

BECOMING A CIVIL RIGHTS LAWYER AND ADVOCATE ADVICE FOR WAYNE STATE LAW STUDENTS

There are a variety of course offerings, clinics, and extracurricular activities at Wayne State University Law School that can provide a solid base for students interested in pursuing a career as a civil rights attorney.

I. Recommended coursework:

In addition to important courses included in the first year curriculum, such as Property and Civil Procedure (particularly for class actions), the following courses are recommended, in no particular order:

- Constitutional Law (A and B)
- Federal Courts
- Advanced constitutional law seminars
- Race and the Law
- Employment Discrimination
- Administrative Law
- Law of Elections and Political Organizations
- Civil Rights Litigation
- American Indian Law
- Immigration and Nationality Law
- Human Rights Law
- Disability Law
- Education Law
- Family Law
- Law and Economics
- Legislation
- Local Government Law

You should also consider enrolling in seminars or clinics, which will let you explore a topic in more depth and provide hands-on experiences that can inform your future career goals. Below are a list of recommended seminars and clinic programs.

- Seminars (not all-inclusive):
 - Advanced Constitutional Law
 - Advanced Race and the Law
 - Sports and Inequality
 - Family Violence
 - Urban Housing and Community Development
- Clinics (not all-inclusive):
 - Civil rights litigation clinic
 - Non-profit and small businesses clinic
 - Disability law clinic

II. Other Advice:

Course selection does not need to drive your career path. You should take courses that you are interested in, but also make sure to build a solid foundation of legal courses.

- Work to expose yourself to a variety of perspectives and thinking, so that you learn to think in different ways and understand the opposing arguments surrounding a particular issue. Your coursework should challenge you to think deeply about existing problems.
- Take advantage of clinic opportunities to meet with and get comfortable with clients and develop trial skills.
- You can never know too much with respect to procedure/federal rules – it frees you to do your work effectively. The more you understand how to navigate through the legal system, the more effective you can be for your clients.
- Civil rights organizations will likely look for commitment to and experience in civil rights litigation more than whether you've worked for a firm or in public interest. Seek to build a resume and transcript that reflects a commitment to civil rights issues. Public interest jobs are competitive, and most public interest employers think of themselves as very specialized. Therefore, civil rights non profits often prefer candidates with a coherent background focused on one issue to a candidate who has been involved in a large variety of public interest related activities.
- If you want to enter academic life, write and write often and at every opportunity. You will most likely have to produce something in order to go on the job market, and you will be in a better position to do that if you have spent time on a journal as a student. It will expose you to legal academic writing, and also give you a chance to write something yourself.
- Find professors and other role models who are doing work in the field that you wish to enter, and take advantage of opportunities to know them better. Take their classes, be a good student, and perhaps try to work as a research assistant or volunteer for a project they are working on. Ask for advice about jobs, career paths, etc. Be proactive in finding areas of overlap in your interests and in offering yourself for research, etc.