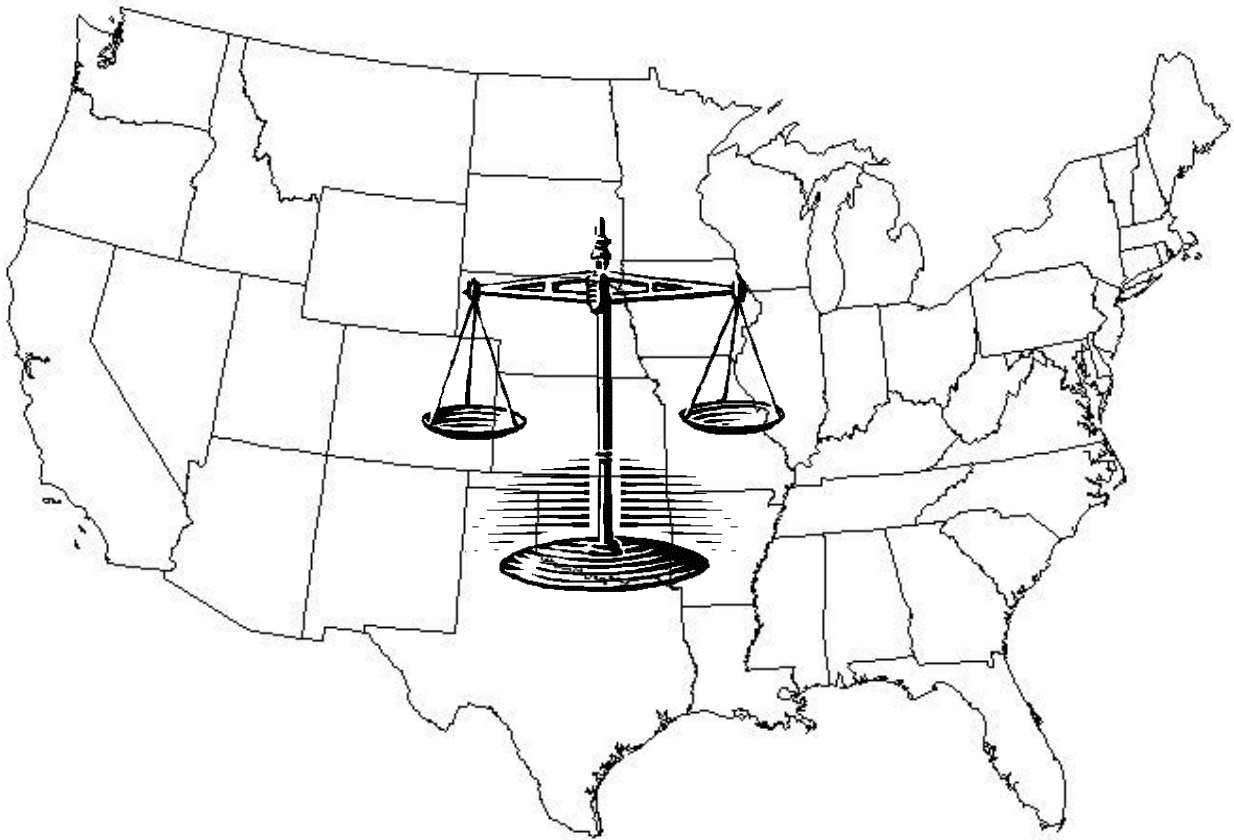


THE FAST TRACK TO A U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks go to the OPIA colleagues and interns who made invaluable contributions to this guide in years past. The creation of this resource would not have been possible without the substantial efforts of the following people:

Original 1997 Edition:

Carolyn Stafford Stein '85, OPIA Attorney Advisor

2008 Edition:

Elliott Chiu, OPIA Summer Fellow, 2008

Lisa D. Williams, OPIA Associate Director

WHY A U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE?

Assistant United States Attorneys (AUSAs) often say they have “the best job (for a lawyer) in the world.” AUSAs do important public interest work while exercising a degree of professional autonomy and responsibility unusual for relatively inexperienced lawyers. In the words of one AUSA, “I believe that law enforcement is a public service that can only be provided by government, and one of the services that our government does best.” Another recalled AUSAs telling him that, as an AUSA, “you can get lots of trial experience and get paid for doing the right thing.” The opportunity to serve the public in a meaningful way while carrying out the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) mandate to “pursue justice” every day is perhaps the biggest draw of working in a United States Attorney’s Office (USAO). Being surrounded by others who share one’s genuine passion for public service is also a strong draw to work in a USAO.

“Your only obligation as an AUSA is to try to do the right thing every day.”

**-Mark Schneider ‘03
AUSA in NDIL since 2004**

Apart from the opportunity for public service, what makes working in a USAO so attractive? Many AUSAs cite the rewards of getting “a ton” of trial/litigation experience. One AUSA noted that three years prior to becoming an AUSA, she had “spent very little time in a courtroom;” within one year at the USAO, she had two trials, settled two other cases, and had “taken more depositions than many attorneys who have worked as law firm partners for years.” Most USAOs are true meritocracies – that is, they value

“You can’t beat the practical experience here. In a year and a half, I have tried 20 cases in the trial court and argued 7 times at the appellate level.”

**-Bryan Seeley ‘05
AUSA in D.C. since 2006**

the quality of their attorneys’ work and their attorneys’ productivity above all. One AUSA says, “While billable hours are not a concern, the work schedule and the work itself are demanding. There is a lot of significant work and expectations are high from both the office and the court. But you can bring all your talents and skills to bear in fulfilling your duties, and can develop areas of individual interest.”

Another unique aspect of being an AUSA is the variety, complexity and importance of the cases one has the opportunity to handle. In the words of one AUSA, “One minute, I can be working on a forest fire case, and the next minute I am off to court to handle a subpoena enforcement action.” Another AUSA counts among her practice areas financial fraud, hazardous-materials violations, and espionage-related matters. AUSAs interviewed for this guide are or have been involved in: the prosecution of a military contractor that bribed a former congressman, the prosecution for torture of the U.S.-citizen son of a former foreign president—“the first use ever of the federal torture criminal statute,” a case involving an identity theft/bank fraud ring, the prosecution of a large health insurer, a suit brought by various plaintiffs against the U.S. Secret Service, and a constitutional tort case brought by an inmate incarcerated for his involvement with the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. As demonstrated by these cases, AUSAs are doing work that is interesting, rigorous, and consequential.

AUSAs also appreciate the frequent opportunities to work with a variety of actors in the federal government. One AUSA says that he gets to “work with great agents from federal agencies to investigate cases, and the working environment is superb.” Surrounded by co-workers who share a deep engagement in the public service mission of the office and energized by the opportunity for an uncommon level of responsibility, AUSAs consistently report tremendous job satisfaction.

“I truly enjoy the level of responsibility I have, the opportunity to be involved in all phases of the case, and the ability to work the entire case from start to finish.”

**—Arimentha Walkins ‘89
AUSA in Miami since 1991**

As a result, USAOs have long been a popular career choice for Harvard Law School graduates. This guide provides insight into how you can get hired as an AUSA.

