to interview their clients about sensitive topics. Trauma-informed interviewing and active listening skills are essential. Fluency in a language other than English can also be valuable in these situations.

Government

Attorneys throughout the government work on immigration matters. For example, trial attorneys at DHS' ICE Office of Chief Counsel represent the government in removal proceedings, while attorneys at DOJ's Office of Immigration Litigation represent the government in circuit court appeals from removal orders, defend against lawsuits in federal district courts and, occasionally, defend the government's interest in litigation brought by or on behalf of states. EOIR also has immigration attorneys on staff who act as law clerks. Lawyers may also serve as USCIS officers, including those who adjudicate affirmative asylum applications.

State and local governments in some states, including California, have increasingly begun to employ attorneys with immigration expertise as states have become more involved in immigration policy. Some local and federal public defender offices also have immigration specialists who counsel clients on the immigration consequences of criminal convictions, defend against immigration-related charges, and challenge their confinement under the immigration laws in habeas litigation.

Research and Academia

Faculty or staff engage with immigration law and immigrants' rights at law schools and other academic settings in traditional campus departments or research centers. Faculty may have some combination of research and teaching responsibilities, with varying degrees of direct contact with students. They may teach in traditional courses or in legal clinics, where students may be involved with direct services to individual clients or broader settings such as litigation, legislative advocacy, or policy engagement with administrative agencies. Some full-time faculty, including clinicians, may earn academic tenure or similar security of employment in tenure-track positions or non-tenure track positions. Part-time immigration law teachers include many lawyers in private practice, in government employment, or in nonprofit organizations.

Work Settings

The types of work described in the previous section may arise in different work settings, including public interest/nonprofit organizations, private practice, businesses, and government agencies. In many of these settings, immigration law and immigrants' rights can intersect closely with other areas of law. Examples include criminal law, education law, labor and employment law, public benefits law, family law, and more.

Immigration-related issues can arise frequently in identity-based organizations. For example, the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) focuses on issues specific to the Black noncitizen community. The Haitian Bridge Alliance addresses the needs of the Haitian immigrant community. Other examples include the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), and Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAAJ).

Nonprofit Organizations

Many nonprofit organizations concern themselves in whole or in part with immigration law and immigrants' rights. Some offer free or low-cost direct representation to individuals and families. Other nonprofit organizations work for broader systemic change through some combination of court litigation, legislative advocacy, and policy engagement with administrative agencies.

National Organizations

Other organizations work at the national level. Some focus on immigration law and immigrants' rights, and some include immigration-related concerns within a portfolio that reaches beyond immigration law. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) includes immigration law and immigrants' rights as part of a broader portfolio devoted to safeguarding civil rights and civil liberties. Other national organizations work with some part of the noncitizen population. An example is Human Rights First, an organization that advocates for refugees.

Local and Regional Organizations

Regional and local organizations have a geographical focus for their efforts to provide services and influence policy. For example, the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project represents immigrants and refugees in Arizona; the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) represents children and detained adults in Colorado. Other examples include the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), Central American Resource Center of Los Angeles (CARECEN-LA), and Justice for Our Neighbors (with a network of regional sites).

International Organizations

International organizations include the International Rescue Committee and Amnesty International. Similar organizations are based in many countries around the world; most have transnational reach. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is broadly concerned with the protection of refugees and asylum seekers across the world.

Private Practice

Private practice in immigration law and immigrants' rights can involve a mix of the types of work described in the previous section. Some law firms may concentrate on removal defense, others on petitions and applications for immigration benefits, and still others on "business" immigration. Many firms devote their practice to the overlap between immigration and other fields, such as criminal law, family law, or employment law. Private practice can also include substantial time and resources devoted to pro bono work, often to a degree that justifies the label "public interest private law firm."

Immigration Law in Other Areas of Practice

As the previous section's overview of work settings suggests, other areas of law practice frequently overlap with and engage in immigration law and immigrants' rights. This is true regardless of whether the work involves direct representation and counseling, litigation, or policy advocacy.

Criminal Defense

Criminal defense attorneys who represent noncitizen clients and prosecutors must understand immigration law. Many criminal convictions have immigration law consequences—including deportation—for noncitizens, and these effects are often hard to discern or avoid. For noncitizens, immigration consequences can be more significant than the criminal conviction itself. For example, a suspended sentence with no jail time can lead to deportation. To address these issues, some public defender offices, such as Alameda County, California, have a designated immigration unit.

Business Law

Immigration lawyers have substantial work opportunities in a wide variety of private enterprises that need immigration advice to guide decisions on hiring, retaining, and transferring personnel. Businesses with these immigration law needs range from start-ups to multinational conglomerates.

Labor and Employment Law

Labor and employment law can affect workers differently if they are noncitizens. For example, attorneys at the intersection of labor and employment law with immigration law and immigrants' rights address workplace protections in spite of temporary or precarious immigration law status. For example, the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) advocates for and works to organize immigrant workers in low-wage industries as part of its broader campaign to advance workers' rights in Koreatown.

Education Law

Immigration attorneys may help clients and their families understand their rights in K-12 and higher education settings. Legal issues can include access to education and financial aid, opportunities for English-language learners, and entering and staying as international students.

Family Law

Family lawyers often work with noncitizen youth who petition family or probate courts to appoint one parent or another responsible adult as a guardian. A guardianship petition can make noncitizen youth eligible for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Such cases involve both state or local probate or family courts and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Marriage or divorce involving a U.S. citizen and a noncitizen can raise other immigration law issues.

Health Law

At the intersection of immigration law and immigrants' rights with health law, attorneys may help navigate noncitizen eligibility for health insurance coverage and other health-related benefits. Closely related are legal questions about eligibility for public benefits in general. The issues may extend beyond basic eligibility on public benefits. For example, noncitizens who qualify for and use benefits may limit their eligibility under immigration law to become a permanent resident of the United States or acquire other new immigration statuses. Also, at the intersection of health law and immigrants' rights are reproductive justice issues, including control over one's own reproductive future.

