



The State Bar
of California

PUBLIC INTEREST DRIFT

FINDINGS FROM THE
2019 CALIFORNIA LAW
STUDENT SURVEY



Background

PUBLIC INTEREST DRIFT

When law students who begin law school intending to enter public interest careers decide to pursue nonpublic interest careers over the duration of their studies.

In 2018, over 5,000 students entered law school in California. Nearly one in four of these students began law school with intentions to work in the area of public interest. However, scholars have observed that many students who enter law school with these intentions veer away from their initial goals over the course of their studies. This phenomenon has been coined “public interest drift” by the academic community. Other studies of the phenomenon have estimated that approximately 40 percent of students who begin law school with the intention of working in public interest change their mind by their third year, and fewer than one-quarter end up taking public interest jobs.¹

The cost of attending law school has increased dramatically over the past decade; between 2008 and 2018, the average tuition of ABA law schools in California rose from \$113,094 to \$156,669, outpacing inflation by over 22 percent.² Law students rely on debt servicing to finance their legal education, and research indicates that law school debt is a significant factor in public interest drift.³ Among 2018 law school graduates, 78 percent of those who attended private law schools, and 69 percent of those who attended public law schools held graduate student loans, with student debt levels averaging \$151,386 and \$121,787 respectively.

There is no consensus among scholars regarding the impact of debt on law student career choices. Some studies posit that

the relationship between debt and career choice is weak.⁴ Instead, these studies point to the availability of public interest jobs and experiences during law school as the key factors influencing a law student’s decision to take a public interest job.

State Bar staff examined public interest drift as part of the 2019 California Justice Gap Study through the Law Student Survey. The 2019 California Justice Gap Survey indicates that 55 percent of California households have experienced a civil legal problem in the past year and received no or inadequate legal help for the vast majority of those problems. The gap between demand for legal services and those supplied is even starker for Californians with incomes at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), who on average experienced more than double the amount of civil legal problems in their households than Californians above 125 percent FPL. While legal aid organizations are the most common source of legal help for low-income Californians, these organizations report being unable to adequately service 63 to 70 percent of the legal problems that people come to them with, largely due to a lack of resources.⁶ One key bottleneck for service provision may be an insufficient number of attorneys working in legal aid organizations. The purpose of the Law Student Survey is to estimate public interest drift among California’s law students and assess constraints on the pipeline of attorneys into public interest careers, specifically careers in legal aid.

Study Methodology

State Bar staff developed the Law Student Survey during the summer of 2019 in collaboration with the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC).⁷ The survey was administered to law school students via the following distribution channels:

State Bar of California Distribution:

All 7,235 law students registered with the State Bar of California at the time of the survey were invited to participate in the Law Student Survey. Of these, 28 percent responded. The survey was open from September 9 through October 6, 2019.

Law School Dean Distribution:

An open link to the survey was shared electronically with California law school deans with a request that they forward the link to their students.⁸ The purpose of this particular distribution vehicle was to reach California law students who had not yet registered with the State Bar; an additional 458 responses were generated through this school-based outreach. State Bar staff is unable to verify the number of students to whom the survey was sent. Thus, a response rate cannot be calculated. The public link was accessible from September 19 through October 6, 2019.

The Law Student Survey received 2,467 responses from students at California law schools certified by the ABA (California ABA law schools), California Accredited Law Schools (CALs), law schools that are registered with the State Bar of California but do not hold accreditation (registered

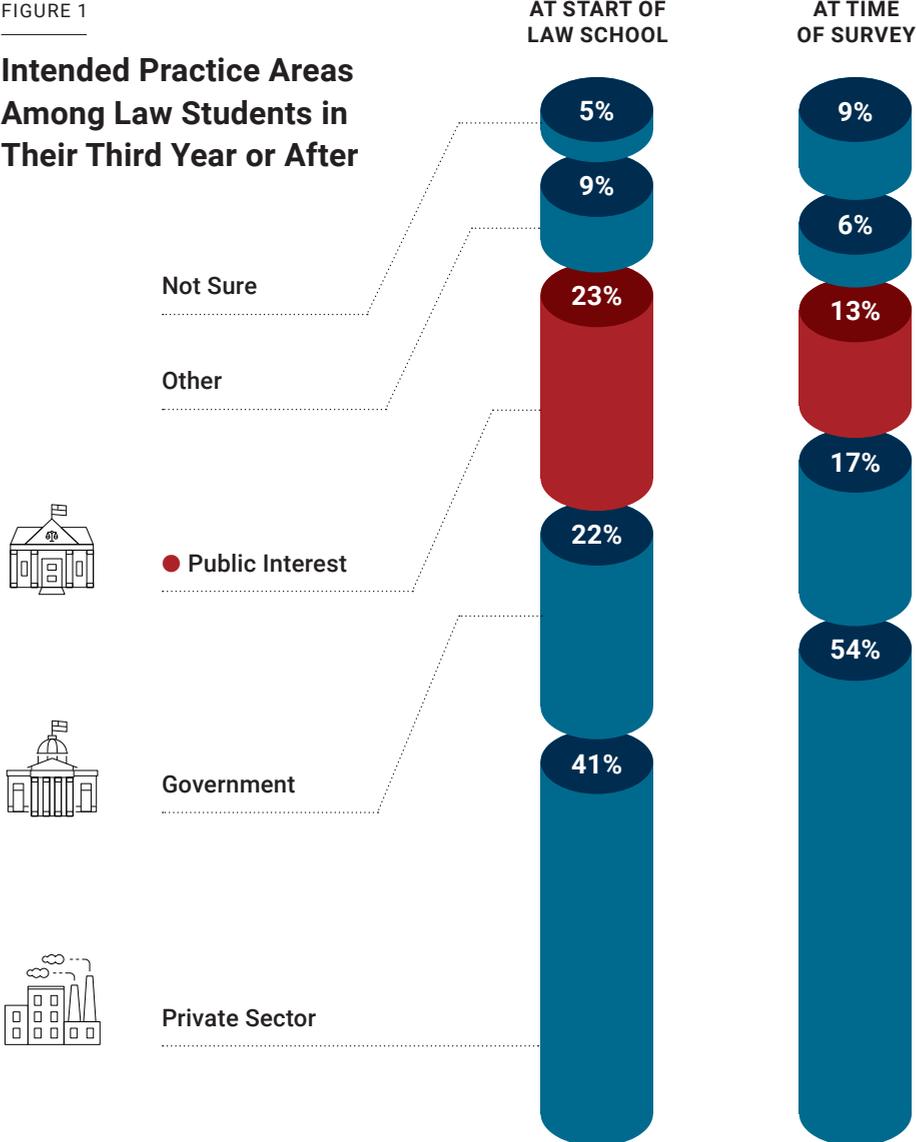
law schools) as well as out-of-state law schools.⁹ Nearly three-fourths of respondents were enrolled in a California ABA school or a CALs. The analyses in this report focus on these students (N = 1,856).¹⁰

