

JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP GUIDE

A judicial clerkship is a post-graduate position with a judge or a court, in which the clerk assists with the judge's or court's caseload and is also responsible for various administrative and clerical duties. Judicial law clerks conduct legal research, advise the judge on the resolution of issues, and assist in the drafting of orders and opinions.

Clerking is a rich and varied experience for recent law graduates. Clerkship opportunities exist at both the federal **and** state levels, and number in the thousands. Given sufficient planning, research and effort, the likelihood of finding clerkship opportunities for which you may be competitive will increase.

If you are interested in obtaining a clerkship, please schedule an appointment with a counselor in the Office of Career Services. We will be happy to assist you in your efforts to develop a strategy and then help you choose clerkship opportunities that suit your skills, interests and career goals.

I. Advantages of a Clerkship

Law clerks at both the trial and appellate levels participate in many aspects of the judicial process. Their responsibilities may range from assembling pleadings, motions, and evidentiary materials for the judge before trial or oral argument, to researching and providing answers to evidentiary issues, drafting legal memoranda and interacting with counsel and drafting the judge's final opinion. Clerkships are prestigious and highly valued by prospective legal employers.

The advantages of a clerkship may vary depending on the responsibilities given to the clerk, which will often depend on the type of court (federal or state; appellate or trial court) and particular judge. Advantages of a clerkship include:

- Personal insight into the judicial process and an opportunity to observe different facets of the judicial system and understand how they work;
- Further development of legal research, writing and analytical skills;
- An increase in the strength of your candidacy for a post-clerkship position with a law firm or other public and private legal employer, or for a career in academia;
- Learning both effective - and ineffective - litigation and advocacy skills, and how judges perceive various types of advocacy, strategy and tactics;
- Developing a mentor relationship with a judge; and
- Gaining exposure to the legal profession in a given substantive or geographic area.

Many members of the College of Law faculty have previously served as judicial clerks. It may be helpful to seek them out to obtain a more personalized view of their clerkship experience, the responsibilities they held, and the benefits they gained.

"Clerking appealed to me because it offered interesting legal work with a clear civic purpose...[E]ven after clerking for three state appellate judges over the course of seven years, the job continued to invigorate and challenge me. I learned to think and write clearly. I learned to talk concretely with judges and law clerks about complicated legal matters and messy facts. I also absorbed which logic and policy arguments persuaded the judges and how they reasoned to a final decision. The rigors of the workload increased my confidence, while the vulnerability of some of the litigants increased my respect for the legal profession. I carry forward the lessons of my clerkships in my teaching and private life."

Aliza Milner, Legal Writing Professor

II. Clerkship Types & Responsibilities

A. Term or Elbow Clerkships

Post-graduate judicial clerkships are often awarded for a certain term, in which the clerk is hired to work for a specific judge. Term clerkships are generally for a term of one or two years, and clerks have the opportunity to participate in the process by which the law is developed, observe the various styles, strengths and weaknesses that attorneys bring to the court and, often times, develop a close and long-lasting relationship with the judge and other members of the court's staff. Federal judges determine the structure of their chamber's staff as well as the term length for their clerkship positions. They also have the power to determine the number of term versus permanent clerks in their chambers. Conversely, the state judiciary generally determines whether state judges can hire a term clerk or a permanent clerk only, though this may also vary from county-to-county.

B. Permanent or Career Clerkships

Permanent or "career" clerks work for a judge or court for an indefinite period of time, rather than a specific term. They frequently assume more administrative and supervisory duties in a judge's chambers than the term clerks. Term clerks, if the chambers has them, will often be supervised by the permanent clerk. Many permanent clerks have completed a term clerkship at some point prior to obtaining their permanent positions, and a growing number of both federal and state courts have begun hiring permanent clerks only.