III. Alumni Narratives

Attorneys enter careers in immigration law and immigrants' rights in a wide variety of ways. After embarking on their careers, they often change course, sometimes more than once. Some law school graduates begin their careers with fellowships or judicial clerkships. Some start in nonprofit organizations, others in private practice or business, and yet others in government service. Part III features short contributions from UCLA School of Law alumni who work in a professional setting that involves immigration law and immigrants' rights.

Stacy Tolchin '01

Immigration Attorney, Law Offices of Stacy Tolchin, Los Angeles, California

I am the owner of the Law Offices of Stacy Tolchin in Los Angeles and we practice immigration law exclusively, specializing in federal court litigation. I love practicing immigration law because you meet people from all over the world and hear their stories, and the work is constantly evolving and challenging. Just when you think you have it mastered, the floor falls out and everything changes.

I was a member of UCLA's Public Interest Law Program when I was in school, and that was my safe space. I made sure that I was always doing community work and was not just limited to law school, so that I felt a connection with the law and its real-world impact. I am so proud of the programs that UCLA has now to integrate students with the community. For me, law school seemed hard and daunting at the time, but the real work of immigration is not only analytically more difficult, the stakes are real and sometimes heartbreaking. I was so immersed in school I don't think I really appreciated how much harder, and how much more rewarding, actually practicing law would be. I chose immigration law because I was interested in civil rights work when I started law school in 1998, and after September 11th it became clear that immigrants' rights work was essentially civil rights work in many areas, especially involving political rights. I continue to represent noncitizens in a civil rights tradition today.

I practice immigration law in the federal courts of appeals, federal district courts, Board of Immigration Appeals, immigration courts, and before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. There really is no typical day, but I am mostly writing and meeting with clients. I also am usually in court or before USCIS at least once a week, and I have a heavy practice of oral arguments before the Ninth Circuit. This year we have seven oral arguments at the Ninth Circuit!

As I own my own law practice, the hardest part of the job is financially providing for our staff while at the same time wanting to do pro bono work to help as many folks as we can. There is no question that the most rewarding part of the work is helping people to stay in the United States with their families and helping them to become U.S. citizens. Starting out, I didn't really think about what it took to run your own practice, but not having a boss and people responsible for your own path is amazing! It also carries financial stress, but the autonomy and freedom has been well worth it.

I wish I had known more about non-traditional legal paths and learned more about the business and law practice management, but I have certainly picked it up along the way. The keys, like everything, are finding mentors, working hard, and believing in yourself. And expanding your horizons. Living in Africa, for example, I learned a great deal about transitional justice, substantive international criminal law, and the history of the Rwandan genocide. During the next couple of years, I took a number of courses that had an international law aspect (e.g., international human rights law, national security law, immigration law and a seminar on Asian legal systems), as well as participated in student groups and journals with a focus on international issues (e.g., the *Journal of International Law and Foreign Affairs*).

Jordan Cummings '14

Staff Attorney, Innovation Law Lab, Portland, Oregon

I currently work as a Director and Staff Attorney at Innovation Law Lab, an immigrants' rights nonprofit based in Portland, Oregon. The work can be extremely challenging but is always interesting. Innovation Law Lab was founded in 2014 in response to the creation of a secret detention center in remote Artesia, New Mexico, for women and children fleeing persecution. Equal parts lawyer, activist, and coder, Innovation Law Lab leverages technology, lawyering, and organizing to stop deportations and support constitutional due process.

My work at Innovation Law Lab primarily involves developing and coordinating a universal representation program for the non-detained docket of the Portland Immigration Court. Employing a massive collaborative representation model, our program uses community navigation, limited legal services, and direct representation to provide removal defense services to Oregonians at risk of deportation if they cannot afford an attorney and would otherwise be unrepresented in immigration court. We also provide tactical assistance and guidance to attorneys working in the program and place a limited number of cases with local pro bono attorneys. Outside of this program, I am involved in Law Lab's immigrants' rights litigation work. Our litigation docket includes challenges to restrictions on asylum eligibility, the immigrant visa ban, the structural bias of the immigration court system, and the federal government's Remain in Mexico program.

I love my job because the type of work I do varies every day, and I get to collaborate with extremely smart, creative people. I work with clients, activists, community lawyers, legal experts, and engineers, and learn unique lessons from all of them.

Prior to my time at Law Lab, I was an Equal Justice Fellow at Public Counsel, where I represented immigrants detained in Los Angeles-area detention centers. I also coordinated a legal orientation program for immigrants held at the James A. Musick detention facility. I also clerked for a judge on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Both of these opportunities were invaluable preparation for my current work. Clerking allowed me to take a deep dive into the intricacies and complexities of immigration law at a high level and helped me understand (or at least begin to understand!) the horrible jurisdictional bars that so often prevent immigrants from exercising their rights in the federal courts. Representing immigrants in detention was crucial preparation for work on a universal representation program.

UCLA Law prepared me so well for work in the immigrants' rights field. Though I am no longer based in Los Angeles, I am so grateful for the opportunities I had there to work with some of the best minds in immigration law and immigrants' rights. The immigration-related classes I took in law school provided a strong foundation to start work in the field straight out of law school, and many of the non-immigration classes I took have been more useful than I would have imagined at the time (Federal Courts, Remedies, and Critical Race Theory all come to mind!). Moreover, my career is continuously enriched by the amazing community of UCLA Law graduates who work in the field.

Shiu-Ming Cheer '00

Deputy Director of Programs and Campaigns, California Immigrant Policy Center, Los Angeles, California

I work at the California Immigrant Policy Center, where I'm the Deputy Director of Programs and Campaigns. I didn't plan on becoming an immigration attorney or being in the immigrant rights' movement. I stumbled into learning about the immigration detention system when I was applying for the Soros Justice Fellowship and was immediately outraged at how a system like that could exist.

During my 6+ years representing detained youth and adults, I've learned a lot of lessons. First, that having colleagues who are committed to zealous representation and ensuring human dignity is essential as part of the support network for doing such emotionally draining work. Second, that feeling sad, upset, powerless and a gamut of other emotions was normal. (Later on, I saw groups adopting the framework of vicarious trauma/secondary trauma as a way to talk about how our practice impacts us personally). Finally, that having that firsthand experience of the injustices of the immigration system made me a more grounded advocate when I later shifted into policy work.