It is important to note that the data gathered in the Law Student Survey is self-reported. While the risk of false reporting exists, the self-reported debt data provided by law students closely conforms to reporting from law schools to *US News & World Report*.¹¹ Qualitative findings are drawn from 14 focus groups conducted by LAAC during the summer of 2019 with law students who interned at organizations affiliated with LAAC as well as in the fall of 2019 with students enrolled in California law schools.

Results

Law Student Survey respondents were asked to report their intended area of law practice upon graduation as well as whether that area of practice had changed over the duration of law school. If they indicated that their career intentions changed, respondents were asked to report

their intended area of practice at the start of law school. As shown in **Figure 1**, while 22 percent of respondents in their third year and after had started law school intending to work in a public interest job upon graduation, only 13 percent of these students remained interested in working a



public interest job upon graduation at the time of the survey.¹²

California law students veered away from public interest careers at a high rate. Of the 416 students who intended to work in public interest at the start of law school, 49 percent had switched their career interest away from public interest at the time of the survey. This figure was 57 percent among students in their third or later year of law

school, as shown in **Figure 2**.¹³

Law students overwhelmingly regarded educational debt as an impediment to their ability to pursue public interest careers. Over 70 percent of the respondents who veered away from their intention to work in public interest cited their debt as a reason for changing career plans. The second most cited reason was a lack of confidence in federal debt assistance (**Figure 3**).

FIGURE 2

Drift among Law Students Who Start Law School Intending to Practice in a Public Interest Setting upon Graduation

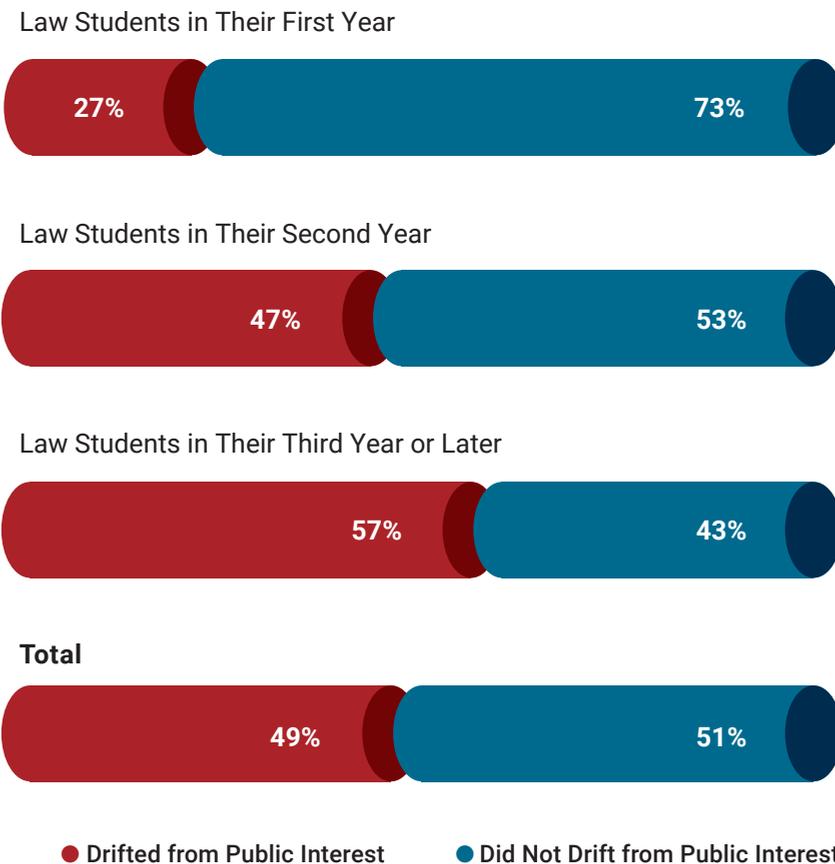


FIGURE 3

Reasons for Public Interest Drift

71%

need to make more money than public interest jobs pay because of their educational debt

40%

are not confident that the Federal Loan Forgiveness Program will continue

32%

plan to pursue public interest job after paying off their educational debt

28%

plan to pursue public interest job after working in the private sector

27%

want or have to make more money than public interest jobs pay, but not because of educational debt

25%

believe their law school does not have good Loan Repayment Assistance Program so need to make more money than public interest jobs pay

23%

discovered another type of job that they are more interested in because of a lack of available public interest jobs

17%

Lack of available public interest jobs

14%

did pro bono or an internship with a public interest organization and realized they do not want to do that type of work

12%

had parents expect them to make more money

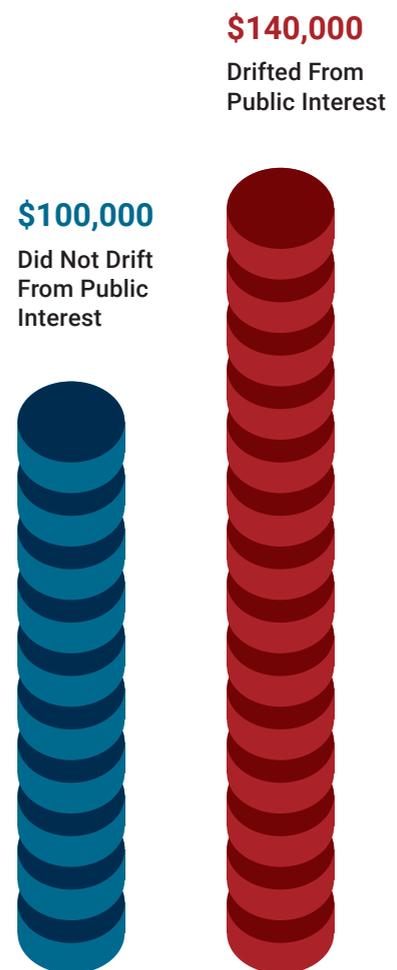
Law Student Debt

The majority of California law students (78 percent) reported taking out loans to finance their legal education. Among these students, 86 percent reported having law school loans from the federal government, and 27 percent reported holding loans from private institutions.