A U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE: BASIC FACTS

There are currently 93 United States Attorneys: one for each of the 94 federal judicial districts, except for Guam and the Northern Marianas, where a single U.S. Attorney serves both districts. In addition to their main offices, many U.S. Attorneys maintain smaller satellite offices throughout their districts. A current contact list for the U.S. Attorneys' Offices is available online at <http://www.justice.gov/usao/districts>. U.S. Attorneys are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, and they serve terms of four years or at the President's discretion. While the U.S. Attorney him or herself is a political appointee, the Assistants, by law, hold non-partisan jobs, so political affiliations or beliefs should play no role in how they are hired, fired, or promoted. A notable exception occurred in the period between 2002 and 2006, when ideological concerns seem to have influenced several instances of hiring and firing in USAOs, as confirmed by various independent reports, (see, for example, the 2008 report from DOJ's Office of the Inspector General and Office of Professional Responsibility: <http://www.justice.gov/oig/special/s0901/final.pdf>). That aberrational period notwithstanding, there is a long history of AUSAs serving for many years, across multiple administrations, effectively insulated from partisan politics.

Each USAO consists of two major divisions: criminal and civil. The criminal division, which is significantly larger than the civil division in most offices, prosecutes violations of the federal criminal laws, such as organized crime, drug trafficking, political corruption, tax evasion, fraud and other financial crimes, bank robbery, cybercrime, human trafficking, and civil rights offenses. Many criminal divisions have specialized units or sections within them, while in others, criminal AUSAs are generalists. Many criminal divisions now have a national security section or unit and work with state and local governments to combat terrorist activities. The civil division defends government agencies and pursues affirmative litigation (such as enforcement of environmental and fair housing laws). For example, the civil division prosecutes Medicare fraud that would divert funding away from those who need it and enforces non-discrimination legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. The work of the civil divisions of USAOs is instrumental in returning billions of dollars to the U.S. Treasury each year, bringing suits to recoup lost or abused federal funds for the ultimate benefit of the public. Although more HLS students and graduates tend to seek positions in the criminal divisions of USAOs, there is equally challenging and important work on the civil side. Our application advice in this guide applies to both the criminal and civil sides.

A significant portion of AUSAs spend 5-7 years in a USAO before moving on to other public or private sector work; those AUSAs who stay longer often move to a supervisory position within the USAO. In some jurisdictions, the majority of AUSAs spend only a portion of their careers in the USAO; in others, many of the AUSAs have made their careers there. The Department of Justice has occasionally instituted hiring freezes, as during the federal budget crisis of 2011-13. When such freezes are ultimately lifted, however, they are often followed by a period of increased hiring. The "thaw" announced by DOJ in February 2014, for example, resulted in a flurry of hiring in USAOs across the country. The salary scale for AUSAs is administratively determined and based primarily on the number of years of professional experience and geographic location. Attorneys assigned to high cost of living areas receive a percentage of their base pay as locality pay. The resulting range of pay, including locality pay, varies greatly, with average starting pay ranging from \$57,000 to \$142,000 based on level of experience. For areas in which locality pay is not authorized, average starting salaries range from roughly \$49,000 to \$130,000.

WHAT AN AUSA DOES

CRIMINAL DIVISION

Criminal AUSAs spend their time investigating cases; drafting indictments and other pleadings; negotiating plea agreements; appearing in court for bail hearings, pretrial motions, plea hearings, and sentencing; conducting jury trials; and briefing and arguing appeals. On a given day, a criminal AUSA may question witnesses before the grand jury, help agents to prepare a search warrant, or review documentary evidence. Later that week, the AUSA may brief the constitutionality of an automobile search or examine witnesses at a suppression hearing. Over the course of the month, the AUSA may argue a sentencing issue before the Court of Appeals, negotiate a plea agreement with a minor player in a conspiracy in the hope of using his testimony to convict the conspiracy's leaders, or prepare witnesses and mark exhibits for an upcoming trial.

Each criminal AUSA has responsibility for a large docket, but because the cases are well investigated and prepared, the majority end in plea agreements. New criminal AUSAs working on lower level cases may have five or six trials a year, while senior AUSAs prosecuting more complex cases tend to have fewer trials. Criminal AUSAs in the D.C. office may carry a larger number of cases since the D.C. U.S. Attorney's Office also acts as the local District Attorney's (DA) office, and new hires generally have to commit to several years of local prosecution before moving on to cases in federal court. This practice allows prosecutors "to amass a significant amount of trial experience and to have a direct impact upon the community," in the words of former D.C. AUSA Denise Cheung ('95). Whether simple or complex, each case handled by an AUSA may prove rewarding in its own way. The conviction of a major organized crime figure or corrupt politician, for example, may conclude years of investigation and a hard-fought trial with a public victory that sends a message to other criminals and would-be criminals. The conviction of a three-time felon for possessing a gun illegally, by contrast, may gain little or no press attention, but may earn the gratitude of neighbors and the larger community.

CIVIL DIVISION

The work of civil AUSAs can vary considerably depending on both the office and the AUSA's specific practice area. In most offices, there are four concrete practice areas for civil AUSAs: financial litigation (which involves chasing civil and criminal restitutions owed to the government); defensive litigation (defending U.S. government departments and agencies); affirmative litigation (enforcing federal laws and regulations); and asset forfeiture (which is included in the criminal division in some offices). Because civil divisions are generally smaller than criminal divisions, civil AUSAs are more likely to be generalists, working on many different types of cases across these practice areas rather than specializing in the way that criminal AUSAs do.

The variety of affirmative cases in which civil AUSAs are involved includes everything from enforcing environmental regulations and anti-discrimination legislation to combating Medicare fraud and predatory lending. The opportunity to try new things within this mix of cases is one of the most exciting, albeit daunting, aspects of working in the civil division. Civil AUSA Veronica Lei ('04) equates the responsibility given to her in the Massachusetts USAO with "driving a car while learning how to operate it," and points out that even when the cases are similar, the facts are always different in interesting ways.

THE PATHS TO A USAO: WHAT USAOs LOOK FOR

Although U.S. Attorneys and their assistants fall within the Department of Justice, each U.S. Attorney, or a committee under his or her direction, has independent responsibility for hiring AUSAs. USAOs do not ordinarily hire AUSAs directly from law school or clerkships. The limited exception to this practice is the Department of Justice's Honors Program, which has recently been expanded to include some AUSA positions. If accepted through the Honors Program, an applicant can become an AUSA straight out of a clerkship or fellowship, and in rare cases immediately after law school.

“We can always find *smart* people, but we are looking for smart people who will also be team players and take on their share of responsibility.”

**-Karen Shinskie '00
*AUSA in D.C. since 2001***

For the most part, however, AUSAs are hired at least three but more commonly four to eight years out of law school, after a clerkship and/or time litigating for a law firm, working as an Assistant District Attorney (ADA), or obtaining comparable litigation experience, perhaps at a state Attorney General's or City Attorney's office. Hiring decisions are holistic, and rest on one's academic record, litigation experience, writing skills, commitment to public service, personal recommendations, and interviews.