I shifted away from removal defense in part because I wanted to spend more time on community organizing, both as part of my work and as a volunteer in my non-work time. In direct representation, I put my clients first and prioritized them over other organizing or policy advocacy work. The few times that I connected former clients to campaigns felt insufficient in terms of building their individual empowerment and broader movement power. The policy advocacy work that I'm currently engaged in allows me to work in coalition and partnership with other groups to build power and to enact an affirmative vision of the world that we want to see.

At this point, I've had a variety of positions with the immigrant rights' ecosystem – from direct services to providing legal support at a grassroots organization to policy advocacy to impact litigation. Across the board, the most rewarding part of my job has been being able to work with progressive, visionary organizations and individuals. Seeing how many organizations have shifted from a defensive posture to demanding that ICE be abolished, and explicitly adopting intersectional frameworks and campaigns, has been inspirational.

Jorge Guerreiro '18

Staff Attorney, Immigrant Defense Project, New York City, New York

My name is Jorge Guerreiro and I work for the Immigrant Defense Project (IDP) in New York City. Previously, I was working for the Bronx Defenders (BXD) - a public defender office in The Bronx, New York. While at BXD, I worked in a variety of areas including but not limited to non-detained removal defense, affirmative applications and interviews, and assistance with orders of supervision. However, the primary focus of my work was advising clients and attorneys on the immigration consequences of criminal and family court contacts.

I ultimately left BXD for an environment more suited to my personal and professional needs. At IDP, I conduct training for legal service providers and members of the community on the intersection of immigration law and criminal law.

Also, similar to what I did at BXD, I now provide immigration advice to private criminal panel attorneys. In New York City, these attorneys, also known as 18-b attorneys, are brought into criminal cases where public defender offices are conflicted off and cannot represent a client.

Generally, an 18-b attorney reaches out to IDP about a case with a noncitizen client. IDP then usually asks for more information about a client's situation, such as information on prior criminal contacts, current immigration situation, and family dynamics. Gathering information is useful because this dictates how we advise an 18-b to move forward with their advocacy.

For a noncitizen client, this advisal can prevent serious consequences; this is one of the most rewarding parts of the job. However, some cases are incredibly complicated, and consequences can't be avoided. That is often the hardest part of the job - knowing that a client is going to face immigration law consequences and I couldn't stop it from happening.

For those entering this particular space of advocacy, I hope they imagine an advocacy beyond the confines of their job title. To work as an immigration attorney, your advocacy is often limited and operates within an inherently unjust and oppressive system. Therefore, it is important to engage in advocacy that extends beyond these dimensions.

This is in no way diminishing important work being done by many advocates. However, as advocates we should recognize the shortcomings of focusing solely on specific or narrow legal outcomes. We should be committed to the liberation of all peoples - and that will not happen simply by winning cases. It will require a variety of things including organizing yourself and your community, continuing political education, and collaborating with people from various walks of life.

All that is to say that the world of immigration advocacy is full of areas where great work can be done, and it's full of a lot of great people. I'm thankful for knowing so many wonderful advocates and will always work to link people together in order to share resources, information, and experiences for the benefit of advocates and communities alike.

IV. Preparing for Careers in Immigration Law and Immigrants' Rights

Part IV provides general background on how to pursue a career that involves immigration law and/or immigrants' rights. It is organized by information that might be of use to different class years in law school, but all law students and graduates may find the entire discussion helpful.

Staying Up to Date

As a general matter, students may want to take advantage of directories, listservs, websites and other resources to stay current on developments in immigration law and immigrants' rights. It may be highly useful to join the listservs of groups in regions in which you have a particular interest. For example, the Southern California Detention Advocates communicate about current detention practices and share information on immigration judges. The [National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild](#) communicates about litigation strategies and new developments in immigration and criminal law. The [Detention Watch Network](#) circulates information on detention conditions and offers trainings for practitioners. The [American Civil Liberties Union](#) provides updates on current issues in immigrants' rights.

More generally, the [Immigration Prof Blog](#) posts short informal pieces about current events and recent developments, and it includes links to a large number of nonprofit organizations involved with immigration law and immigrants' rights. The [American Immigration Lawyers Association](#) (AILA) has a directory through which students can search for immigration attorneys already practicing within the field.

II. Students

Coursework and Extracurricular Activities

During the first year of law school, 1L students should plan to meet with faculty and connect with communities inside the law school that are concerned with immigration law and immigrants' rights. 1L students may decide to join a student organization and/or participate in an El Centro Clinic. They can also attend events related to immigration law and immigrants' rights and to careers in this and related fields.

Though the first-year curriculum is generally fixed, much of what you learn in 1L courses are general patterns of legal thought and foundational understanding of legal institutions; these have direct practical value in immigration law and immigrants' rights. In the spring semester, 1Ls can choose the immigration-focused sections of the Law Through Scholarship elective. These sections offer an overview of key areas of immigration law and policy and introduce students to some of the immigration law faculty at UCLA. Many of the other Law Through Scholarship courses may be just as useful, depending on a student's particular interests.

Students should also consider participating in student organizations and journals, such as Law Students for Immigrant Justice (LSIJ), the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), the International Human Rights Law Student Association (IHRLA), the Criminal Justice Society (CJS), or other related groups. 1L students may also consider affiliating with the Critical Race Studies program. It is also a good idea to meet with faculty to get their advice during the 1L year.

During the 1L year, it's a good idea to think about who might be able to write a recommendation letter to help your search for summer internships, fellowships, and job opportunities. Who writes these letters for you is important! The best letters of recommendations are based on one-on-one interactions and highlight your strengths and skills, without necessarily focusing on grades.

Summer Internships: When and Where to Apply

Before applying for and accepting an internship, think about what you hope to get out of the summer. In deciding where to apply, it's generally a good idea to reflect on gaps in your experience and knowledge. For example, if you have experience with direct representation, you may want to see what it's like to work in policy advocacy or impact litigation. Talk to faculty and staff about your options and ask them for advice.

The application process looks different for each student. Some apply for summer internships in the preceding fall, and some apply in the spring. One strategy is not necessarily better than the other; it depends on the internship. If information about the application process and its timeline

isn't publicly available, reach out to that organization and ask. Overall, 1Ls have consistently had success in landing internships through the Public Interest Career Day (held in February), applying directly to organizations, or participating in attending On-Campus Interviews (OCI).