Among students with law school loan debt, the median law school loan debt level reported was \$120,000 (Figure 4). As shown in Figure 3, the majority of law students who drifted from public interest cited debt as a major reason for their decision. An analysis of debt data supports this; students who drifted from their initial plans to practice in a public interest area had a median law school loan debt 40 percent higher than their peers who stayed committed to public interest careers. Law school debt loads were not evenly distributed across the law student population. Black and Latinx students were more likely to have law school loan debt than their white peers. While 22 percent of white students reported not taking out law school loans, that figure was only 9 percent for Black and Latinx students. And among those that had debt, the median law school loan debt load was 26 percent higher for Black and Latinx students than for white students.

FIGURE 4

Median Law School Loan Debt



Pipelines to Public Interest Careers

There have been numerous initiatives on the part of law schools and government to help facilitate public interest legal careers after law school. Many law schools administer a loan repayment assistance program (LRAP) to provide students with financial assistance after graduation. LRAPs are specific to each school and are awarded to a limited number of students, depending on the availability of funding. Most LRAPs require

students to work full time in an approved nonprofit or government agency and earn a salary below a set amount. For example, one California ABA law school LRAP requires applicants to work in a nonprofit or government agency, receive a total income of less than \$60,000 per year, and resubmit forms every six months. Marital status also affects eligibility for LRAP. The income ceiling takes into account the earnings of spouses or domestic partners, using the highest partner's income or one half of joint marital income to assessing the graduate's eligibility. The majority of law schools' LRAPs follow this format, with household income ceilings ranging from \$50,000 to \$75,000.¹⁴

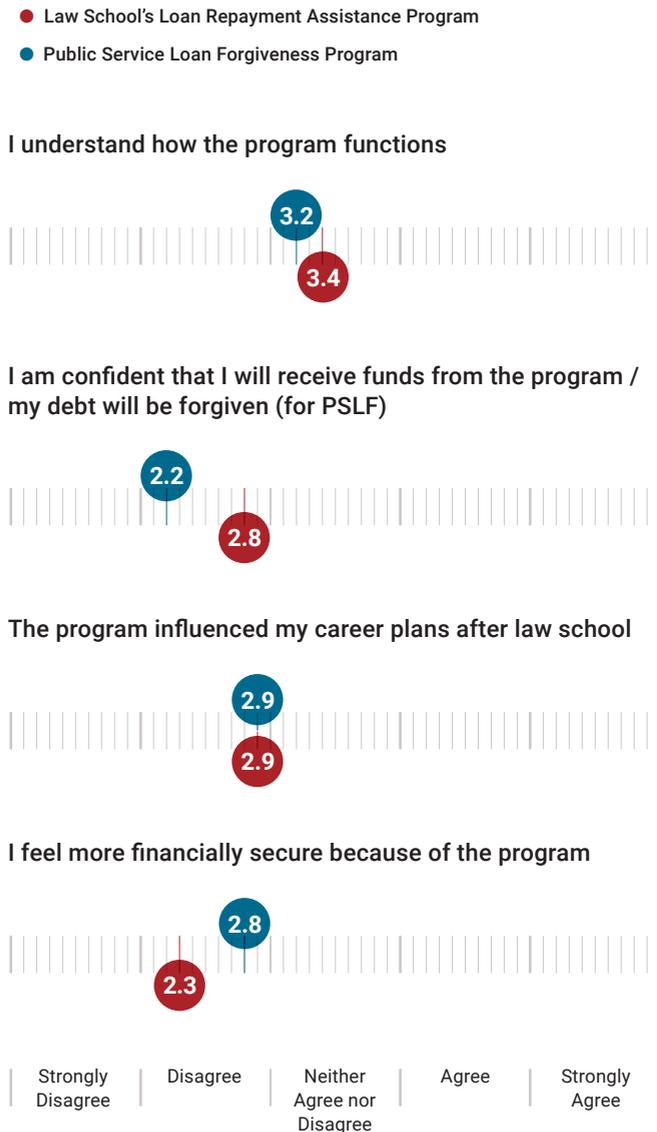
Of the California law students who indicated interest in public interest or government careers at the time of the survey or at the start of law school, 27 percent were aware of their law school's LRAP and 68 percent were aware of the PSLF.

In addition to LRAPs, students going into public interest and government careers are often eligible for the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program (PSLF). Unlike LRAPs, which provide payments towards a student's loans, PSLF erases a student's remaining educational debt after 10 years of working in an eligible place of employment. PSLF processed its first cohort of applicants in 2017; as of June 30, 2019, only 1,216 out of 102,051 applications were approved by the U.S. Department of Education, with missing qualifying payments serving as the most common reason for rejection.

Of the California law students who indicated interest in public interest or government careers at the time of the survey or at the start of law school, 27 percent were aware of their law school's

FIGURE 5

Average Ratings of Debt Assistance Programs



LRAP and 68 percent were aware of the PSLF.¹⁵ Law Student Survey respondents who were intent on public interest or government careers rated their law school's LRAP and the PSLF negatively.