Academic Background

Although most AUSAs are hired after they have been out of law school for several years, a strong academic background is still critical. As one AUSA in charge of hiring said, “We look for outstanding academic credentials and solid legal experience,” with the balance shifting from academic credentials towards experience the longer an applicant has been in practice. While applicants' grades are generally taken into account, graduating from Harvard Law School is an indicator of strong academics in and of itself, and HLS applicants with solid but not over the top grades may still be successful in securing an AUSA position.

“I would recommend taking a clinical. It is something that my office looks at when interviewing applicants. You have to be able to answer the question of why you want to be a prosecutor, and having some real experience in criminal justice helps you answer that question.”

**—Howard Sklamberg '95
*AUSA in D.C. 2005-2007***

Academic and Clinical Experience

Clinical experiences during the academic year provide an opportunity to gain valuable experience, to demonstrate your interest in trial work and, in some cases, to see government attorneys in action. Virtually every AUSA interviewed noted the importance of taking a clinic. One AUSA also noted that “if your resume is thin on actual litigation experience, a clinic can help.” The Government Lawyer course at HLS offers a clinical component with placement in the Boston USAO (or in the Massachusetts

Attorney General's Office). Other great ways to get relevant in-court time would be the ITA: Prosecution Perspectives Clinic, which gives 3Ls an opportunity for placement in a local DA's office and the Government Lawyer: Attorney General Clinic, which offers placements in Attorney General's Offices throughout the country. Additionally, the Criminal Justice Institute (CJI) offers in-court experience from a different perspective, allowing 3Ls to represent indigent criminal defendants and juveniles accused of crimes in the local district and juvenile courts. Clinics may be especially important for those who plan to go to firms before trying for a USAO, as these young attorneys may receive little in-court time otherwise.

While the aforementioned clinics may be especially appropriate for those interested in working in a USAO, any clinic that offers actual in-court experience would be valuable and would strengthen an AUSA

application. Additionally, the Government Lawyer: Semester in Washington clinic can be a good way to demonstrate interest in the federal government and a commitment to public service, even though it is unlikely to afford litigation experience.

Most criminal AUSAs have also noted the value of getting criminal law experience through one's coursework. Some recommended courses are: Evidence, Criminal Adjudication, White Collar Criminal Law and Procedure, and the Trial Advocacy Workshop, which one AUSA credits as having given her "confidence as a trial lawyer." Civil AUSAs can also acquire valuable and relevant experience through their coursework. Some recommended courses are Federal Litigation: Civil, Advanced Topics in Civil Procedure, Appellate Courts and Advocacy Workshop, and Federal Courts and the Federal System. While no specific courses are prerequisites to applying, AUSAs interviewed indicated that these courses were helpful to them in their work.

On-Campus Extracurricular Experience

Involvement in activities that demonstrate interest in public service and prosecution work is helpful. One AUSA participated in Harvard Defenders for all three years, which he "enjoyed very much and which fostered [his] interest in criminal law." Another also worked for Harvard Defenders during her entire time at the law school and "interned for every prosecutor's office [she] could find." She found the "practical experiences [to have] helped quite a bit." The Prison Legal Assistance Project (PLAP), another student-run clinical organization, also offers students valuable experience in criminal advocacy for the disadvantaged. PLAP members represent inmates in Massachusetts state prisons. Other student practice organizations such as the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau (HLAB), the Harvard Immigration Project and the Tenant Advocacy Project (TAP) may not offer criminal or prosecutorial experience, but can provide helpful in-court experience. For a full listing of Student Practice Organizations, see <http://law.harvard.edu/current/orgs/clinical/index.html>.

Summer Experience

A summer spent in a USAO can help demonstrate your commitment, give you a sense of whether being an AUSA is really something you want to pursue, and be an interesting and rewarding experience no matter what direction your career takes. While most summer internships with USAOs are unpaid, they are eligible for Summer Public Interest Funding (SPIF). Occasionally, a USAO may hire a 2L summer intern through DOJ's paid Summer Law Interns Program (SLIP). The

"If you're interested in getting experience at DOJ, consider getting an internship outside of D.C., New York, and the other big offices. You'll have a better chance of getting hired if someone has seen your work and remembers you."

-Kate Buzicky '07

AUSA in Minnesota since 2013

Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. (Main Justice) offers both paid (2L) and volunteer (1L and 2L) summer positions, and many state Attorney General's and District Attorney's offices offer volunteer internships as well. (More information regarding the Department of Justice's Summer Law Intern Program, Honors Program, and Volunteer Legal Internship program can be found in OPIA's [DOJ specialty guides](#)). Such positions can demonstrate your interest in becoming a government litigator and provide a great summer experience in their own right. Even outside government, a summer spent developing a substantive area of expertise, like environmental law, financial regulation or civil rights, might contribute someday to a successful USAO application.

Judicial Clerkships

Many AUSAs have had federal judicial clerkships with district or circuit court judges. A federal clerkship is a valuable credential when applying for a position as an AUSA, as it will expose you to all aspects of federal prosecution, trials or appeals, and substantive criminal and civil law. For attorneys who go on to large law firms, a year or two spent as a U.S. district court clerk may provide more time in the courtroom, even if just as an observer, than four or five years as a litigation associate. For attorneys who go on to District Attorney's offices or state Attorney General's offices, such a clerkship may provide your only exposure to the federal courts before applying to a USAO.

If you apply to be an AUSA in the district in which you clerked, your application will be strengthened by the recommendation of someone known to the USAO and by the perception that you have extra insight into one of the judges before whom the office practices. There is some debate as to the relative advantages of an appellate versus a district court clerkship; the former is generally considered more prestigious, but the latter gives you trial court exposure. Either type of federal clerkship is a considerable plus in any AUSA application. State clerkships can also be advantageous, both for the substantive experience they offer and because in some instances they may lead to federal clerkships.

Professional Experience

USAOs hire most of their attorneys from law firms, District Attorney's offices or other state or local prosecuting offices, or other components of the Department of Justice. Each practice setting has its own strengths and weaknesses in preparing attorneys to be AUSAs, and U.S. Attorneys have different preferences in making hiring decisions. By talking to AUSAs in the office you hope to join, you may learn how most of the attorneys got there. As one AUSA remarked, "Different USAOs look for different kinds of people, so I think it pays to learn what types of people the USAO in the particular district in which you want to work tends to hire." For instance, one AUSA has observed that "some offices mostly hire from District Attorney's offices within the district, and in those offices the best route is a few years as an assistant DA." Such offices are more likely located in smaller cities.

Be aware, however, that the U.S. Attorney who may be in office when you apply may have different hiring preferences than his/her predecessor. For this reason, and because your own desire to become an AUSA may change, think carefully about which path best suits your personality and overall professional goals, not only that which is most likely to land you in a USAO.

"Develop writing samples that are really your own, and do it early on."

-Mark Schneider '03

AUSA in NDIL since 2004

The advantages law firm litigation experience offers (assuming the firm has a high-quality litigation practice) are good training in research, analysis, and writing, and an opportunity to learn from attorneys who have the ability, time, and resources to litigate with painstaking care. The major disadvantage is that courtroom experience, particularly trial experience, may be thin or

nonexistent during your first few years. Moreover, many large firms do little or no criminal work, and what criminal work there is may be snapped up by more senior associates. Because USAOs want to see a demonstrated commitment to public service as well as ample courtroom experience, it is an especially good idea for firm attorneys to seek out relevant pro bono work that will address these likely deficits in their AUSA applications.