2L Students

Coursework and Extracurricular Activities

2L students have much more freedom than 1Ls to select courses. Students interested in careers in immigration law and immigrants' rights should take a variety of classes that both enhance relevant knowledge of the law and the legal system and also demonstrate their interest and commitment to the field. Be creative with your course choices. While Immigration Law and seminars related to immigration are obvious choices, other courses, like Administrative Law or Constitutional Criminal Procedure, can also richly augment an immigration-focused course of study.

2L students should also consider experiential courses, including clinics. The Immigrant Family Legal Clinic and the Immigrants' Rights Policy Clinic offer opportunities to practice under the supervision of professors and immigration attorneys. Take advantage of courses outside the law school as well.

2L students should also consider taking on leadership positions in student organizations. These are excellent opportunities to learn and to demonstrate commitment to immigrants' rights. 2Ls may also consider externships clerking for federal or state judges or federal immigration judges. For judicial clerkships after graduation, a typical timeline would start the application process as early as the spring of the 2L year.

Summer Internships: When and Where to Apply

The information above for summer internships after the 1L year generally applies to summer internships after the 2L year, though each internship (and each student) is different.

3L Students

Coursework and Extracurricular Activities

Like 2L students, 3L students should continue to pursue courses, clinics and extracurricular activities that develop the skills and knowledge relevant to immigration law and immigrants' rights. For many students, this will include not just courses obviously connected to immigration, but also courses that offer useful approaches to legal knowledge or skills training. Examples include statutory interpretation, constitutional analysis, intensive writing, or client interviewing. As in the 2L year, experiential courses including externships and clinics have great value. Students interested in post-graduation fellowships should gather information during the spring of their 2L year and apply in the early fall of their 3L year.

Language Proficiency

For many students interested in immigration law and immigrants' rights, fluency in a language other than English is essential to their careers. This is especially true for students interested in working to provide direct services to noncitizens; it is less true for policy-focused work, although even in that context language ability can be a significant asset. For students with little or no language experience, a great place to start can be taking a language class outside the law school or signing up for the language exchange program through UCLA's Dashew Center, which pairs you with an international student who speaks the language you would like to learn.

The most useful non-English language will depend on the needs of clients. In Southern California and much of the United States, this is Spanish, but other languages can be useful, depending on the practice setting and location. Students with some Spanish proficiency can enroll in Spanish for Lawyers in the law school. Other ways to improve proficiency include volunteering with El Centro Clinics, volunteering to translate for asylum seekers (e.g. with Respond Crisis Translation), or enrolling in an exchange semester abroad. Students may choose to enroll in summer language schools. For example, El Proyecto Linguistico Quetzalteco in Xela, Guatemala, offers immersion Spanish courses that include the opportunity to focus on legal Spanish.

Fellowships

Fellowships are a great way to start a career that includes immigration law and immigrants' rights. In general, fellowships can be important to the first stage of a career in immigration law and immigrants' rights, providing excellent opportunities for skill-building and mentorship as well as increasing the chances of landing a staff attorney position in the same organization or law practice after one or two years as a fellow.

The fellowship application process typically begins in the early fall of the 3L year. Applicants work with a sponsoring organization to design a project to be implemented during the fellowship period. The fellowship then funds the applicant's project. Fellowships in immigration and immigrants' rights are available through Equal Justice Works Fellowship, the Skadden Fellowship, the Immigrant Justice Corps, Justice Catalyst, Van Der Hout Law Firm, and other sources. The University of California and the UCLA School of Law also fund some fellowships in immigration law, immigrants' rights, or related fields. Fellowships are also available as Fulbright awards for international work, or for teaching in law school clinics. Additionally, the UCLA School of Law's Center for Immigration Law and Policy has a fellowship to work on various policy matters.

The UCLA School of Law offers extensive support for fellowship applicants, especially through its Office of Public Interest Programs.

ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER:

- Applying for El Centro Clinics
- Joining student organizations
- Letters of recommendation
- Improving proficiency in a language other than English
- Long-term goals (i.e., what is required to apply for fellowships?)

Undocumented Law Students

Immigrants Rising published a new resource in September 2021, [Law School Resource Guide for Undocumented Students: Getting to Law School](#), that compiles the experiences and advice of undocumented individuals who have gone through the law school process. The guide provides an overview of the application, admissions, and financial aid processes for law school, with a focus on immigration-specific considerations.

For undocumented students interested in learning more about how to advocate for yourself when it comes to funded experiential opportunities, you may find the following document useful. The [FAQ on Experiential and Funding Opportunities for Undocumented Students](#) provides campuses and their legal counsel with information on developing nonemployment-based, funded experiential opportunities for undocumented students. This document sets forth legal considerations pertinent to experiential and funding opportunities that institutions may consider providing to undocumented students.

V. Interview Preparation

Employment interviews can seem intimidating no matter how many you have been through, but you have the tools and life experience you need to succeed! This section is designed to cue you into questions that might be asked and experiences you may want to highlight during the interview process. In any case, you will want to demonstrate a commitment to the field of immigration and immigrants' rights law in a way that matches the opportunity you are seeking. You may showcase this by highlighting your life experiences, externships, past employment (including internships), clinics, relevant coursework, extracurricular activities such as student organizations and journals, and/or your academic record.

During interviews for jobs and internships, it is important to be able to answer the question "why immigrants' rights?" or "why immigration law?" It is also important for you to demonstrate a sustained interest in the field. For fellowships, you may be asked to explain why your fellowship project has a particular urgency during the time period for the fellowship, and to explain how your fellowship contributes not just staff time to the organization, but instead launches a significant initiative with long-term benefits.

Sample Interview Questions

General interest:

- o Why are you interested in working in the area of immigrants' rights/immigration law?
- o What about your background has led you to pursue this career path?
- o Have any personal experiences significantly contributed to your desire to do this work?
- o How do you approach making decisions about your future?
- o For summer internships, how do you see your law school summers fitting together?
- o What are your plans between now and when the position starts?

Interest in working at the interviewing organization:

- o Why are you interested in working for this organization?
- o How did you find out about this organization?
- o Why do you want to be in this country/city?
- o Describe why working at this organization is the next logical step in your career.

