



# CAREER DEVELOPMENT OFFICE JOB GUIDE

## CRIMINAL DEFENSE

### Description

In the United States, every person accused of a crime is entitled to be represented by a lawyer. If the accused cannot afford to pay for a lawyer, then the court will assign a public defender. Consequently, criminal defense attorneys may work for the government as public defenders, or they may work in private law practice for paying clients. The work involves, among other things, handling arraignments, pretrial hearings, settlement conferences, trials and sentencing hearings. A significant portion of a criminal defense attorney's day is spent on investigations and evidence gathering, including interviewing clients and eye witnesses, reviewing police reports, and working with the prosecuting attorneys assigned to the cases.

### Qualifications

The most important attribute for a new lawyer in the criminal defense area is a passion for providing the best possible defense for those accused. You also need to have an excellent knowledge of criminal law and procedures, good courtroom skills, and the ability and confidence to interview clients (including incarcerated clients) effectively.

This is a practice area where you will get courtroom experience early and often. Consequently, many employers in the criminal defense area only hire lawyers who are already members of the bar.

### Types of Employers

#### **Public Defenders:**

*Federal Defender Program.* Indigent defendants in federal courts are served by either the federal public

defender organizations (federal employees) or, in certain specified districts, by nonprofit community defender organizations. The federal program typically hires experienced lawyers, pulling from the state and local public defender offices or from federal judicial clerkships.

*State and Local Programs.* State and local programs vary in structure. In Georgia, the state is divided into 49 divisions, overseen by the Georgia Public Defender Standards Council. The State of Georgia provides most of the funding for the divisions, with individual counties also providing support in some cases. The purpose of the Council, acting as an independent agency within the executive branch, is to ensure that the divisions can operate in the best interests of the clients, independent of political considerations and private interests. Each division is responsible for its own hiring, but the Council's website is one of the best places to look for job postings.

#### **Law Firms:**

*Large Law Firms.* The only criminal law typically practiced by the larger firms is white collar crime. Most large firms require grades in the top 20% or better. Most of the big law firms in the Southeast recruit on-campus at UGA, and your CDO Counselor can give you more information about this process.

*Small Law Firms and Solo Practitioners.* Most private practice criminal defense work is done in smaller firms and by solo practitioners. The best way to find jobs with these employers is by networking. Participating in activities of criminal defense sections of the bar and professional organizations can be a good way to meet these lawyers. You may also find it effective to reach out with unsolicited letters, emails or phone calls. You can find lists of criminal lawyers in Georgia at the Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, the State Bar of Georgia Directory, and Lawyers.com.

## Job Search Strategy

Because of the need to be licensed, many new graduates do not secure these positions until close to the time that they receive bar exam results. However, the most successful applicant for one of these positions will have an established relationship with the employer prior to the position coming open. That relationship is best achieved by working as an intern during the summers, during the school term, and even after graduation until bar results arrive.

As you plan your path to a criminal defense career, consider the following advice:

- There are far more opportunities for entry level jobs in the public defender offices than in law firms. Also, many law firm jobs are particularly competitive, and the firms often demand experience. Working at a PD office for a few years can be a stepping stone to private practice.
- For your 1L and 2L summers, secure a position for at least part of each summer at a public defender's office or with a criminal defense practitioner.
- Look for internship positions in Symplicity or at external job posting sites listed below. You should also talk with Professor Gabriel, your CDO Counselor, and 2Ls and 3Ls who had such internships in the past. You can get lists of summer positions held by our students during the most recent summer from your CDO Counselor.
- Watch for panel discussions organized by CDO, at which practicing public defenders will give you tips.
- Be mindful that most internships at public defenders offices are unpaid. However, there may be some opportunities for stipends or fellowships (see the sample list below). In the alternative, you may be able to receive course credit for summer positions.
- During your 2L and 3L years, enroll in the Criminal Defense Clinic. This will give you classroom instruction and hands-on experience. You should also get to know Professor Gabriel. He can be a valuable contact and reference for your job search.

- Participate in extracurricular activities and professional organizations. You can network with helpful people at meetings, and it helps to have these affiliations on your resume.

Interviewing for public defender positions can be much different than interviewing with law firms. Often, law firm interviews will be with one attorney at a time, and they can be congenial, focused more on your personality and fit. Interviews for public defender jobs are often done with panels of current attorneys in the office meeting with you at the same time. They often pose hypotheticals dealing with client issues and ethical matters. See [Public Defender Jobs Interview Tips](#) for more guidance.

## Experiential Learning Opportunities

The most effective course work is to participate in the criminal defense clinics. These clinics provide you with hands-on experience, including opportunities to represent clients in court under Georgia's Third-Year Practice Act (as of August 2015, this Act will also extend to second-year students). The clinics are offered fall, spring and summer semesters. For more information about how to enroll, see the Law School's [website](#).

## Relevant Courses

For additional information about relevant courses, the following video provides helpful guidance from Georgia Law Professor Russell Gabriel. Also, check the Law School's [Course Offerings page](#) for a list of courses offered and the applicable semester class schedule.