The major advantage an Assistant District Attorney position offers is copious courtroom experience as a prosecutor. Many ADAs begin handling their own trials immediately after completing a training program

and spend the majority of each day in the courtroom. The disadvantage is that, because of their busy caseloads and the nature of many of their cases, ADAs may not have the opportunity to develop their research and writing skills fully or to take the time to prepare cases with the attention to detail prized by USAOs. Fairly or unfairly, some USAOs believe that ADAs bring “bad habits” and a “shoot from the hip” litigation and management style, as well as insufficient writing skills. While working in an Attorney General’s office may offer a similar experience in many ways, Assistant Attorneys General typically spend less time in the courtroom; they may, however, have a greater ability to gain subject matter expertise in areas relevant to USAOs, (e.g. civil rights, environmental litigation, etc.).

Because the advantages and disadvantages offered by the public and private routes are so different, you may consider doing both types of work before trying to join a USAO. AUSAs who come from District Attorney’s offices may have started out as litigation associates in law firms. Attorneys who come from firms may have participated in *pro bono* programs in which they have worked on loan in a District Attorney’s office, handled smaller criminal defense cases, or otherwise obtained trial and criminal law experience they were not getting from their firm caseloads.

The third most common route to a USAO, after law firms and District Attorney’s (or state Attorney General’s) offices, is via Main Justice. Main Justice does hire attorneys directly from law school and clerkships through its Honors Program, but this path is not an “easy shortcut” into a USAO, as the Honors Program itself is extremely competitive. Those accepted into the Honors Program gain considerably more litigation experience than associates at the same level in a law firm, and they get to work on interesting cases and demonstrate their commitment to public service. Young lawyers at Main Justice often work with and develop connections within USAOs, which can facilitate a move. It is important to note, however, that DOJ’s Honors Program requires a commitment of at least three years, (and sometimes four, depending on the hiring component), so this strategy requires the long view.

“I advise current law students interested in working at a USAO to apply for the DOJ Honors Program in D.C. Many USAOs hire attorneys from Main Justice because those attorneys already have the necessary security clearance, understand the workings of the Department, and have received training that most attorneys simply do not receive in a firm setting.”

**—Amanda Rocque ‘00
*AUSA in Colorado since 2000***

For those who are geographically flexible, eventual transfer between USAOs is another path to entering the USAO of your choice. However, this path is also a rather long-term route as it requires working at the initial USAO for several years and then waiting for a position to open at the office where you would ultimately like to be. Another long-game option is to first get experience in the Judge Advocate General’s (JAG) Corps, serving as a legal advisor to commands for the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard. The JAG Corps are usually a four-year commitment. AUSA Kate Buzicky (’07) served in the Army JAG Corps prior to becoming an AUSA, and recommends JAG as “one of the few places where you can get a lot of experience right out of law school.”

THE HIRING PROCESS: APPLYING AND INTERVIEWING

Where Should I Apply?

The competition for AUSA positions is considerable. Offices in large cities on the East and West coasts (such as Boston, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles) receive hundreds of applications for each opening. The large number of applicants vying for jobs in these offices produces two results. First, these USAOs can demand more experience in their hires. Second, even experienced attorneys with strong

backgrounds cannot count on being hired, especially in times of budget constraints. For these reasons, if you really want to be an AUSA and are geographically flexible, consider applying to smaller cities or cities in the Midwest, West, and South. Additionally, offices in border states often have heavy caseloads dealing with immigration and border crime, and consequently may offer more opportunities for relatively young attorneys. The San Diego, Miami and Arizona offices in particular have some history of hiring attorneys with somewhat fewer years of practice to handle the volume of such cases. Because of the steep competition for AUSA positions, interested graduates are encouraged to apply as broadly as they can. You need to be strategic in the timing of multiple applications, however, to avoid a situation in which you are presented with an offer from a city that is lower on your list before even receiving an interview at your first choice office.

Professional Recommendations

Whether you are clerking or working at a firm, a DA's office, or Main Justice, recommendations from well-respected attorneys, especially if they have some present or former connection to the USAO, are enormously helpful. An introduction from someone who knows and is respected by the U.S. Attorney or

“I worked at a firm with former prosecutors, did relevant pro bono work, and then used that experience (and their letters of recommendation) to get this job.”

—Samuel Cole '98

AUSA in NDIL since 2003

a member of the hiring committee may, for example, get your resume pulled out of the stack and land you an interview. Several AUSAs who formerly worked in firms said they sought out firms that had a good number of former AUSAs, worked hard for them, and were able to use their insights and contacts in getting AUSA offers. One such AUSA also joined the local women's bar association and got to know members who

were AUSAs, recalling that “those friends helped a lot when the time came to apply.”

For those working in a District Attorney's office, cultivating friendships with ADAs with AUSA contacts is very helpful. An AUSA in the Southern District of New York who came directly from a DA's office said that, compared with the more traditional clerkship and then firm experience, “it is more difficult to transition from a state prosecutor's office to the SDNY.” She added that her office “relies heavily on recommendations from SDNY alumni in making hiring decisions, although obviously that is not a requirement.”

Do not despair if you do not have a “connection,” however; the essential recommendations are substantive ones from experienced attorneys who think highly of your work and can speak firsthand about your professional qualifications. Recommendations from former AUSAs are not necessarily more persuasive than recommendations from other attorneys with whom you may have worked. In fact, one hiring attorney at a USAO said that he would value the recommendation of a non-former-AUSA attorney whom he respected more highly than that of a former AUSA who gave “easy A's,” praising everyone with whom he had worked equally highly.

Bar Requirements

The great majority of USAOs require that their new hires be admitted to the bar, although admission to any bar will suffice. Two exceptions to this rule are the D.C. office, which does have a preference for admission to the D.C. bar specifically, and the Ohio offices, which have in the past sometimes allowed 3Ls (who will obviously not yet have taken or passed the bar) to apply to their offices through the Honors Program.

Security Clearance and Residency Requirements

As at Main Justice, once a decision is made to hire an applicant, USAOs require potential hires to pass an FBI background check. Some applicants have experienced difficulty because of unpaid or unfiled taxes, or past drug use. Having used drugs during or after law school may lead to rejection, but it is important to keep in mind that lying about drug use is considered perjury and so all drug use should be reported honestly. For more information on security clearances, see <http://www.law.harvard.edu/current/careers/opia/toolkit/security-clearances.html>. If you are a current student and think you might like to work for the Department of Justice at any point in your career, we strongly suggest you desist from any illegal drug use starting now. AUSAs must be United States citizens and must reside in the district in which they serve, or, in some districts, within 25 miles of the district.