Inquiries about specific skills:

- o Describe your previous experience conducting research on immigrants' rights/immigration law questions.
- o Describe your familiarity with relevant databases and research tools.
- o Describe your experience of working with data.
- o Do you have fluency in a language other than English? (Be prepared to showcase your proficiency. In some cases, interviewers may have you work through a role-play situation in that language).
- o Do you have experience working with trauma survivors? What is (or would be) your approach to working with trauma survivors?
- o Do you have experience working with children?
- o Describe your relevant prior administrative or management experience.
- o Describe any prior advocacy experience.
- o Describe your experience working in a team or collaborative setting.
- o Describe a situation in which you demonstrated leadership.
- o Describe a time in which you had to do something difficult professionally.
- o Describe an example of your experience working without close supervision in a new setting (for example, in a new substantive area, new geographic area, etc.).
- o Describe a time when you have had to exercise your professional judgment in making a decision.

General Competency:

- o Describe a current immigrants' rights debate or change in immigration law and outline some of the key challenges posed by the debate or change.
- o What are some of the ethical considerations that attorneys should keep in mind when working with noncitizen or migrant populations?

VI. Immigration Faculty at UCLA Law

Hiroshi Motomura

Hiroshi Motomura has taught and written about immigration law and immigrants' rights for over three decades. His work ranges from the constitutional aspects of immigration law, to the integration of immigrants, to undocumented migration, to the state and local role in immigration law and policy, to the transnational aspects of migration regulation. He is the author of *Immigration Outside the Law* (2014) and *Americans in Waiting* (2006); and the co-author of two law school casebooks: *Immigration and Citizenship: Process and Policy* (9th ed. 2021) and *Forced Migration: Law and Policy* (2d ed. 2013).

Professor Motomura has received teaching awards at the University of Colorado and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and more recently the UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award in 2014 and the UCLA School of Law's Rutter Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2021. He is one of 26 law professors in the United States profiled in *What the Best Law Teachers Do* (2013). He was one of the founders of the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN), and he served on the Board of Directors of the National Immigration Law Center from 2011 through 2020.

Professor Motomura is now at work on a book project, supported in part by a Guggenheim Fellowship, on the future of migration law and policy. Some of the book's conceptual foundation is in his 2020 article, *The New Migration Law: Migrants, Refugees, and Citizens in an Anxious Age*, in the *Cornell Law Review*. He is Faculty Co-Director of the law school's Center for Immigration Law and Policy.

Ahilan Arulanantham

Ahilan T. Arulanantham is Professor from Practice and Co-Director of the Center for Immigration Law and Policy at UCLA School of Law. He has successfully litigated a number of cases involving immigrants' rights, including *Franco-Gonzalez v. Holder*, the first case to establish a federal right to appointed counsel for any group of immigrants; *Jennings v. Rodriguez*, which secured the due process rights of immigrants jailed for years while litigating their deportation cases; and, most recently, *Ramos v. Nielsen*, a challenge to the Trump Administration's plan to end the TPS program for immigrants who have lived here lawfully for decades. Ahilan has argued three times before the U.S. Supreme Court, most recently in the fall of 2021 on behalf of Americans of the Muslim faith who were targeted by the federal government for surveillance because of their religion, in *FBI v. Fazaga*. He has also testified before the United States Congress on three occasions, and served as a Lecturer at the University of Chicago Law School and at the University of Irvine School of Law, where he taught on Preventive Detention.

Ahilan's parents are Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants who left Sri Lanka to escape race discrimination and sporadic violence. Several years after they came to this country, the Sri Lankan civil war began, causing much of his extended family to flee Sri Lanka. Ahilan has remained interested in promoting human rights in Sri Lanka, and has also represented several Sri Lankan Tamil refugees during the course of his work with the ACLU.

Prior to joining UCLA, Ahilan was Senior Counsel at the ACLU in Los Angeles, where he worked for nearly twenty years. Ahilan has also worked as an Assistant Federal Public Defender in El Paso, Texas, and as a law clerk on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. In 2007 and 2013 he was named one of California Lawyer Magazine's Lawyers of the Year for immigrants' rights, and has repeatedly been named one of the Daily Journal's Top 100 Lawyers in California over the last decade. In 2010 he received the Arthur C. Helton Human Rights Award from the American Immigration Lawyers' Association, and in 2014 received the Jack Wasserman Memorial Award for litigation to protect the rights of vulnerable immigrants, also from the American Immigration Lawyers' Association.

In 2016 Ahilan was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow.

Talia Inlender

Talia Inlender is Deputy Director of the Center for Immigration Law and Policy (CILP) at UCLA School of Law. Prior to joining CILP, Talia spent 13 years at Public Counsel, the nation's largest pro bono law firm, where she launched and led the agency's detained deportation defense program and most recently served as Supervising Senior Staff Attorney with the Immigrant's Rights Project. During her career, Talia has worked with thousands of people incarcerated by immigration authorities as well as deported military veterans seeking lawful return to the United States. Talia has also trained and supervised scores of attorneys, legal fellows, and law students representing non-citizens in their immigration proceedings—including serving as a Clinical Supervisor at the UCLA Immigration Clinic from 2009-2017. Talia has herself litigated cases on behalf of immigrants before Immigration Judges; the Board of Immigration Appeals; and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Talia's direct service work has led to transformative impact litigation on behalf of immigrants. She was co-counsel on *Franco-Gonzalez v. Holder*, the first lawsuit to establish a right to government-appointed counsel for a class of immigrants with serious mental disabilities, *F.L.B. (formerly J.E.F.M.) v. Lynch* and *C.J.L.G. v. Barr*, lawsuits to vindicate children's right to counsel in immigration proceedings, and *International Refugee Assistance Project v. Kelly*, a lawsuit challenging the detention of an Afghan family entering on Special Immigrant Visas during the so-called "Muslim Ban." Talia has also played a pivotal role in movement advocacy to expand public funding for removal defense at the local and state level through the Los Angeles Justice Fund and One California programs.