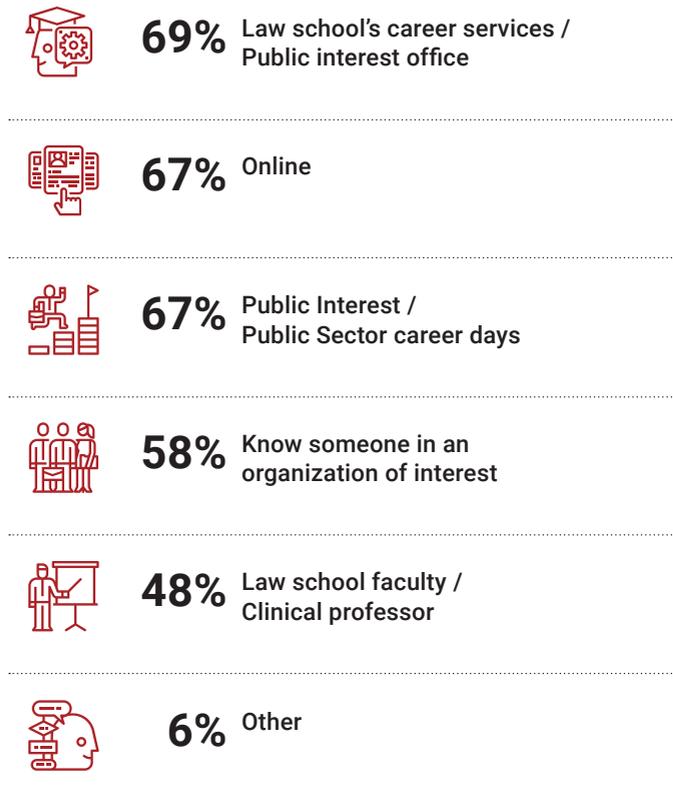
Figure 5 displays law students' ratings of the existing programs on a five-point scale.¹⁵ Respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that LRAP and PSLF increased their sense of financial security or who were not confident that such programs would provide funds were asked to comment on why they rated these programs negatively. These respondents expressed dissatisfaction with low income ceiling requirements, inadequate funding, overly complicated terms, and a negative influence over potential marriage decisions.

Beyond debt assistance programs, many law schools also dedicate resources to public interest career services, often through a dedicated public interest office. These programs connect students and graduates with public interest employment opportunities. As shown in **Figure 6**, law students interested in public interest careers were most likely to look for jobs through their school's career services or public interest offices.

California law students intent on practicing public interest law upon graduation rated their law school's provision of information and resources about public interest careers positively. However, according to student responses in the focus groups hosted by LAAC, public interest career services are limited. These respondents noted that career services for public interest law placed emphasis on Public Interest/ Public Sector career days, but lacked

FIGURE 6

Top Information Channels for Public Interest Careers Reported by Students Intending to Work in the Public Interest Field



resources devoted to funding summer internships and planning post-graduation employment.¹⁶

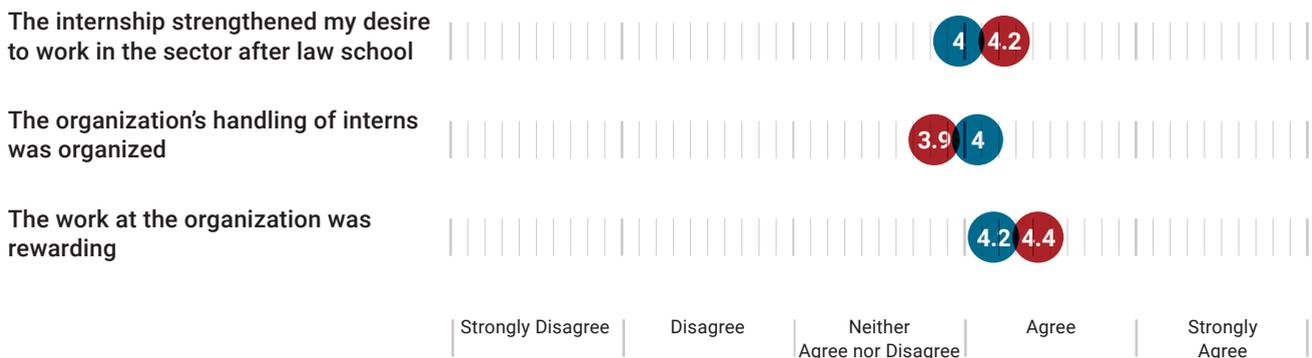
Law students commented that summer funding for internships was particularly important. During law school, summer internships are common for students interested in a variety of practice areas. For students interested in the private sector, summer internship placements in the summer after the second year of law school is a common predictor of post-graduate employment. However, for students interested in legal aid, internships do not translate to clear pathways to employment. Legal aid internships are also generally unpaid, which can preclude participation for students who cannot afford to undertake voluntary summer work.

Students who interned in legal aid organizations were more likely to agree that the internship strengthened their desire to work in the sector after law school and to feel that their work was rewarding compared with law students who participated in other types of internships (Figure 7).¹⁷

FIGURE 7

Legal Internship Ratings

● Legal aid interns ● Other legal interns



Factors That Contribute to Public Interest Drift

This section summarizes the findings of a regression analysis that predicts public interest drift. The regression model draws on student demographics; debt levels; career services; debt assistance program ratings; internship experience; and, job preferences. Since public interest drift is measured as a binary decision, results can be read as probabilities that a student who enters law school intending to work in the public interest will veer away from this intention during law school.

The regression uses the subsample of survey respondents who entered law school with the intention of working in public interest law. These students held an average debt level of \$125,000. They also, on average, disagreed with the statement “I am confident that I will receive funds from the program (for LRAP)/ my outstanding debt will be forgiven (for PSLF)”. Additionally, 36 percent of these students reported interning at a public interest organization.¹⁸ Overall, this cohort of students exhibited a drift rate of 49 percent.

The regression analysis shows that students who enter law school intent on working in public interest had a higher probability of drift under the following conditions:

- when the student has higher law school loan debt
- when the student does not have financial support from their family
- when the student is motivated by “better salary and benefits” and/or the “ability to work from home/remotely” in selecting their first job out of law school.¹⁹

In contrast, students were less likely to drift under the following conditions:

- when the student feels confident that debt assistance programs will work for them
- when the student has interned or is interning at a public interest organization
- when the student is motivated by “passion for the substantive legal area” and “the opportunity to help others” in selecting their first job out of law school.

These factors are not the only predictors of public interest drift. See the Technical Appendix for the complete display of the regression model.

TABLE 1

Predicted Probabilities of Public Interest Drift Assuming Intervention Effects

	Hypothetical Intervention Effects	Probability of Drift
Law School Loan Debt (Average = \$125K)	\$0	39%
	\$25K	41%
	\$50K	43%
	\$75K	45%
	\$100K	47%
	\$125K	49%
	\$150K	51%
	\$175K	52%
	\$200K	54%

Average Rating of Statement:

"I am confident that I will receive funds from the program (for LRAP) / my outstanding debt will be forgiven because of the program (for PSLF)"

Average = 2.2

	Probability of Drift
Strongly Disagrees (1)	58%
Disagrees (2)	50%
Neither Agrees nor Disagrees (3)	41%
Agrees (4)	33%
Strongly Agrees (5)	25%

Internship Experience at a Public Interest Organization

Average = 36%

No Public Interest Internship (0)	61%
Public Interest Internship (1)	27%

Table 1 displays the isolated effects on predicted drift rates that changing law school loan debt levels, confidence in debt assistance programs, and access to internships would have according to the regression model. These three factors were selected to illustrate the impact that possible policy interventions could have on mitigating public interest drift.

