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Criminal Justice

## Napa County DA launches mentorship program for aspiring prosecutors

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TRY 3 MONTHS FOR \$3



Taylor Lindsley, left, and Katie Gross discuss their job in the district attorney's office as law clerks. The professional development program is unpaid and runs for 10 weeks.

J.L. Sousa, Register

What could be better than molding minds and getting some work done for free? This is exactly what the Napa County District Attorney's Office is doing by launching a mentorship program for law students interested in becoming prosecutors.

The first two students to enter the new program – Taylor Lindsley of UC Davis School of Law and Katie Gross of UC Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco – started working at the DA's Office late last month. Just a few weeks in, they've already been exposed to misdemeanor and felony cases and have assisted in preparing for such cases.

"I've written a couple of motions," Gross said last week. "I've prepared to appear in court a few times – I did appear once, and it was a thrill."

Lindsley said she was helping one of the deputy district attorneys prepare for a felony child molestation case, but that the case was continued.

Both students, who are entering their third and final year of law school in the fall, said they enjoy being exposed to all the types of cases handled by the DA's Office. Both are also certified by the State Bar of California to appear in court under supervision.

The DA's Office hasn't had a formal mentorship program in at least 10 years, but bringing it back or starting a new one has been talked about for a while, Assistant District Attorney Paul Gero said. They finally started recruiting students last fall.

"We believe strongly in professional development, and we want to help influence, train and mentor the next generation of prosecutors," Gero said.

The Napa County DA's program seeks to give the potential prosecutors a comprehensive experience, Gero said.

"In most offices that have formal programs ... you're assigned to one attorney for 10 weeks, you're assigned to one courtroom for 10 weeks or you're assigned to one project for 10 weeks," Gero said. Larger offices have so many interns, he said, that they can't always provide them with the individualized attention.

"Our goal was to expose them to as much as we can in 10 weeks – domestic violence, sexual assault, misdemeanors, court appearances, juvenile court – really trying to give them a broad experience," Gero said.

The smaller office is one of the reasons Gross and Lindsley chose Napa County's program over others.

"It feels like a more personalized experience as opposed to being a cog in a big machine," Gross said.

“I knew it was a small office, I knew it was a new program and, when I interviewed with them, the impression that I got was that there’s going to be a lot of flexibility and what I get out of this internship is going to be what I put into it,” Lindsley said. “I liked the fact that I was going to have a flexible internship where I would be doing many different things at once.”

The law clerks will be working for the Napa County DA’s Office until the end of July. Neither is receiving any pay or receiving school credit. They just want the experience, they say.

The women share one goal: to serve communities by bringing justice to victims.

“I definitely want to be a prosecutor,” Lindsley said. After working with ex-felons while an undergraduate student at UC Santa Cruz, she said she realized that “crime begins in the community.”

“In the DA’s role,” she said, “your client is the community – it’s not an individual person ... so I knew that I would be able to effectuate justice the best in the DA’s office and be able to wake up every morning enjoying what I was doing and knowing that what I was doing was for the community.”

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