In January of 2017, Talia was among the first to arrive at LAX to help those detained by the "Muslim Ban," earning the recognition of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti during his State of the City Address. She was also recognized as part of the *Franco-Gonzalez* team with the 2014 Jack

Wasserman Memorial Award from the American Immigration Lawyers' Association for excellence in litigation. Her community contributions have been recognized with the 2016 Community Partner Award from the Western State College of Law Immigration Clinic and the 2017 Karen Paull Colleague of the Year Award at Public Counsel. In 2008, Talia was awarded an Equal Justice Works fellowship.

Talia is a former judicial clerk to the Honorable Stephen Reinhardt on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. She is the author of *The Imperfect Legacy of Gomez v. I.N.S.: Using Social Perceptions to Adjudicate Social Group Claims*, 20 Geo. Immigr. L.J. 681 (Summer 2006) and *Status Quo or Sixth Ground?: Adjudicating Gender Asylum Claims*, in *Migrations and Mobilities: Gender, Citizenship, and Borders* (Seyla Benhabib & Judith Resnik eds., 2009). Talia is a graduate of Wesleyan University (B.A. 2001) and Yale Law School (J.D. 2007).

Ingrid Eagly

Professor Eagly is an expert in the intersection between immigration enforcement and the criminal legal system. Her recent work explores a range of topics, including the criminalization of migration, police policymaking, and U.S. immigration courts. She has published numerous law review articles, reports, and op-eds on the criminalization of immigrants. She also serves as a co-editor of the *ImmigrationProf* blog and a member of the editorial board of *Law & Social Inquiry*.

At UCLA, Professor Eagly teaches the Criminal Defense Clinic, which in recent years has represented individuals seeking post-conviction relief and release from immigration detention at Adelanto, California. In the past, she has also taught Immigration Law.

Professor Eagly earned an A.B. from Princeton University in public policy, with certificates in African American Studies and Women's Studies. She received her J.D. from Harvard Law School and clerked for Judge David Coar of the U.S. District Court in Chicago. Prior to joining the faculty at UCLA, Professor Eagly was a Skadden Fellow at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago (LAF), a Soros Justice Fellow at the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), and a trial attorney for the Federal Public Defender in Los Angeles.

Nina Rabin

Professor Rabin's has developed and directed legal clinics, working in partnership with community organizations and local institutions to best serve the multi-faceted needs of mixed status families. At the same time, she has undertaken policy research and advocacy to study and document the impact of immigration enforcement on women and families. She has authored articles and reports on the consequences of immigration enforcement for children in immigrant families, working conditions of low-wage immigrant women workers, immigrants' parental rights, and the treatment of women fleeing gender-based violence in immigration detention. She has spoken extensively on immigration policy issues in a variety of venues, including academic conferences, community forums, and a Congressional briefing.

At UCLA, Professor Rabin is Director of the Immigrant Family Legal Clinic. The clinic's work involves representing immigrant families on immigration and employment matters, brief legal consultations on a range of additional issues, community outreach and education, and policy research and advocacy.

Professor Rabin was previously Clinical Professor of Law at University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law where she served as Director of the Bacon Immigration Law and Policy Program, an interdisciplinary program on immigration law and policy. Prior to her work in Arizona, Rabin clerked for the Honorable Dorothy W. Nelson on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and practiced in a civil rights law firm in California. She graduated from Yale Law School in 2003 and Harvard College in 1998.

Tendayi Achiume

The current focus of Professor Achiume's work is the global governance of racism and xenophobia; and the legal and ethical implications of colonialism for contemporary international migration. More generally, her research and teaching interests lie in international human rights law, international refugee law, international migration, and property.

At UCLA, Professor Achiume teaches International Human Rights Law and leads the International Human Rights Clinic, where students provide legal support to the Special Rapporteur mandate, including cutting-edge legal and policy research, drafting, oral advocacy, and possible travel to the United Nations.

Professor Achiume earned her J.D. from Yale Law School. She also earned a Graduate Certificate in Development Studies from Yale. In November 2017, the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed Professor Achiume the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, making her the first woman to serve in this role since its creation in 1993. In 2016, she was appointed to co-chair the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law (ASIL), and she is currently the co-chair of the ASIL Migration Law Interest Group. Professor Achiume has also clerked for Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke and Justice Yvonne Mokgoro on the Constitutional Court of South Africa. Following her clerkships, she was awarded the Bernstein International Human Rights Fellowship to work for the Refugee and Migrant Rights Project unit at Lawyers for Human Rights in Johannesburg. Professor Achiume also taught on the faculty of the International Human Rights Exchange Programme based at the University of the Witwatersrand. She then joined the New York office of Sullivan & Cromwell LLP as a litigation associate. Immediately prior to her current appointment she was the second recipient of Binder Clinical Teaching Fellowship at UCLA School of Law.

Khaled Abou El Fadl

Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl is one of the world's leading authorities on Shari'ah, Islamic law and Islam, and a prominent scholar in the field of human rights. He is the Omar and Azmeralda Alfi Distinguished Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law where he teaches International Human Rights; Islamic Jurisprudence; Political Asylum and Refugee Law; The Trafficking of Human Beings: Law and Policy; Political Crimes and Legal

Systems; and Muslims, Race and Law. He was also formerly the Chair of the Islamic Studies Interdepartmental Program at UCLA. He is the founder of the Institute of Advanced Usuli Studies (“The Usuli Institute”), a non-profit educational institute dedicated to ethics, beauty and critical thinking in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Among his many honors and distinctions, Dr. Abou El Fadl was awarded the University of Oslo Human Rights Award, the Leo and Lisl Eitingher Prize in 2007, and named a Carnegie Scholar in Islamic Law in 2005.

A prolific scholar and prominent public intellectual, Dr. Abou El Fadl is the author of numerous books and articles on various topics in Islam and Islamic law. His work has been translated into numerous languages including Arabic, Persian, French, Spanish, Malay, Ethiopian, Vietnamese and Japanese, among others.

Dr. Abou El Fadl is most noted for his scholarly approach to Islam from a moral point of view. He writes extensively on universal themes of humanity, morality, human rights, justice, and mercy, and is well known for his writings on beauty as a core moral value of Islam. He is one of the foremost critics of puritan and Wahhabi Islam. Dr. Abou El Fadl has appeared on most major national and international media channels and has published widely in such publications as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Al-Jazeera English*, *Boston Review*, and many others.