The analysis affirms prior research that has shown that law school loan debt contributes to public interest drift. Based on these predictions, the probability of drift for a student who enters law school intending to work in public interest with no law school loan debt is 39 percent, holding constant all other factors in the regression model. Meanwhile, a student with \$125,000 in law school loan debt has a 49 percent probability of drifting.

Lack of confidence in the programs that are meant to reduce debt burden also contributes to law students' departure from public interest career intentions. A student who enters law school with intentions to work in public interest and confidence in the effectiveness of debt assistance programs has a 33 percent predicted probability of drifting. In contrast, a student who enters law school with intentions to work in public interest yet is skeptical of debt assistance programs has a 50 percent predicted probability of drifting, holding constant all other factors in the regression model. This compliments a 2007 study of New York University law students that found tuition reduction contingent on public sector work post-law school was more effective at incentivizing public interest career placement than loan assistance programs that took effect after law school.



Law students' low level of trust in debt assistance programs may help explain why law students are more inclined to decide to work in public interest law when they do not have to rely on these programs.²⁰

Lastly, a student who enters law school intending to work in public interest and who interns at a public interest organization has a 27 percent predicted probability of drifting holding all other factors constant. If such a student does not pursue an internship at a public interest organization, their predicted probability of drifting rises to 61 percent, holding constant all other factors in the regression model. This analysis suggests that experience interning at a public interest organization is the strongest predictor of a student maintaining their plans to pursue a public interest career after graduation. This finding may be the result of self-selection, in

which public interest-minded students who intern at public interest organizations are more committed to public interest careers than those who do not. However, the results from the focus groups administered by LAAC indicate an alternative explanation. In the focus groups, students intent on working in the public interest field reported obstacles to interning at public interest organizations due to a lack of funding for such internships. Considering the strong statistical relationship between internship experience at public interest organizations and commitment to public interest careers, as well as the reported scarcity of available funding for students to pursue such internships, it is clear that increasing funding for internships at public interest organizations is a direct way to assist law students in sustaining their public interest career goals.

Conclusion

Only a fraction of students enter law school with the intention to go into public interest careers, and over half of these students change those intentions over the course of law school. The causes of this drift are both financial and experiential. Initiatives to reduce law school loan debt and improve student confidence in debt assistance programs are critical to mitigating public

interest drift. Promoting and supporting internships in public interest organizations is also a critical step that should be taken to keep students committed to public interest careers.

While the results of the Law Student Survey help to inform discussion of determinants of law students' decision to enter public interest careers, further research is needed. The Law Student Survey did not gather detailed information about the internships that respondents reported and other experiential learning outside of internships, such as clinicals. Existing studies indicate that experiential factors may have a strong effect in mitigating public interest drift. Follow-up study should investigate these factors as well as the mechanisms through which experiential learning promotes law students' willingness to enter careers in legal aid.

Lastly, this study focuses on students who begin law school with intentions to work in the public interest field upon graduation. It may be the case that the prospect of law school loan debt prevents people interested in public interest and civil legal aid careers from entering law school in the first place. If this is true, then the Law Student Survey results may be underestimating the effects of law school debt on the pipeline of attorneys for public interest careers. More research is required to understand the degree to which the cost of law school prevents those with public interest motivations from applying to law school.



¹ A 1989 study found that 48 percent of students at the University Of Denver Sturm College Of Law who started law school considering public interest jobs as the most preferable did not hold the same preference in their third year. See: *Stover, Robert, Making It and Breaking It: The Fate of Public Interest Commitment during Law School*. University of Illinois Press (1989). A 1976 study found that 41 percent of students at the University of California at Davis School of Law who started law school expecting to work as “movement,” “poverty,” or “public interest” lawyers after graduation did not hold the same expectations in their third year. See: *Kubey, Craig, “Three Years of Adjustment: Where Your Ideals Go”, Juris Doctor 6 (1976)*. Another study based on employment data of law students who graduated in 1994 saw that 76 percent of students who came to law school aspiring to work in government or public interest jobs did not enter these jobs. See: *McGill, Christa, “Educational Debt and Law Student Failure to Enter Public Service Careers: Bringing Empirical Data to Bear”, 31 Law & Social Inquiry 677, 679 (2006)*.

² Data on law school costs and student debt loads are from Law School Transparency. See: <https://data.lawschooltransparency.com/costs/tuition/?y1=2008&y2=2018&scope=schools> Tuition figures do not include discounted tuition levels for in-state residents of state schools. In-state tuition levels increased from \$89,566 in 2008 to \$139,234 in 2018.

³ The ABA Commission on Loan Repayment and Forgiveness reported that law school loan debt restricts students’ ability to work public interest jobs. See: “Lifting the Burden: Law Student Debt as a Barrier to Public Service” (2003). Studies have found that higher levels of debt lead students to assume higher paying jobs after law school, and thus impact pipelines into lower-paying public service jobs. Yeseul Choi provides a literature review of the topic of debt’s impact on student career decisions. The literature review cites studies that support and refute the notion that debt influences student career choice. See: *Choi, Yeseul, “Debt and College Students’ Life Transitions: The Effect of Educational Debt on Career Choice in America”, Journal of Student Financial Aid, v44 n1 Article 3 (2014)*.

⁴ See Yeseul Choi, *id.* See Christa McGill, *id.*

⁵ A multi-method longitudinal case study of student experiences found that students change career expectations after going through on-campus interviews during their second year of law school. See: *Bliss, John, “From Idealists to Hired Guns? An Empirical Analysis of ‘Public Interest Drift’ in Law School”, 51 UC Davis L. Rev. 1973 (2018)*. McGill cites salary differentials between salaries as well as the availability of public interest jobs. See: *McGill id.* Research indicates that clinical experience during law school can be an effective mitigant against public interest drift. A study based on employment data from the ABA found a strong relationship between clinical education and public service employment for students who enter law school for “civic” reasons. See: *Sandefur, Rebecca and Selbin, Jeffrey, “The Clinic Effect”, 16 Clinical L. Rev. 57 (2009)*. A review of the effects of student participation in the Marshall-Brennan Project at American University, Washington College of Law found that the program strengthened student’s resolve to work in public interest careers. See: *Addington, Lynn A. & Waters, Jessica L., “Public Interest 101: Using the Law School Curriculum to Quell Public Interest Drift and Expand Student’s Public Interest Commitment”, 21 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 79 (2012)*.