**Criminal Law**  
with Professor [Russell Gabriel](#)



## Relevant Law School Activities

[Criminal Defense Clinic](#)  
[Capital Assistance Project](#)  
[Moot Court and Mock Trial](#)  
[American Constitution Society](#)  
[Equal Justice Foundation](#)  
[Public Interest Law Council](#)  
[Working in the Public Interest](#)

## Bar and Professional Organizations

[Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers](#)  
[Georgia Bar Association Criminal Law Section](#)  
[Atlanta Bar Association Criminal Law Section](#)  
[Southern Center for Human Rights, Southern Public Defender Training Center](#)  
[American Bar Association Criminal Justice Section](#)

## Job Fairs

Georgia Public Sector Career Fair (Spring)

- Takes place in Atlanta
- Last year, it included over 75 employers from the Southeast
- Registration period is in mid-January, and the job fair is typically during the third week of February
- No website; see a CDO Counselor for more information

[Equal Justice Works \(Fall\)](#)

- Takes place in Washington, D.C.
- Last year, it included over 140 employers from across the country
- Registration period is August 11–September 14, 2015, and the job fair is October 23-24, 2015

## External Job Posting Sites

[Georgia Public Defender Standards Council](#). This site is very effective for announcing open positions in public defender offices across all of Georgia.

[Georgia Association of Defense Counsel](#). Many of these jobs may also be posted on the Public Defender Standards Council site, but this site may also include private practice positions.

[Public Sector Jobs Directory](#). This site posts all types of public interest jobs from across the country.

[Gideon's Promise Summer Internships](#)

[Idealist](#)

[Atlanta Federal Defender Program Summer Jobs and Externships](#)

[National Federal Defender Program Employment](#)

[National Legal Aid & Defender Association](#)

[Indeed.com](#)

[Public Defender Service for Washington, DC](#)

[The Bronx Defenders](#)

## Fellowships and Funding

[UGA Law Public Service Fellowships for post-graduation \(talk to your CDO Counselor\)](#)

[UGA Equal Justice Foundation Fellowships](#)

[Gideon's Promise Summer Funding](#)

[National Lawyers Guild](#)

[Public Interest Law Initiative for Illinois PD Internships](#)

[Center for Appellate Litigation \(New York City\)](#)

[Equal Justice Works Public Defender Corps](#)

[PSJD Summer Funding](#)

[D.C. Public Defender Service Fellowships](#)

[UGA Law Downs Loan Repayment Assistance Program](#)

## Recent Jobs

The table below lists some of the employers who have hired UGA Law students in the criminal defense practice area. For confidentiality reasons, we do not publish the names of specific students; however, CDO may have contacts at these employers who can help you.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Type of Job</b>
Appalachian Judicial Circuit Public Defender	Jasper, GA	Post-Grad
Atlanta Circuit Public Defender	Atlanta, GA	Post-Grad, Summer
Augusta Public Defender	Augusta, GA	Post-Grad
Brunswick Circuit Public Defender	Brunswick, GA	Post-Grad, Summer
Charleston County Public Defender	Charleston, SC	Summer
Colorado State Public Defender	Denver and other cities	Post-Grad, Summer
Conasauga Judicial Circuit	Dalton, GA	Post-Grad
Cook Noell Tolley & Bates	Athens, GA	Part-Time Intern
Coweta Judicial Circuit Public Defender	Newnan, GA	Post-Grad
Douglas Judicial Circuit Public Defender	Douglasville, GA	Post-Grad
Eastern Circuit Public Defender	Savannah, GA	Post-Grad
Georgia Capital Defender's Office	Atlanta, GA	Summer
Hamilton County, OH Public Defender	Cincinnati, OH	Post-Grad, Summer
Lookout Mtn. Judicial Circuit Public Defender	LaFayette, GA	Post-Grad
Monroe County, IN Public Defender	Bloomington, IN	Post-Grad
Ninth Judicial Circuit Public Defender	Orlando, FL	Post-Grad, Summer
Northeastern Judicial Circuit Public Defender	Gainesville, GA	Post-Grad
Piedmont Circuit Public Defender	Winder, GA	Summer
Rockdale County Public Defender	Conyers, GA	Post-Grad
Southern Circuit Public Defender	Valdosta, GA	Post-Grad
Stone Mountain Circuit Public Defender	Decatur, GA	Post-Grad, Summer
Tifton Judicial Circuit Public Defender	Tifton, GA	Post-Grad
Walton County Public Defender	Monroe, GA	Post-Grad
Washington, DC Public Defender	Washington, DC	Summer
Western Circuit Public Defender	Athens, GA	Post-Grad, Summer

## Other Resources

- [\*Careers in Indigent Defense\*](#), Harvard Law School
- [\*Public Defender Handbook\*](#), New York University Law School
- [\*How to Get a Job in a Public Defender's Office\*](#), University of Virginia School of Law
- [\*Criminal Law Lib Guide\*](#), UGA King Library