His latest book is entitled, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari’ah in the Modern Age* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), considered to be his magnum opus and intellectual autobiography. His other books include: *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*; *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*; *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*; *And God Knows the Soldiers: The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourses*; *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*; *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*; and *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books*. His book, *The Great Theft*, was the first work to delineate the key differences between moderate and extremist Muslims and was named one of the Top 100 Books of the year by Canada’s *Globe and Mail* (Canada’s leading national newspaper). His book, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books*, is a landmark work in modern Muslim literature.

Dr. Abou El Fadl holds a B.A. in Political Science from Yale University, a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Islamic law from Princeton University.

Joseph Berra

Joseph Berra is Human Rights in the Americas Project Director with the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law. His teaching and research interests include immigrant rights, international human rights, and the rights of Indigenous and Afrodescendent peoples in Central America. Berra coordinates projects with organizational partners in the U.S. and Latin America to engage students in human rights advocacy and the Inter-American system for human rights. Current projects include collaboration with Indigenous organizations resisting extractivist industries in their territories, litigation at the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, and research on the human rights challenges faced by Indigenous migrants in the U.S. detention and immigration systems.

Before coming to UCLA, Berra was a successful civil and human rights litigator with both the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the Texas Civil Rights Project. He is the past Executive Director of the Caribbean Central American Research Council, an inter-disciplinary activist research organization, and currently serves on the CCARC Board. He co-authored two studies with CCARC in 2002 and 2007 to support the territorial claims of Indigenous and Afrodescendent communities in Honduras. A former Jesuit, Berra spent many years living and working in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America before earning his law degree.

In addition to his role with the Promise Institute, Berra serves the Vice-Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion as Special Projects Director for Programming in coordination with the Special Advisors to the Chancellor for Immigration and Native American and Indigenous Affairs.

Berra holds a J.D. from St. Mary’s University School of Law; an M.A. in Social Anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin; an M.Div. from the Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador, El Salvador; and a B.A. in Philosophy from St. Louis University.

VII. STUDENT NARRATIVES

Ming Tanigawa-Lau ’21

As an undergrad, I double-majored in Peace and Justice Studies and Music, with the intention of never going to law school. After college, I lived in Trujillo, Peru, teaching at a music school for children. I then moved back home to Honolulu, Hawai’i, where I began working as a child advocate at a domestic violence shelter. This was my first experience working with survivors of trauma, and the lessons I learned during my two years in that position continue to inform my work with immigrants today.

I decided to go to law school because of my frustrations with the limits of working in the social service field, and because of the 2016 election. I hoped to return to Hawai’i to directly serve immigrant communities, and I chose UCLA Law because of the Epstein Program in Public Interest Law and Policy and the Critical Race Studies program. Through these two programs I’ve found an awesome community that has pulled me through law school’s roughest times.

Having had no experience in immigration law before law school, I seized every opportunity I could find to be involved. I signed up as a 1L rep for Law Students for Immigrant Justice and was able to volunteer at a family detention center in Dilley, Texas, that December. I also joined two trips to the border to volunteer with Al Otro Lado during the second semester of my 1L year. I cannot overstate the impact these trips had on me and my gratitude to the students before me who paved the path for these volunteer opportunities.

The summer after my 1L year, I interned with Al Otro Lado in Tijuana. I come out of it with a realistic picture of what was happening to people at the border and strong connections with the amazing advocates working on the ground. These connections made it easy for me to take on organizing volunteer trips and other opportunities for students as a 2L. As a 2L, I also took the Immigrant Rights Policy Clinic and did an

externship with the ACLU Immigrant Rights project. That semester, I had the opportunity to work with many local immigration service providers. I also learned a lot about policy advocacy and how important local government is in protecting immigrants.

My 2L summer internship was with Innovation Law Lab, an organization that does a mix of direct services and impact litigation. That internship was a perfect complement to my summer at the border, and I am glad that I had the opportunity to see how impact litigation works.

As someone with no immigration experience prior to law school, my internships with Innovation Law Lab and the ACLU, as well as any other opportunities I have or will receive, are entirely possible because of three things: 1) the connections I have built within the immigrant rights community since coming to LA; 2) my demonstrated eagerness to engage in intense—and sometimes unconventional—work; and 3) the support of mentors and professors like Hiroshi Motomura, Ingrid Eagly, and Nina Rabin. UCLA has many ways to get involved in immigrant rights advocacy, and I would encourage anyone interested in a career in immigration law to seize as many of them as possible. Please also reach out to me if you are interested in advocacy in the LA area (or Hawai'i)! The only way we are going to abolish borders is with all of us working together.

Christian Gutierrez '22

Growing up in South Central Los Angeles I saw how the injustices of the law disproportionately affected my community, especially in immigration. As an undergrad I majored in Political Science and Rhetoric, thinking I wanted to go to law school, but only having a romanticized idea of what that meant. Upon graduation, I became a legal assistant for the organization Legal Services for Children. There I had the opportunity to work with unaccompanied children from Mexico and Central America. I worked to help our youth clients on their journey to attaining legal protection through asylum or SIJS. I also worked with children experiencing prolonged imprisonment while being held at immigration detention centers. I bore witness to the work of these attorneys and saw the direct impact of their work. I felt confident in my pursuit of a law degree. But my plans went on hold as the tragedy of the immigration system came to my family's doorstep. My mother was incarcerated and subsequently placed into deportation proceedings.

Lost and afraid, I was privileged to be surrounded by a community of people that came to my aid during one of my most vulnerable moments. With the help of my friends and family, we were able to secure her release from immigration custody. While we continue to fight her case, I am blessed to have her with me today.

My personal and professional lives collided. What emerged from the rubble was my reinvigorated will to wield the power of the law against those systems that had caused so much harm to my clients and my mother. With my admission to UCLA Law, I found the opportunity I was looking for to come back home and prepare to help my community. Since that time, I have joined the Critical Race Studies and Public Interest programs. I became a board member for Law Students for Immigrant Justice. My fellow members and I focused our PILP project on interpretation services for indigenous immigrants from Guatemala. I had the privilege of taking the seminar Noncitizens in the Criminal Justice System taught by Professor Jennifer Chacón, as well as Immigration Law taught by Professor Motomura. I hope to join the fight as a public/federal defender working at the intersection of criminal and immigration law. I have seen the cruelty of incarceration and deportation. But I have also seen the power of advocacy and love. Together we can make a difference and inspire others, just as we once were.

