

# Criminal Law Externships

## Fall 2026

## Does UCLA Law Offer Externship Opportunities in Criminal Law?

Yes!

UCLA School of Law's Externship Program allows J.D. and LL.M. students to earn academic credit while gaining hands-on criminal law experience in an externship. Students may pursue either a full-time or part-time externship. Students also participate in a corresponding seminar or faculty tutorial that supplements the placement with a review of relevant areas of criminal law and practice, the application of legal ethics rules to criminal practice, and guided reflection on the diversity of criminal law practice settings and client work.

Externships in criminal law are an important way to gain hands-on legal skills. Externships also offer valuable networking opportunities and enhance your professional marketability.

More information is available on [UCLA Law's Externship Program website](#).

## How Do I Find a Criminal Law Externship?

You must apply directly to the office offering a criminal law externship. Deadlines vary, but in general for spring externships you begin looking no later than October 1, and for fall externships you should begin looking no later than March 1. Some criminal law externship programs have even earlier deadlines. This resource contains information about common externship placements, the type of work you may do, how to apply, and relevant deadlines.

## I Have an Externship Offer! What Do I Do Next?

After receiving an externship offer from a placement organization, apply to the externship program at UCLA Law. For spring semester, the application deadline is typically the last day of classes for the fall semester. For the fall semester, the application deadline is in early August. More information is available on [UCLA Law's Externship Program website](#).

## How Many Hours a Week is a Criminal Law Externship?

Part-time externships range from 2 to 8 fieldwork units. Each fieldwork unit requires 52 hours in the placement over the course of the semester, or 4 hours a week over the course of the 13-week semester. For example, if you would like to earn 4 fieldwork units you would need to work 16 hours a week in the placement, which is roughly a two-day-a-week commitment. Students will also enroll in the companion [Criminal Practice Externship Seminar](#).

Instead of up to two part-time externships, JD candidates may complete one full-time externship, which requires a 40-hour-a-week commitment as well as participation in a faculty tutorial.

## As an Extern, Can I Be Certified to Appear in Criminal Court?

Yes!

Students enrolled in criminal law externships that practice in California state courts may qualify to be certified to appear in state court under supervision of a practicing attorney. To qualify, students must be enrolled in their second or third year of law school and either have completed *or* be currently enrolled in Evidence and Civil Procedure. LL.M. students can also qualify for certification if they satisfy the applicable rules. More information on how to apply for State Bar certification is available [here](#). State courts outside of California may have different requirements.

Students enrolled in criminal law externships that practice in federal courts may also qualify to appear in court. To do so in the Central District of California, students must have completed at least half of law school and *completed* courses in Evidence, Criminal Law, and Criminal Procedure. Federal courts outside the Central District of California may have different rules.

## What Are Criminal Law Externship Opportunities in Los Angeles?

What follows is a list of common criminal law externship placements located in Los Angeles. This is not an exhaustive list but provides a strong starting point for your search. These placements are suitable for full- or part-time externships.

### Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office

The Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office offers externship opportunities that expose students to misdemeanor and felony trials, juvenile adjudications, and other specialized units such as the Office's immigration advising unit. The Los Angeles County Public Defender's office is the largest and oldest criminal defense agency in the country. Externs participate in client interviews, case strategy meetings, and court proceedings. Externs may complete research and writing projects, including briefs, investigative requests, and motions to be filed in court. In addition, externs who earn State Bar certification will have opportunities to appear on the record under the supervision of an experienced attorney.

The application period for spring externships is from May 1 to November 30. For fall externships the application period is from December 1 to June 30. More information on how to apply is available on the [Public Defender's Office website](#).

### Los Angeles County Alternate Public Defender's Office

The Los Angeles County Alternate Public Defender Office has an externship program designed to provide law students with first-hand experience of what it is like to serve as a public defender. The Alternate Public Defender was established in 1993 to serve as the appointed attorney in cases where the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office has a conflict of interest. Externs assist with intake interviews in misdemeanor and felony cases, interview witnesses and family for bail review hearings, review and organize discovery, research legal issues, and prepare legal memoranda. Certified externs may appear in court under supervision.

Students interested in a spring externship should apply as close to October 1 as possible and students interested in a fall externship must apply before March 31. More information is available on the [Alternate Public Defender's Office website](#).

### ACLU of Southern California, Criminal Justice & Jails Projects

The ACLU of Southern California offers externships for students interested in working on abolition and criminal legal system reform. Externship opportunities exist in several projects, including the Criminal Justice Project and the Jails Project. Opportunities for externs include legal research, drafting, and analysis. Externs may also work on public education and advocacy efforts and assist in the activities of the Jails Project. More details are [available here](#).