Applying

Although some offices are more open than others to young lawyers, keep in mind that for all offices, patience and persistence are essential. It is not at all uncommon for applicants to wait months between rounds of interviews or apply multiple times over several years before receiving an offer. The AUSAs interviewed for this guide typically spoke to contacts at USAOs, learned about the application and interview process from them, and sent in applications to three to ten offices. “It took a while,” one AUSA said, “almost a year—to get responses and go through the interviewing process.”

For a list of all the U.S. Attorneys and links to brief information about each, go to this page on the DOJ website: <http://www.justice.gov/usao/about/usattorneys.html> and click through to the office that interests you. For more specific information about particular offices, you can then click on the “website” link under the office’s name. Almost all USAOs detail on their websites the process by which one should apply to their offices, generally under the ‘Employment’ tab. The DOJ website also provides USAO job postings here: <http://www.justice.gov/usao/career/jobopenings.html>.

Interviewing

Personal Qualities

USAOs are looking for candidates who not only possess strong academic backgrounds and professional experience, but who have personal qualities that will make them good prosecutors or federal civil litigators. AUSAs value public service and believe in the importance of their work, and are naturally drawn to candidates who share these views. Hiring attorneys/committees are also looking for candidates who convey poise, assertiveness, and enthusiasm. Given the demands of a USAO (e.g., handling high-stakes cases, dealing with sometimes difficult witnesses, negotiating with experienced defense counsel), a more dynamic interviewee is likely to fare better than one who is too retiring.

Interview Topics and Hiring Practices

Because of the diversity among USAOs’ interview processes, no typical process can be described, aside from the fact that most offices hold more than one interview. There is, however, one question that is virtually always asked: “Why do you want to be an AUSA?” Every applicant needs to think fully about this question and be prepared to answer it in a way that conveys that he or she

“The questions can vary widely, but the one question applicants can count on is: ‘Why do you want to be an AUSA?’ Inability to answer that question well is usually fatal.”
—Beong-Soo Kim ‘99
AUSA in CDCA 2003-2012

has really thought about what an AUSA does and why he or she wants to serve in that role. During an interview, you should demonstrate your strengths as an applicant and, perhaps most importantly, convince the interviewers of your great enthusiasm for being a prosecutor or federal civil litigator. If you are interested in a particular practice area within an office, it would be beneficial to be familiar with the latest Supreme Court, circuit, and district court cases in that area, especially if any arose from the jurisdiction in which the office is located. Another great source of information for interview preparation is the “News” tab on any USAO website, where you will find current and archived press releases. One AUSA in D.C. even found it helpful to observe the court(s) that frequently heard cases from the office she hoped to join.

The hiring process generally includes a written application followed by several rounds of interviews, with the final interview involving the U.S. Attorney. For some offices, the written portion consists only of a resume, while other offices require a cover letter and/or a completed application form. There are typically three rounds of interviews in the hiring process, but the number of interview rounds can range from one to five. The interview process may also differ based on whether you are applying to the criminal or the civil division of the office. For example, in one district there is a three-round interview process for criminal hires, but just one panel interview for civil hires.

“Ultimately you have to be an officer to the court. Truth and faithfulness to the defendant is your job, too.”

-Karen Shinskie ‘00

AUSA in D.C. since 2001

Questions asked in AUSA interviews tend to combine an effort to get to know you as a person with questions aimed at evaluating your legal knowledge and sense of ethics. D.C. AUSA Karen Shinskie (’00) says that her office places special emphasis on ethical hypotheticals, as it is the responsibility of an AUSA to

“be the one the judge can trust to be extremely fair to everybody.” Interviewers may also inquire as to the details of academic or work experience, test your knowledge of substantive law and procedure, pose hypothetical cases and issues, or even require you to give a brief opening or closing statement based on a fact pattern with which they present you. More personal questions about strengths and weaknesses, interest in public service, and ties to (or at least interest in) the district are also usually key parts of an AUSA interview.

For more specific information about interviewing in a particular district, email OPIA (opia@law.harvard.edu) or set up an appointment with an OPIA staff member. Keep in mind that practices may shift as USAO administrations change.

NARRATIVES¹

Clare Connors ’02 – *formerly* Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Hawaii (HI);

***currently* Litigation Associate, Davis Levin Livingston**

Career Path: Clerkship → DOJ, temporarily detailed to serve as a special AUSA → USAO → Firm

After spending my 1L summer at the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Hawaii, I became interested in prosecution and pursued the Department of Justice Honors track. During my 2L summer, I worked at a law firm for eight weeks and with the DOJ Honors summer program for seven weeks. After graduating from law school, I clerked for one year for the Honorable David Alan Ezra, Chief District Court Judge for

¹ All narratives were written during the writers’ time as AUSAs. Many of the AUSAs cited here have now moved on to other jobs, as noted in the biographical lines.

the District of Hawaii. Afterwards, I joined the Criminal Section of the Tax Division as a DOJ Honors attorney and spent the first six months as a Special Assistant United States Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia. I then spent approximately one year with the Tax Division before receiving an offer of employment at the USAO in Hawaii.

During my 1L summer, I made great contacts with Assistant U.S. Attorneys in the Hawaii office, which turned out to be a great set of government references. When I sought employment at the DOJ, I applied to a division of DOJ that offered a lot of litigation and travel opportunities, including in the district where I ultimately wanted to practice. I got some felony trial experience under my belt, as well as experience operating in the federal system (including working on grand jury investigations, etc.), and then kept my eyes and ears open for any hiring opportunities in other areas of federal prosecution. When it came to seeking recommendations for the USAO position in Honolulu, Hawaii, I had contacts in the DOJ circles willing to recommend me, as well as AUSAs in the office with whom I had previously worked. I chose to work at the USAO in Hawaii primarily because my family is here. In this district, we run the gamut of federal crimes, although we don't get as many of the complex cases common in the larger district offices.

In law school, I did several things to prepare myself for the career path I wanted to take. I worked for the Legal Aid Bureau, which was certainly helpful. I took Administrative Law, which was a great course. Though only indirectly related to the statutes I now consult regularly, it familiarized me with standards of review, etc. I would also recommend any kind of trial advocacy, which probably goes without saying. And finally, if you hope to do white collar prosecution, here's a hint: take accounting, accounting, accounting! These skills will enable you to figure out a white collar criminal's intent – they can be masters of the books, but the misconduct can be pieced together by those who know what to look for in the records.

Currently, I am a criminal prosecutor. Our office is divided into Civil and Criminal sections, with the Criminal section broken down into Major Crimes, Drugs, and Organized Crime. I prosecute tax crimes, public corruption, immigration, procurement fraud, tribal issues, child exploitation crimes, mortgage fraud, identity theft, gun crimes, violent crimes – to name a few. Among the many cases I have been involved in, some significant ones stand out. I just indicted the first mortgage fraud case in Hawaii, which involved millions of dollars of losses to federally insured institutions. I have gone to trial against six tax protestors who proclaim that the system of income taxation is voluntary. I prosecuted individuals for stealing native Hawaiian artifacts, and indicted and extradited a Japanese citizen for blackmailing the governor's chief of staff. I also regularly appear on TV news stations to talk about the child exploitation crimes I have prosecuted, including a case involving the production of child pornography.