Melissa Segarra '23

I had a really circuitous path to law school. In undergrad, I studied music, specializing in musical theater and opera performance. However, musical performance is an intensely demanding career, so I decided to make a change. I had always been interested in migrants' rights, and I decided to pursue a graduate degree in public affairs. As I learned about policy-making from the top-down, I found I missed connecting to people, especially those impacted by policy.

After graduate school, I moved to France and worked with a group of NGOs that provided resources to migrants headed to the United Kingdom. I spent most of my time working as a language instructor for an organization called the School Bus Project. The organization's bus traveled to migrant communities throughout Calais and Dunkirk and served as an educational hub, a source of migrants' rights empowerment, and a shelter. Witnessing the challenges this community faced in France ultimately placed me on a path fighting for migrants' rights.

My fascination with borders and migration led me to Al Otro Lado Border Rights Project in Tijuana, Mexico. Thanks to my bilingual upbringing, I was able to use my language skills to aid asylum seekers trapped in Mexico under the Trump administration's Remain in Mexico program with their asylum cases. My work included outreach at the port of entry, interpreting for attorneys, conducting intakes, and preparing asylum applications. After a year of immersing myself in this work, I was determined to go to law school to become an immigration attorney.

At UCLA School of Law, I found a cohort of people who shared similar values and life goals of breaking down legal barriers designed to exclude and oppress. I became involved with Law Students for Immigrant Justice, the International Refugee Assistance Project, and the new Center for Immigration Law and Policy. What has helped me so far is finding a good work-life balance because actually enacting change takes a long time, and burnout is common in this field. It is so important to make time to replenish yourself so that together we can fight the injustices that we encounter.

Nina Papachristou '22

I never thought I wanted to be a lawyer, but I always knew I wanted to work on immigration as a racial justice issue. I worked as a paralegal at the ACLU's Racial Justice Program for two years. When I left that job to get a master's degree in human geography (migration studies), I started working with a group whose purpose was to bail people out of immigration detention in England. Through this experience, I realized I loved casework and working directly with people to solve immigration issues. Unfortunately, I couldn't do those things without a law degree. So, I decided to apply to law school in order to become a deportation defense attorney. In law school, I joined Law Students for Immigrant Justice (LSIJ), Law Students Against ICE (LSAI) and the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP). With IRAP, I work on the Special Immigrant Visa

application for an Afghan interpreter who worked with the U.S. military. This experience has given me insight into the struggles of educating pro bono attorneys and big law's failure to prioritize preparing them for this type of work. During my 1L summer, I worked at the Florence Project in Arizona doing direct representation of detained immigrants. After 2L, I worked at the Federal Defenders of San Diego, which primarily represents people fighting illegal reentry, drug smuggling, and people smuggling charges.

My experiences thus far have led me to two insights I want to share. First, the best immigrants' rights advocates I know care about people; they don't care about the law for the sake of law nor theory for the sake of theory. Instead, they are driven by a passion to advance racial justice and dismantle immigration law as much as possible. Second, the immigrants' rights world is a very small community. This is especially true for Southern California where you'll run into the same people over and over again. Because of this, networking and talking to everyone you can in the field is super important. Also, be kind to everyone because you'll definitely run across them later. My advice to incoming law students is to talk to alumni and other people working in your chosen field as much as possible; and invite professors who work on the area you want to practice in to lunch. When you have doubts, questions, or are starting to feel imposter syndrome, talk to someone who knows the field and can help. That person may be a mentor, classmate, public interest office administrator, professor, or practitioner. Overall, it's really important to voice those concerns and questions. Chances are if you have a question, someone else does too. In the immigrant rights' field, cooperation is key. Remember that everything good is built together.

Tiana Cherbosque '23

I came to law school to pursue a career working at the intersection of immigration and gender-based violence. While I currently have a very clear vision for my trajectory in the legal field, this was not always the case. Most of my life, I aspired to provide community mental health care for immigrant and refugee populations. I spent my undergraduate years at UC Berkeley interning at Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants where I coordinated adult and youth programming. In 2017, upon graduating with a degree in Peace and Conflict Studies, I planned to relocate to New York City to work as a case manager for survivors of human trafficking before pursuing an MSW degree. A couple months into my work at Sanctuary for Families, a New York City non-profit focusing on gender-based violence, I was asked to assist with consular processing cases and what began as a temporary favor turned into a life-long career change.

I began my legal career working in the Anti-Trafficking Initiative at Sanctuary for Families first as a Case Manager and then as a Family Reunification Coordinator. As a Family Reunification Coordinator, I had the privilege of working with immigrant survivors of human trafficking to reunify them with their family members in the United States by means of consular processing. Here, I experienced firsthand both zealous, client-centered legal representation as well as the importance of building cross-border, pro bono partnerships that eliminate barriers to family reunification. While I initially entered this work as an aspiring social worker, I was deeply inspired by the immigration attorneys around me who modeled trauma-informed lawyering and motivated me to enroll at UCLA School of Law to pursue a career in immigration law.

Working with immigrant survivors of gender-based violence, to me, offers the best of which mental health and legal professions have to offer: the ability to connect with others profoundly and to be intellectually stimulated and challenged to problem-solve creatively. Working at Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice with immigrant survivors of human trafficking in Los Angeles the summer after 1L affirmed my belief that this work has the potential to help others' take back and reclaim their power. My work at Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice was funded by the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law by means of the UC Human Rights Fellowship. This fellowship has enabled me to deepen my understanding of human rights issues as they pertain to migration through an interdisciplinary lens, learning with and from other human rights practitioners.

Getting involved with the Public Interest Law and Policy Specialization, Immigrant Family Legal Clinic, Law Students for Immigrant Justice, and the El Centro Youth Deportation Defense Clinic at UCLA Law further reinforced my commitment to this cause. These experiences, taken together, make me feel incredibly honored to pursue a career fighting for immigrants' rights!