⁶ Civil legal aid refers to nonprofit organizations that primarily provide no-cost civil legal services to people at 125 percent of FPL and below as well as organizations that provide technical assistance to the aforementioned direct service organizations.

⁷ Law Student Survey questions were developed and tested during a pilot launch administered by LAAC. The pilot survey was distributed to interns at organizations affiliated with LAAC. In total, 149 law students completed the survey and provided feedback on how to improve the survey questions. This survey was open from July 9, 2019 through July 31, 2019.

⁸ At the time of the survey, there were 55 law schools in California.

⁹ Considering that there were 12,388 students at California ABA schools, 1,661 students at CALS and 1,494 students at registered law schools in the 2018-2019 academic year, the proportion of these populations who responded to the Law Student Survey was 11 percent, 26 percent and 33 percent respectively.

¹⁰ Sixty-two percent of students at registered law schools reported being in their first year of law school. Given the lack of sufficient upper division students, respondents from registered law schools were excluded from the discussion of results. Students of non-California law schools were also excluded from the discussion of results due to their small sample size and relevance to the study. These responses were included in the regression analysis, which is detailed in the Technical Appendix.

¹¹ An overview of respondents' characteristics by law school type along with a comparison with data reported by the ABA can be found in the Technical Appendix.

¹² Some law schools provide imputed contributions for graduates who earn above the income ceiling, in which graduates pay off part of their loan payment with a set amount covered by the LRAP program.

¹³ While law students generally complete law school in three years, law students can take more time to complete law school depending on their program. Elongated law school time lines are particularly common among students enrolled in part-time programs. Among the respondents of the Law Student Survey at California ABA and CALS, 19 percent reported being in their first year, 35 percent reported being in their second year, 29 percent reported being in their third year, and 7 percent reported being in a year after their third year.

¹⁴ Law Student Survey respondents who were intent on public interest or government careers were included in this section of the survey since work in government and qualified nonprofits qualifies graduates for PSLF and LRAP programs.

¹⁵ The five point scale included ratings of "Strongly Disagree (1)," "Disagree (2)," "Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)," "Agree (4)," and "Strongly Agree (5)." Only law students who intended to work in public interest or government at the start of law school or at the time of the survey were asked to rate debt forgiveness programs that they were familiar with. In total, 240 students rated their law school's LRAP and 606 students rated the PSLF program.

¹⁶ Public Interest/Public Sector Career Days refer to regional job fairs hosted annually in Northern and Southern California in which students meet recruiters from public interest organizations and public sector agencies.

¹⁷ The 5 point scale included ratings of "Strongly Disagree (1)," "Disagree (2)," "Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)," "Agree (4)," and "Strongly Agree (5)." Of the 1,204 students who had legal internships, 92 students had interned at a civil legal aid organization and were asked to rate that internship. The remaining 1,112 students were asked to provide ratings of their most recent legal-related internship. For a description of how internship information was gathered, see the Technical Appendix.

¹⁸ Internship and debt assistance program variables were made using composites from responses from multiple questions. For details on how these variables were constructed, see the Technical Appendix.

¹⁹ Motivations in selecting the first job out of law school are based on the response to the question "Which factors are important to you in choosing your first job out of law school? (Select top 5 factors)" For details on the answer options to this question, see the Technical Appendix.

²⁰ See Field, Erica. "Educational Debt Burden and Career Choice: Evidence from a Financial Aid Experiment at NYU Law School", *American Economic Journal - Applied Economics* (2007).

Survey Population Statistics

The Technical Appendix contains details on the Law Student Survey (LSS) respondent population and the regression model employed in the study.

Survey Population Statistics

TABLE 1

Description of respondent demographics

		ABA (1,422)	CALS (434)	Registered (489)	Out of State (116)	Unknown (15)	Total (2,476)
Law School Year	1L	16%	29%	62%	9%	47%	27%
	2L	36%	29%	24%	13%	40%	31%
	3L	43%	25%	9%	71%	7%	34%
	4L +	5%	16%	6%	7%	7%	7%
	Unknown	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Program Time	Full-time	87%	51%	51%	89%	53%	74%
	Part-time	13%	49%	48%	11%	47%	26%
	Unknown	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Gender	Male	35%	34%	46%	38%	40%	37%
	Female	60%	62%	49%	51%	40%	58%
	Gender Variant	3%	3%	3%	7%	7%	3%
	Prefer to not answer	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Unknown	2%	2%	2%	4%	13%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Race / Ethnicity	Asian	11%	7%	10%	10%	13%	10%
	Black	5%	9%	18%	11%	20%	8%
	Latinx	14%	26%	10%	9%	0%	15%
	White	48%	38%	42%	44%	33%	45%
	More Than One	10%	7%	6%	13%	0%	9%
	Other	6%	5%	6%	5%	7%	5%
	Prefer to not answer	5%	5%	7%	4%	13%	5%
	Unknown	2%	3%	2%	3%	13%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	

		ABA (1,422)	CALS (434)	Registered (489)	Out of State (116)	Unknown (15)	Total (2,476)
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	78%	84%	82%	68%	73%	80%
	LGBTQIA+	15%	6%	6%	18%	7%	12%
	Prefer to not answer	4%	7%	7%	8%	0%	5%
	Unknown	3%	3%	4%	6%	20%	3%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Dependent Status	Plans on having dependent(s) at time of graduation	44%	70%	71%	36%	67%	90%
	Does not plan on having dependent(s) at time of graduation	39%	20%	18%	50%	7%	54%
	Not Sure	16%	9%	9%	11%	20%	22%
	Unknown	1%	1%	2%	3%	7%	3%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Parent's Education Level	Neither parents have Bachelor's degree	31%	58%	50%	27%	40%	40%
	One or both parent's have Bachelor's degree	67%	38%	46%	70%	47%	58%
	Not Sure	1%	2%	2%	1%	7%	1%
	Unknown	2%	1%	2%	3%	7%	2%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Veteran Status	Has served in Military	4%	8%	17%	10%	13%	8%
	Has not served in Military	95%	91%	82%	87%	80%	91%
	Unknown	1%	1%	1%	3%	7%	1%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Disability Status	Has a disability	10%	10%	18%	11%	0%	12%
	Does not have a disability	88%	88%	80%	85%	93%	86%
	Unknown	2%	2%	2%	3%	7%	2%
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Debt	Proportion with law school debt	80%	69%	41%	76%	—	70%
	Proportion with other educational loan debt	33%	35%	26%	37%	—	32%
	Median law school loan debt	\$147k	\$91k	\$75k	\$132k	—	\$120k
	Median total educational loan debt	\$151k	\$101k	\$90k	\$160k	—	\$131k

