

Juvenile Probation Officer



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What do you do as a Probation officer?

I supervise a caseload and perform court investigations of cases coming to the court. I work for the judge.

What are the academic requirements for this profession?

A bachelor's degree in counseling, corrections, criminal justice, social work or any other relevant degree that would apply to probation work. Previous experience is not necessary.

What areas of study have helped you most in your job?

The counseling course has helped me the most. I learned about Rational Behavior Therapy and the Rogerian Theory. Rational Behavior Therapy deals with how a person reacts toward an event based on their belief system. The Rogerian theory, by Dr. Carl Rogers is based on self-talk. This type of therapy engages the client in "self talk". You listen while the client speaks and you let them figure out the problem.

What type of person does it take to be a Probation officer?

You need to have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Also, you have to be able to handle stress and constant change.

What do you like about your job?

I like the autonomy; most of the decisions and recommendations made to the court are up to me. I get self gratification by doing my job well. However, this is not based upon changing a kid. I get satisfaction by giving juveniles on my caseload all the options so they can better themselves. With these options they have the ability to prove themselves to the court and become law-abiding citizens in the community. I don't take credit for the positive things they do because then I would have to take credit for the negative things they do.

What kind of pay system do you have?

Your pay is based upon the years of experience and education. The maximum amount of education is a master's degree plus 45 credit hours. However, you will still receive an increment raise every three years.

What would someone starting out in this field expect to make?

Someone with a bachelor's degree in a relevant field and no previous experience can expect an entry-level salary of approximately \$22,000 a year.

Does your job allow for further education?

This job not only allows you to augment your education but the Supreme Court encourages Probation officers and other court employees to further their education. As an officer, the court will pay for your tuition. All you have to do is get your courses approved by the Judicial Education Office, pass the course and you will be reimbursed for your tuition. However, the court will not pay for parking, books, school supplies or lab fees.

What advice would you give for someone planning to go into this field?

The bottom line is don't come into this field if you are interested in obtaining wealth. Also, don't come into this field if you're the type of person who has to control every single detail. I would suggest you take a couple of counseling courses and get to know yourself. By doing this you will see if this is type of work you really want to pursue.

Do you have a set work schedule?

I work 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. However, as a Probation Officer you may get a call in the middle of the night to attend a hearing on one of the juveniles from your caseload. You will not get overtime pay for attending the hearing but, you will get compensation time.

What would be a typical day?

There is no such thing as a typical day for a Probation Officer. You may have court hearings or appointments scheduled on certain days but that could change quickly. It may be easier to tell you some of the things that may happen during a workweek. I may go to a school to visit a juvenile on my caseload, do a home visit and attend meetings at various agencies that the juvenile has been court ordered to attend. By law an officer has so many days to serve court papers on a juvenile that has been detained. When the juvenile is part of a caseload, an officer is expected to attend court hearings in front of the circuit judge, magistrate or juvenile referee. Also, the officer is required to document every encounter with the juvenile, develop reports and make recommendations.

Is there security in this work?

Yes, however, you work under the "Will and Pleasure" of the judges in your circuit which means they can let you go without cause. In reality, it has not happened since I have been employed as a Juvenile Probation officer.

If you could change anything about your job, what would it be?

I would like to be out in the field more since I feel you cannot learn much from sitting behind a desk. Sitting behind a desk is the most dangerous place to view the world.

Interviewed by Teresa Ballengee for a College 101 assignment on 12/00.