Students are advised to apply as early as possible for ACLU externship opportunities. Applications formally close on December 5 for spring externships and August 1 for fall externships. More information is available on the [ACLU of Southern California's website](#).

### Federal Public Defender, Central District of CA, Noncapital Habeas Unit Practicum

Students engaged in a fieldwork placement with the Federal Public Defender's Office Capital Habeas Unit gain hands-on experience advocating for indigent criminal defendants in habeas corpus proceedings. Habeas corpus is often the last opportunity for someone convicted of a crime to obtain relief from an unconstitutional conviction or sentence. Students in this practicum with field placement will work with the Office of the Federal Public Defender's Noncapital Habeas Unit that handles the habeas cases of individuals convicted in state and federal courts and sentenced to terms up to and including life without parole. The Noncapital Habeas Unit represents clients before state courts, federal district courts, the Ninth Circuit, and the U.S. Supreme Court. As part of their fieldwork, students will be assigned to a single federal habeas case that has an important litigation event scheduled during the externship. Students enrolled in this externship will also participate in a specialized companion seminar taught by one current and one retired, long-time public defender. The seminar introduces students to how criminal cases move through state and federal courts and the advocacy strategies used by habeas lawyers to advocate for clients who have been wrongly convicted and sentenced.

Students may enroll in this opportunity through the UCLA Law Practicum application process. Decisions on admission are made on a rolling basis, and spaces fill up quickly, so students should apply as soon as possible by sending a resume and cover letter explaining their interest to [externshipprogram@law.ucla.edu](mailto:externshipprogram@law.ucla.edu).

## Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Domestic Violence Prevention Practicum

Students engaged in this special fieldwork placement at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) will assist domestic violence survivors in the Domestic Violence Restraining Order Walk-In Clinic at the courthouse. Students will support litigants to complete petitions for civil restraining orders. Students also represent clients in civil hearings before Los Angeles Superior Court. In addition to the field placement at LAFLA, students attend a two-credit seminar (known as a “practicum”) focused on topics such as best practices in serving clients, laws governing families and child custody, and trial skills.

Students may enroll in this opportunity through the UCLA Law Practicum application process. This course is offered only during the spring semester. More information is available on the [UCLA Law Practicum website](#).

## Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office

The Los Angeles District Attorney’s Office allows law student externs to appear on the record in the courtroom in criminal cases, under the supervision of an attorney with their office. The District Attorney’s Office deals with cases ranging from misdemeanors, including petty theft and reckless driving, to felonies, including sexual assault and murder. As certified externs, 2Ls, 3Ls, and LL.M. students can conduct preliminary hearings, evidence suppression hearings, and in some offices, even a trial. Students must be available to attend a one-day training course on how to present evidence in a criminal proceeding and how to conduct a preliminary hearing or juvenile adjudication.

Students must apply between September 1 and November 15 for a spring externship and between May 1 and July 15 for a fall externship. More information about this opportunity is available on the [District Attorney’s Office website](#).

## California Attorney General’s Office, Criminal Law Division, Appeals, Writs & Trials Section

The California Attorney General’s Office offers externships in its Criminal Law Division. Assignments involve representing the People of the State of California in post-conviction felony proceedings. This includes working on writs and appeals in the California Court of Appeal, California Supreme Court, Federal District Court, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and United States Supreme Court. Certified externs in Los Angeles are given the same responsibilities as a first-year Deputy Attorneys General and may appear for oral argument in the California Court of Appeal (under the supervision of a Deputy Attorney General) to represent the People of the State of California in a felony appeal.

Opportunities for spring and fall semester externships are very limited and only offered on a case-by-case basis. More information on how to apply is available on the [California Attorney General’s Office website](#).

## United States Attorney’s Office, Central District of CA

The United States Attorney’s Office for the Central District of California offers externships in its Criminal, Civil, National Security, and Tax Divisions. Assignments may include assisting with legal research, writing pleadings, trial preparation, completing appellate briefs, and responding to habeas corpus petitions. Externs are also encouraged to observe trials and other court proceedings in cases in which they have worked or in cases of general interest in the office. Externs who qualify to practice under the district court’s student practice rules may also handle some misdemeanor and petty offense hearings.

Deadlines for externships with the US Attorney’s Office are very early due to required background checks. For spring externships, students must apply by September 15, and for fall externships, students must apply by April 15. More information about this opportunity is available on the [U.S. Attorney’s Office website](#).

## Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office

The Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office handles violations of the city municipal code and misdemeanors that occur within the city’s limits. The Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office requires externs to commit a minimum of 16 hours a week up to a full-time schedule of 40 hours a week. Externs at the City Attorney may also qualify to become certified and appear in court under attorney supervision.

Only the fall externship opportunity works for the law school’s calendar. Opportunities are limited and students should apply as early as possible. More information about this opportunity is available on the [Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office website](#).