Notes on Data Configuration: In order to present the LSS data, certain categories with low response rates were condensed into “other” categories. These include:

- **Gender:** “Transgender”, “Gender Variant/Nonconforming/Nonbinary”, “Two-Spirit”, “More than One”, and “Other” were grouped as “Other”
- **Race/Ethnicity:** “American Indian”, “Middle Eastern & North African”, “Pacific Islander”, and “Other” were grouped as “Other”

LSS responses from California ABA students were comparable to figures reported by the law schools themselves. In 2018, there were approximately 12,254 law students enrolled in The LSS sample included 1,422 students from California ABA schools, making up 11.6 percent of the total law student population at California ABA schools. Table 2 compares the results of the LSS specifically regarding students at California ABA law schools with comparable data reported by California ABA law schools.

TABLE 2

Comparison of LSS Response Data and ABA Data

		California ABA Population	LSS Sample Population
Gender	Male	45%	35%
	Female	55%	60%
	Other	0%	3%
	Unknown	0%	2%
	Total	100%	100%
Race / Ethnicity	Asian	15%	12%
	Black	5%	5%
	Hispanic	18%	14%
	White	51%	49%
	More than One	4%	10%
	Other*	1%	6%
	Unknown*	7%	5%
	Total	100%	100%
Graduate Debt*	Percent with graduate debt	75%	80%
	Average Graduate Debt (among those with graduate debt)	\$142.7K	\$144.4K

Data on California ABA schools is publically available by the ABA at: <http://www.abarequreddisclosures.org/Disclosure509.aspx>.

Graduate debt figures are reported by law schools to U.S. News & World Report and are made available by Law School Transparency. The amount borrowed does not include the interest accumulated. This information is made available at <https://data.lawschooltransparency.com/costs/debt>. The comparable LSS figure is based students’ expected law school loan debt at graduation.

In ABA data, the “Other” Race / Ethnicity category includes Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander and American Indian. The “Unknown” category includes nonresponses as well as the counts of Nontresident Aliens.

Multivariate Analysis

We employed a multivariate logistic regression model to assess the predictors of public interest drift. The results of this model can be found in Table 2. Logistic regression results are displayed in odds-ratios for interpretation (Table 3). The odds ratio is defined as the odds that a student exhibits public interest drift divided by the odds that a student does not drift. As seen in the model results, a one unit increase in law school loan debt increases the odds of public interest drift by a factor of 1.01. Additionally, a student with financial support from their family has 2/5th the odds of drifting than a student with no financial support from their family.

TABLE 3

Model Results

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Interval]	Conf.
Law School Loan Debt						
Law School Loan Debt*	1.01	0.00	3.16	0.00	1.00	1.01
Law School Type (Base Category = California ABA)						
2. CALS	0.96	0.58	-0.07	0.94	0.29	3.14
3. Registered	1.28	0.98	0.32	0.75	0.29	5.72
4. Out of State / Other	2.72	2.12	1.28	0.20	0.59	12.58
Law School Year (Base Category = 3L)						
1L*	0.06	0.03	-5.02	0.00	0.02	0.19
2L	0.84	0.31	-0.49	0.63	0.41	1.72
4L+	1.49	1.43	0.41	0.68	0.23	9.82
Full-time vs. Part Time (Base Category = Full Time)						
Part-time*	0.40	0.18	-2.01	0.04	0.16	0.98
Non-debt Financial Support						
Grant Support	0.70	0.35	-0.71	0.48	0.26	1.89
Scholarship Support	0.45	0.24	-1.52	0.13	0.16	1.26
Family Support*	0.40	0.19	-1.97	0.05	0.16	1.00
None of the above	0.41	0.25	-1.45	0.15	0.12	1.37
Average Debt Assistance Rating						
Rating 1: Understanding of Program	1.34	0.28	1.39	0.16	0.89	2.02
Rating 2: Confidence in Program*	0.45	0.14	-2.58	0.01	0.25	0.83
Rating 3: Influence on Career Decision	0.71	0.15	-1.60	0.11	0.47	1.08
Rating 4: Financial Security	1.21	0.33	0.68	0.49	0.71	2.06
Internship Experience						
Has held a Public Interest Internship*	0.05	0.02	-7.16	0.00	0.02	0.11
Career Services Rating						