Being an AUSA has been a rewarding job that also happens to be life-style friendly, a rare combination these days. One especially rewarding experience I've had is obtaining, after a grueling trial, the conviction of a longtime fraudster who previously had been acquitted and who had defrauded hundreds of victims. I'm also proud to have indicted a preschool teacher with a long history of sexual assaults on minors, with a crime that carries a ten year mandatory minimum sentence of imprisonment.

**D. Loren Washburn '02 – *formerly* Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Utah (UT);
currently Shareholder and Director, Clyde Snow & Sessions**
Career Path: Clerkship → DOJ → USAO → Firm

I began my law school career with little idea of what precisely the practice of law entailed. Prior to law school I'm not sure I was entirely aware of the fact that there were lawyers who weren't involved in litigation. As such, law school and my summer internships were the vehicles for me to explore career options.

I first became interested in working as an Assistant United States Attorney during a course I had taken on Federal Criminal Law. I had taken this course not out of a sense that this was the practice area

that I was destined to practice in but rather because two close friends thought it would be an interesting course. I became interested in federal criminal law both because I found the things I was learning to be intellectually interesting but also because during the course the professor repeatedly mentioned the high level of job satisfaction experienced by U.S. Department of Justice attorneys. A short time later a friend mentioned to me that she would be working as a summer law clerk at the Department of Justice, Tax Division, which sounded interesting as well. Eventually I joined the Department of Justice through the Attorney General's Honors Program. I began my career at the Tax Division, Criminal Enforcement Section. I found this work challenging, intellectually interesting, and personally rewarding. I specifically recall a late night in July on the 25th floor of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Detroit, Michigan looking over the abandoned office buildings and the run down city having worked long hours to prepare for an upcoming trial and thinking to myself, "I can't believe I get paid to do this."

However, travelling soon began to be a burden on my family. While at DOJ, all of my litigation assignments required me to travel away from home. I began to look for a way to do the same interesting work I had been doing without the associated personal costs of all the travel. Becoming an AUSA was the obvious way to continue the work while reducing the burden of travel.

When I was with the Tax Division I was assigned a number of cases in the District of Utah. Prior to being assigned those cases I did not have an interest in returning to Utah, which is where I was raised and where I clerked. However, in the course of handling cases in the district I became more interested in working in this office. I saw that the cases that the U.S. Attorney's office in Utah was prosecuting were as interesting and complex as the cases I had worked on in Boston, Detroit, and New York. It also had a much lower cost of living. Also, through my involvement in cases, I became known to people in the U.S. Attorney's Office. Through discussions with an AUSA I was working with and later with the U.S. Attorney, I was offered a job in the white collar section of the office. What led me to the office was in many ways a product of happenstance, but the largest single factor in choosing the office was that my parents and siblings, and my wife's parents and siblings, live here.

As I have continued my career in the U.S. Attorney's Office I have seen a number of hirings take place. My largest recommendation would be to become known to the decision makers in the office. When there is an opening in a U.S. Attorney's Office, even in a small office like Salt Lake City, hundreds of applications flow in from around the country, many of them with impressive credentials and excellent experience. In my experience credentials and experience matter somewhat less than some connection to the office. Your credentials won't matter until someone takes the time to look at them. Unless something brings your resume to the top of the pile or otherwise to the attention of a decision maker, no one will ever really see your credentials, let alone compare them to the other candidates.

My experience has been that specific law school classes are much less important than the experience you gain and the connections you make. A clinical in which you are able to do relevant work (such as work with a local prosecuting office or perhaps work on immigration issues) would show some possibility that you could shorten your learning curve. Perhaps the largest factor in me taking the career path I took was a connection I made with a professor who taught a course I took on a lark. Although the substance was interesting, it has not been a factor in any job I have gotten. However, that connection with that professor did open doors. I didn't realize how helpful he could be to me, or how willing he was to be so helpful, until I discussed with him my plans, interests, and career needs. Having these conversations with professors, whether or not you think they are likely to be fruitful, is a great help to recognizing doors you might not have realized were open to you.

As an AUSA I find that I have interesting work that is challenging and rewarding to me personally. I am a criminal AUSA in the white collar section of my office. I specialize in tax, securities, and fraud offenses. Perhaps the most significant case I am currently involved in is a prosecution of a money laundering company that is alleged to have laundered hundreds of millions of dollars for Internet gambling companies throughout the world. The case involves companies and banks throughout Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean. Preparing for this case has led me to learn about the interplay between state and federal law and between U.S. law at all levels and international law as codified in various international trade

agreements. I've even been forced to understand—and hate—the Byzantine structure of the World Trade Organization. As this case illustrates, it is difficult to predict where a case will lead and it is impossible to pigeon-hole cases into narrow categories.

Other significant cases I have worked on have been complex tax shelter cases with offshore transactions being used to create fraudulent tax losses for clients of my defendants. These cases have often involved (locally) high profile clients and rather large tax losses. In one case, our trial team created a new precedent for forfeiture against the promoters of abusive tax shelters.

For me, every trial is a rewarding experience. The most interesting part of my job is not the particular factual backdrop of the cases; it is the challenge of putting on a complex case before a jury. Unfortunately, in tax cases there are no tearful victims to acknowledge the justice you have brought into their lives; in fraud cases the victims often believe the lies the perpetrators tell them: that if the authorities hadn't come along the defendants would have been able to pull off their scheme and make everyone rich and that the government is really the one who victimized them. As such, I rarely experience the kind of personal joy of acknowledgement by a private citizen that I have made their life better than my friends who prosecute violent crime enjoy. However, knowing that you have stopped someone from victimizing others or from cheating the system brings its own joy.

One final piece of advice: It is important to be flexible. If you are willing to go wherever fate takes you, you are more likely to find a job that will work than if you must have one specific job. Knock on as many doors as you can find, not just one. Along those lines, there are U.S. Attorneys offices in the regions of the country that are more than 100 miles from an ocean. These offices can do complex work just like the USAOs in NY, Boston, and LA. When you have federal law enforcement agencies behind you and a federal court issuing subpoenas, the only limitations on your ability to do important and complex work are your willingness to tackle difficult projects. Don't think that all the good work is in the biggest cities.

Justin Anand '98 – *formerly* Assistant U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Georgia (NDGA); *currently* Magistrate Judge, District Court for the Northern District of Georgia
Career Path: Clerkship → Firm → USAO → Federal Magistrate Judge

My interest in working in a U.S. Attorney's Office began during law school, as I did more in the way of trial practice work, including clinicals. My interest in becoming a prosecutor solidified during my time as a district court law clerk, during which I was able to see almost every day the exciting work that Assistant U.S. Attorneys perform. Prior to starting in my office, I clerked for a U.S. district court judge in the Southern District of New York for one year, and worked as a litigation associate at a major corporate law firm in NYC for approximately four years.

As I developed an interest during law school in working at a U.S. Attorney's Office, I spoke to as many people as I could who were AUSAs or who had previously served as AUSAs, to get a feel for what they do. I tried to gear my schedule in my last year of law school and my time at the law firm to develop and demonstrate an interest in trial work, and criminal law in particular. Thus, I participated in a third-year criminal defense clinical program as well as national trial team competition in my last year at HLS. Looking back, Evidence and Trial Advocacy are a must. The defense clinical also helped a great deal in demonstrating my interest in criminal law, and in trial work more generally.

