

SO YOU WANT TO BE A CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYER? ADVICE FOR WAYNE STATE LAW STUDENTS

Wayne State Law School offers a rich variety of upperclass elective courses, clinics, and internships that are especially valuable to students interested in becoming criminal defense lawyers. All students will take a Criminal Law course as part of the first-year curriculum. Those interested in pursuing careers in criminal defense should take as many of the courses listed below as possible in their upperclass years:

Criminal Procedure I
Criminal Procedure II
White Collar Crime
Evidence
Advanced Topics in Criminal Law Seminar
Criminal Appellate Practice
Trial Advocacy
Criminal Justice Internship

With few exceptions, these courses can be taken in any order. For example, Criminal Procedure II can be taken before (or at the same time as) Criminal Procedure I. In some semesters, the Advanced Topics in Criminal Law Seminar may be open only to students who have taken (or are taking) Criminal Procedure I, Criminal Procedure II, or White Collar Crime. It is recommended that students taking Criminal Appellate Practice have taken at least one of Criminal Procedure I, Criminal Procedure II, or Evidence.

A typical criminal defense lawyer spends a much higher percentage of his or her time in court, or preparing for court, than other types of lawyers. Therefore, courses that teach the rules that apply in court, such as Evidence, and courses that prepare students to practice in court, such as Criminal Appellate Practice and Trial Advocacy, are particularly valuable.

Since most criminal defense lawyers are solo practitioners or are in very small firms, it is a good idea for a law student interested in criminal defense to develop contacts during law school with the criminal defense bar in the location where he or she wishes to practice. One way to develop such contacts is to do an internship with a public defender office (if there is one in that area), the prosecutor's office, or to work with a lawyer or small firm that does criminal defense in the area. The Criminal Justice Internship program sponsors internships with all public defenders and prosecutors in Southeast Michigan. The Criminal Appellate Practice course is run by the State Appellate Defender Office, which takes criminal appeals from all counties in Michigan.