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Interval]	Conf.
Rating	0.95	0.14	-0.34	0.74	0.71	1.28
Job Preference Factors						
Ability to gain litigation experience	2.46	1.16	1.92	0.06	0.98	6.18
Ability to work directly with clients	0.56	0.27	-1.19	0.23	0.21	1.45
Potential for advancement	2.07	1.05	1.43	0.15	0.76	5.58
Availability of job training	2.79	1.54	1.86	0.06	0.95	8.22
Availability of mentoring support	1.71	0.87	1.05	0.30	0.63	4.63
Opportunities to build networks	0.98	0.58	-0.04	0.97	0.31	3.11
Better salary and benefits*	10.03	5.14	4.50	0.00	3.67	27.41
Availability of a loan repayment assistance program LRAP	0.45	0.23	-1.55	0.12	0.17	1.23
Housing costs in the organization's location	0.40	0.26	-1.43	0.15	0.12	1.40
Passion for the substantive legal area*	0.34	0.16	-2.37	0.02	0.14	0.83
Opportunity to help others*	0.38	0.17	-2.12	0.03	0.16	0.93
Feeling like you are making a difference	0.79	0.36	-0.52	0.61	0.32	1.93
Diverse work environment	1.34	0.67	0.59	0.56	0.50	3.56
Inclusive work environment	2.48	1.31	1.72	0.09	0.88	6.98
Prior experience working/interning at the organization	2.28	3.04	0.62	0.54	0.17	31.22
Family friendly policies	1.67	0.95	0.91	0.36	0.55	5.09
Alternative work schedule/flexible hours	2.27	1.23	1.51	0.13	0.78	6.58
Ability to work for yourself	0.76	0.68	-0.31	0.76	0.13	4.34
Ability to work from home/remotely*	3.73	2.54	1.93	0.05	0.98	14.19
Rural Location	4.70	5.09	1.43	0.15	0.56	39.20
Urban Location	0.85	0.58	-0.24	0.81	0.22	3.24
Know someone in the organization	0.61	1.10	-0.27	0.78	0.02	21.60
Proximity to family	1.23	0.74	0.34	0.74	0.38	3.99
Race / Ethnicity (Base Category = White)						
Asian*	3.64	2.21	2.13	0.03	1.11	11.96
Black	1.42	0.85	0.58	0.56	0.44	4.58
Latinx	0.46	0.24	-1.46	0.14	0.16	1.30
More Than One	1.05	0.62	0.08	0.93	0.33	3.32
Other	0.24	0.18	-1.90	0.06	0.05	1.05
PreferNoAnswer	3.46	3.19	1.34	0.18	0.57	21.11
Gender (Base Category = Male)						
Female	1.78	0.81	1.27	0.21	0.73	4.35
Gender Variant/Nonconforming/Nonbinary	0.88	0.74	-0.16	0.88	0.17	4.58
Sexual Orientation (Base Category = Heterosexual)						
LGBTQIA+	0.59	0.22	-1.40	0.16	0.28	1.24
PreferNoAnswer	0.28	0.27	-1.32	0.19	0.04	1.85
Financial Dependents Expected at Graduation (Base = Yes)						
No	0.85	0.32	-0.44	0.66	0.41	1.76
Not Sure	1.14	0.59	0.26	0.79	0.42	3.14

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Interval]	Conf.
Parent's Education Level (Base = Neither parent or people who raised me hold a Bachelor's degree)						
One or both parents or people who raised me holds a Bachelor's degree	0.96	0.37	-0.10	0.92	0.45	2.05
Not Sure	0.03	0.08	-1.36	0.17	0.00	4.76
Military Status (Base = Has Served in Military)						
No	0.24	0.19	-1.78	0.08	0.05	1.16
Persons with Disability (Base = Has a Disability)						
No*	3.40	1.86	2.23	0.03	1.16	9.94
cons	12.74	25.72	1.26	0.21	0.24	666.18
Pseudo R2 = 0.543		** indicates significance at the alpha = .05 level				
N = 468						

To isolate the effects that potential interventions may have on the predicted probability of public interest drift, we estimated marginal effects holding constant all other factors in the regression model at their Average Marginal Effect (AME). The results of these estimations are displayed in Table 10.

TABLE 4

Estimation Results

		Probability of Drift	Std. Err.	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Law School Loan Debt	0	39%	0.03	0.33	0.46
	\$25K	41%	0.03	0.36	0.47
	\$50K	43%	0.02	0.39	0.48
	\$75K	45%	0.02	0.41	0.49
	\$100K	47%	0.02	0.44	0.5
	\$125K	49%	0.02	0.46	0.52
	\$150K	51%	0.02	0.47	0.54
	\$175K	52%	0.02	0.49	0.56
	\$200K	54%	0.02	0.5	0.59
Average Rating of Statement: "I am confident that I will receive funds from the program (for LRAP) / my outstanding debt will be forgiven because of the program (for PSLF)"	Strongly Disagrees	58%	0.04	0.5	0.67
	Disagrees	50%	0.02	0.46	0.54
	Neither Agrees nor Disagrees	41%	0.03	0.35	0.48
	Agrees	33%	0.06	0.21	0.45
	Strongly Agrees	25%	0.08	0.1	0.41
Internship Experience at a Public Interest Organization	No Public Interest Internship	61%	0.02	0.56	0.65
	Public Interest Internship	27%	0.03	0.21	0.32

The relationship between internship experience and career preferences may involve some self-selection effect unaccounted for in the regression models. That is, certain unmeasured attributes of the students may be correlated with both variables. Therefore, more research is required to better assess the directionality between career decisions and internship decisions during law school. However, the importance of internship experience was repeated by students in focus groups, which supports the LSS finding that internships have a substantial independent effect in reinforcing students' intentions to enter a public interest career upon graduation.

Note on Debt Variables

Law students were asked to report their expected level of debt at graduation for both law school loan debt and total educational loan debt including law school loan debt. For students who reported lower total educational loan debt than law school loan debt (n = 99), it was assumed that the respondent mistakenly switched the two categories. To account for this, these law school loan figures were replaced with their response for total educational loan debt and vice versa. Additionally, for students who stated having law school loan debt and left the amount blank (n = 1), the figure was replaced by the total educational loan debt amount that they reported.

Average Debt Assistance Program Rating Variable

Law students who reported intent to work in government or public interest fields at the start of law school or at the point of the survey were asked to rate their law school's LRAP and the federal government's PSLF program depending on their familiarity with the program. The variable used in the regression analysis is an average of the ratings they provided on the statement "I am confident that I will receive funds from the program" for LRAP and "I am confident that my outstanding debt will be forgiven because of the program" for PSLF. In order to account for respondents who were not familiar with any of these programs, the variable includes imputed replacements for missing values. Imputations were created using predictions based on a regression model using average ratings on these statements as the dependent variable and drawing upon student demographic, job choice preferences, career service ratings, and debt level.

Internship Composite Variable

Students were asked about their internship experience in multiple questions. Students who stated they intended to work in public interest at the time of the survey were asked if they had held or currently hold an internship at a civil legal aid organization. Those who selected yes were asked to rate their most recent civil legal aid internship. Those that had not interned at a civil legal aid organization were asked if they had held or currently hold a legal-related internship. If they selected yes, they were asked to report the practice area of their most recent legal-related internship and rate that internship. The internship variable used in the regression model was binary. Respondents that held a civil legal aid internship as well as those who reported their most recent internship being in a public interest organization were represented by "1" (n = 288) and respondents that did not hold an internship in a civil legal aid or public interest organization by "0" (n = 1,564). Among the subpopulation of students who entered law school intending to work in public interest, 36 percent (148 / 416) reported having held an internship at a public interest firm. There is a chance that a student had an internship at a public interest firm but that this was not their most recent internship. This survey is limited because it does not capture this information.