At the law firm, I sought out opportunities to work on white collar and/or government investigation matters, as well as pro bono criminal appellate cases. In addition to trying to get this experience, I applied very early on to USAOs, unsuccessfully at first. Because you never know when your resume might be of interest, and how long it might take to get a position, you really should apply early and often. If nothing else, this helps demonstrate your consistent desire to serve. As with good clerkship opportunities, you may also have to be flexible in terms of your geographic limitations in applying to U.S. Attorney's Offices.

Above all else, the hiring folks at our office – and I'm sure at most offices – place a premium on hiring candidates who demonstrate a drive and a passion for public service, and prosecutorial work in

particular. Most offices are not inclined towards candidates who are interested in joining the office just to develop trial skills and to then potentially leave within a few years. So if this is your passion, you should take as many opportunities to demonstrate it as early in your career as possible, and be prepared to explain in an interview how it fits with your drive to be a prosecutor. This does not necessarily mean that you need to join a District Attorney's office first – although there will be some AUSAs on some hiring committees who like that prior experience. It just means that if you go to a law firm you need to think of ways to demonstrate your interest in other ways – such as clinical programs in law school, pro bono work, or attempting to get some criminal or quasi-criminal corporate cases at the firm.

I chose the office I currently work in due in part to personal reasons—my wife is from Atlanta, and it's far easier to live indefinitely on an AUSA salary here than in NYC, where I was previously working! But, also, this office allowed me the opportunity unavailable in other offices to start working more quickly as a lead prosecutor on major securities and other white collar cases. They were particularly looking for someone with that experience, which I had, although mostly from a civil litigation background.

I am currently the Deputy Chief of the Economic Crimes Section of the Criminal Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Northern District of Georgia, based in Atlanta. I specialize in corporate, securities, and health care fraud, along with tax crimes and money laundering. Recently, I have, among other cases, tried the head of an Atlanta-based hedge fund, who perpetrated a \$150 million "Ponzi-scheme." For me, working with victims, and helping give them some closure to the wrongs they have suffered, is very rewarding. It is also extremely rewarding in a financial case when you can actually help get some meaningful financial recovery for the victims.

Kathleen Nandan '95 – *formerly* Assistant U.S. Attorney, Eastern District of New York (EDNY); *currently* Counsel, Reed Smith LLP

Career Path: City Law Department → Firm → USAO → Firm

How did I become interested in working in a U.S. Attorney's Office? Looking back, I had always wanted to pursue a career in government or public interest. I wanted the autonomy and responsibility that accompanies government work as well as the opportunity for courtroom work early in my career. Towards that end, during law school I was a member of the Harvard Defenders, interned at the New York County District Attorney's Office my second summer, and took Trial Advocacy and the Criminal Defense Clinical in my third year.

After I graduated in 1995, I went to work in the New York City Law Department, where I served as Assistant Corporation Counsel, defending the City of New York and city employees in employment and civil rights actions, primarily gender, race, age, and disability discrimination and §1983 false arrest, excessive force, and prison conditions litigation. I handled all aspects of litigation, including pleadings, discovery, motion practice, and trial, and served as lead or co-counsel in a number of jury trials.

In 1998, I moved to London, where I became a corporate associate in the London office of Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP. The move—as well as the job—was unexpected, as my husband had been transferred to England and I had never envisioned myself as a corporate attorney. However, the United Kingdom offered few legal opportunities for U.S.-trained litigators, with the American firms at that time focusing almost exclusively on mergers and acquisitions and project finance and the U.K. firms reluctant to hire a litigator whose only experience was in a foreign jurisdiction. Fortunately, I met the managing partner of Simpson Thacher's London office at an HLS alumni event, and the firm, in need of additional associates, was willing to take a chance on me. During the time that I worked at Simpson Thacher, I drafted underwriting and syndicate agreements, prospectuses and offering memoranda, and conducted due diligence reviews for underwriters and issuers of debt and equity. While I am a litigator at heart, this experience as a corporate attorney turned out to be incredibly helpful; it provided me with some insight into corporate practice and gave me the foundation to understand many of the complex financial transactions that I now see on a regular basis.

When I returned to the United States in 2000, I began looking for opportunities in a USAO. I began my job search by conducting internet searches and visiting the Department of Justice and various USAO websites (keeping in mind, however, that at that time the government websites were not always current). Most importantly, I tracked down classmates and friends of friends who worked for a USAO to ask for their advice on (and insight into) how the process worked and what to expect. When I decided to apply, I applied only to the Eastern District of New York (EDNY) and the Southern District of New York (SDNY) because I needed to stay in the New York City area. The EDNY offered me a position first, and I accepted it.

With regard to the hiring process, neither the SDNY nor EDNY hire candidates directly from law school. Given that, and my own experience on our hiring committee, I can confidently say that work experience is more important than any particular class that one may have taken in school. However, when a candidate's work experience does not appear to reflect an interest in what we do in the USAO, we often look to law school (especially clinical work). Our office wants to see applicants who can articulate why they want to become an AUSA and who have a demonstrated commitment to public service (through prior jobs, pro bono or volunteer work, etc.). We want candidates who can think and write about complicated legal issues but who also have the poise and confidence to stand up in court.

Currently, I am the Chief of the Forfeiture Unit of my office, which is situated in the Civil Division. (This varies from office to office; for example, the SDNY Forfeiture Unit is in the Criminal Division). I joined the office as a line AUSA in the Civil Division, handling all manner of affirmative and defensive litigation for the government, including torts, employment discrimination, civil rights, bankruptcy, environmental, forfeiture, social security disability appeals, immigration, etc. In 2003, the office decided to form a forfeiture unit to focus on the forfeiture work that previously had been assigned to AUSAs throughout the Civil Division. I joined the unit upon its inception. The Forfeiture Unit litigates all forfeiture matters in the district—whether criminal or civil. We work with law enforcement to identify assets tainted by criminal activity (typically criminal proceeds), obtain the warrants necessary to seize or restrain those assets, and then handle the ensuing litigation.

Among the notable cases I have been involved in, I was the forfeiture AUSA assigned to *US v. Jacobowitz*, a criminal prosecution against the officers of a publicly traded company located in Long Island. The government untangled an extremely complicated \$170 million + fraud against the company's lenders and shareholders and obtained a significant forfeiture judgment. I am also handling the civil forfeiture related to *US v. Alexander*, a fraud prosecution against the former CEO of a Long Island company who is currently fighting extradition from Namibia.

I have a great job. As a general proposition, it is extremely rewarding and satisfying to litigate one's own cases from start to finish, making all decisions (with input from supervisors and client agencies) and handling all aspects of the case, from the exciting (trial, oral arguments) to the mundane (privilege review). In government, young attorneys have a tremendous amount of responsibility and autonomy, and that, in turn, is tremendously rewarding and fun. In terms of specific rewarding experiences, they have been many and varied. Notably, the most meaningful experiences typically have not come from the big, high profile cases. Instead, the small moments are the most memorable and the most touching, whether it be vindicating a client accused of a civil rights violation or sued in tort or returning forfeited money to an elderly victim of a fraud.

Elliott B. Jacobson '80 – Senior Litigation Counsel, USAO for the Southern District of New York (SDNY)

Career Path: DA's Office → USAO

I became interested in working in a U.S. Attorney's Office after working on several white collar criminal investigations and prosecutions at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. I had applied for a position with the Manhattan DA's Office in the fall of my third year of law school, was offered a position

as an Assistant DA with that office in November of my third year, accepted the offer, and commenced work as an ADA in August of 1980, about two months after graduation.

At the DA's office, I initially worked in one of the six bureaus comprising the Trial Division, principally responsible for the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes. I spent three years in the trial division, at first prosecuting misdemeanors in the Criminal Court of the City of New York and ultimately prosecuting felonies (including burglaries, robberies, and rapes) in the Supreme Court of the State of New York for New York County. I then accepted an offer to become a member of the DA's Rackets Bureau.

Initially formed to go after classical organized crime groups, the Rackets Bureau (at least when I was a member), investigated and prosecuted a wide range of miscellaneous matters. My work in the Rackets Bureau spurred my interest in working in a U.S. Attorney's Office, where some of the more sophisticated white-collar crimes are prosecuted. Accordingly, in early 1985, I applied for positions in a number of USAOs. After several months, I was offered a position in the USAO for the Southern District of New York. (Rudolph Giuliani was then U.S. Attorney.) Given its reputation as the preeminent USAO in the country, I accepted the offer.

I approached getting my job simply by asking for and submitting an application in the ordinary course. Towards the end of the interviewing process at the USAO-SDNY, I had prosecutors at the DA's office who were familiar with my work contact their contacts at the USAO-SDNY on my behalf. I do not think that any of my law courses or extra-curricular activities at the Law School played any role of significance in my hiring at the USAO. I believe that my experience at the Manhattan DA's office and my record of achievement there had more to do with my successful application to the USAO.

I am currently a Senior Litigation Counsel in the Criminal Division of my office. I typically handle complex white collar matters. I conduct long term grand jury investigations, try cases in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, and brief and argue cases before the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Working criminal cases has been rewarding as a general matter. It's hard to say with specificity which cases have been the most rewarding, but I think it's fair to say that cases with real victims (or their survivors in the case of homicides) have been particularly important to me because I have felt that I've tangibly helped another person or persons in such cases. Below are some particularly notable cases that I've prosecuted:

U.S. v. James Gabriel & Gerard Vitti (1997) – Three top executives of Chromalloy Gas Turbine Corporation were charged with fraud and making false statements to the Federal Aviation Commission concerning the repair of jet aircraft engine parts. One of them pleaded guilty, and other two were eventually convicted.

U.S. v. Kenneth Gribetz (1996) – The DA of Rockland County, NY pleaded guilty to tax and embezzlement charges, resigned from office and was ultimately disbarred.

U.S. v. Mutulu Shakur & Marilyn Buck (1989) – The defendants—the mastermind (a Black Liberation Army member) and a principal accomplice (a Weather Underground member) in the botched 1981 Brinks robbery in Rockland County, NY, in which a Brinks guard and two police officers were killed—were convicted of racketeering, racketeering conspiracy, bank robbery, and murder and sentenced to prison.

U.S. v. Dennis Malvasi (1987) – After an investigation into the bombing of four abortion clinics in the New York metropolitan area followed by an intensive manhunt, the defendant was apprehended, pleaded guilty to multiple federal arson charges and was sentenced to years in prison.

I think anyone interested in a career as a federal prosecutor should read the judicial decisions in the above cases (and similar ones). If you're interested in the issues presented by these cases, this may be the job for you. If not, then you may be more suited to another area of practice.

TRANSITIONING OUT OF A USAO

While working in a U.S. Attorney's Office is considered by many to be one of the best and most rewarding careers in the law, attorneys who enjoy their experiences in USAOs may nonetheless choose at some point to leave for career development or because of personal considerations. No matter what the reason for making a change, AUSAs universally find that their experience is valued by potential new employers.

Some who choose to move on from the USAO do so out of a desire to try new things or experience a different kind of working environment. Former AUSA Loren Washburn ('02) decided to leave the criminal division of the USAO in Utah for the chance to spend some time "on the other side," defending clients – an experience which he believes, "helps you be a better prosecutor ultimately." To AUSAs contemplating making the move from the prosecutorial side of criminal practice to the defensive side, Loren states that while "some people get the mentality that they'd be betraying the righteousness of the cause to go over to the other side, this is not the case. Now I am able to help individuals walk through some of the darkest moments in their lives." Loren's time as an AUSA was instrumental to his success as a defender, and he regards the USAO as something of a "last frontier" for those who want to get jury trial experience relatively early on in their careers. Similarly, former AUSA Kathleen Nandan ('95) moved on after thirteen years at the EDNY USAO in order to try private practice, but looks back fondly on her time as an AUSA, particularly for the tremendous autonomy and responsibility she enjoyed.

"I wasn't going to leave to join a big law firm. I really took time to reflect on what I was doing as an AUSA and why I was doing it, and consciously used that as the platform for what I would do next."

-Clare Connors '02

AUSA in Hawaii 2004-2011

For those who do decide to move on from the USAO, a successful track record as an AUSA generally translates to abundant opportunities for employment. Former AUSAs are highly marketable due to their extensive trial experience and the relationships they have forged within the USAO, with judges, and in the broader community. Clare Connors ('02), who transitioned to private civil practice after eight years as an AUSA in Hawaii, credits her time in the USAO with giving her "credibility, experience, and connections," and found that the reputation she had made for herself as an AUSA meant that firms were calling her with job offers as soon as she made the decision to leave. AUSAs leave their USAOs not only for private practice, but for supervisory posts at DOJ and at other federal, state, and local agencies, to become judges, to join law school faculties, to take positions on Capitol Hill and as in-house counsel at universities and businesses, and for elective office.

CONCLUSION

AUSAs almost universally describe their positions as tremendously rewarding because they offer an opportunity both to serve the public in an important way and to gain terrific professional experience. Our aim in providing the suggestions outlined here is to make seeking an AUSA job a little easier. In making each decision along your career path, however, be sure to consider what a particular choice will mean if you ultimately decide not to pursue a job as an AUSA or if you seek but do not obtain one. That is, always bear in mind how a particular choice fits in with your personal and professional needs apart from its value in getting you a step closer to a USAO, because you should be seeking professional satisfaction at every step of your career, wherever it may lead.

“The people are incredibly public-interest oriented and devoted, but also just amazing attorneys.”

-Veronica Lei '04

AUSA in Massachusetts since 2009

“Every day I am able to stand up and say that I represent the United States. Fighting for victims. Fighting for justice. I am rewarded every day.”

—Kwame J. Manley '00

AUSA in Maryland 2004-2011

“Being an AUSA is an amazing job – a combination of doing the right thing, the excitement of running criminal trials, and the intellectual challenge of mastering complicated areas of the law.”

—Howard Sklamberg '95

AUSA in D.C. 2005-2007