C. Staff Attorney Positions

Federal and state appellate courts sometimes hire staff attorneys to work for all the judges of the court. These positions may also be called "court clerks," "pool clerks" or "central staff counsel." These clerkships are typically for a term of one or two years, or more. Instead of clerking for one judge, the staff attorney performs work in a "clerkship pool" for all judges of the court. A staff attorney position may provide the clerk with an opportunity to gain familiarity with all of the judges of the court and to work collaboratively with other staff attorneys.

All thirteen federal judicial circuits have staff attorney offices of varying sizes; some will consider 3Ls for these positions, while others require a minimum of one year post-graduate work experience.

III. Preparing to Apply for Clerkships

Once you have decided to apply for clerkships, you will need to determine which judges or courts to apply to. Conduct a self-assessment and then target your search according to the criteria driving your decision to apply for clerkships. See **Appendix B** for a brief self- assessment.

For example:

- If you want to clerk because you would like to see what trial work is like, you may want to focus on state or federal trial court clerkship opportunities.

- If you want to clerk because you foresee a career as a law professor, you may want to focus on federal appellate court clerkships.
- If you want a clerkship for the mentoring experience, you may want to seek out clerkships with judges who form a close relationship with their law clerks.
- You may choose state or federal specialty courts based on your interest in a specific area of practice, such as family law or tax.
- If there is a geographical area in which you are interested, target your search accordingly. Please note that competition for the most prestigious or geographically desirable courts has increased greatly in recent years. It is therefore highly recommended that those interested in pursuing a clerkship consider cities beyond New York City, Washington, D.C., Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago.

Courts to Consider:

Federal district court and state supreme court clerkships are extremely competitive and may not be the best option for every candidate. Therefore, it is important to keep an open mind and research courts that you may not have already considered. Below are some courts that are commonly overlooked in the judicial clerkship application process, but nonetheless offer excellent clerkships for recent graduates:

- State intermediate appeals courts
- State trial courts (particularly if you are interested in criminal or civil litigation)
- Staff attorney clerkships, both state and federal
- Federal Magistrate Judges' chambers
- **NOTE:** Each U.S. District Court has Magistrate Judges, who are appointed by Article III District Court Judges to serve an eight-year term. The role of Magistrates varies by District.
- Administrative Law Judges (ALJs)
- Bankruptcy Courts
- State and Federal specialty courts (International Court of Trade, Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, Tax Court (NJ, Federal) and Environmental Court (VT, OR))

A Note on New Jersey Clerkships:

New Jersey has by far the largest and most robust state court clerkship program. Each member of the entire state judiciary, from the trial and tax courts up to the State Supreme Court (approximately 480 judges in all), hires a new clerk for a one-year term to begin each fall. The application period for New Jersey begins in the summer following 2L year. Applicants are not required to be New Jersey residents or U.S. citizens or sit for the New Jersey bar exam. New Jersey clerkships are particularly helpful to recent graduates seeking long-term employment in the metro New York City or Philadelphia markets.

See **Appendix D** for a breakdown of clerkship opportunities in federal, state courts and administrative agencies.

Improving the Odds: Planning Ahead for a Successful Candidacy

While each judge or court has their own criteria for hiring clerks, some traits or abilities tend to be common:

- **Judicial Internships/Externships.**¹ Students who are interested in building a résumé to compete for a post-graduate clerkship should obtain a summer or academic year judicial internship/externship during their law school career. Judicial internships (generally unpaid) usually are available both during the summer and the academic year. An internship/externship can provide a preview of the clerkship experience and can convey to a judge your interest in a post-graduate clerkship. (See Judicial Internships/Externships below for more information on these positions).
 - Some judges have expressed that they will **not** write letters of recommendation for students who have worked as either an intern or extern in their chambers. This is information that you should ascertain during your research process.
- **Relationships with Potential Recommenders.** A clerkship application typically requires three letters of recommendation. For federal clerkship applications, it is recommended that applicants submit two letters of recommendation from faculty. Your recommendations should come from people who can highlight your qualifications. In order to build relationships with faculty, consider working as a research assistant for one of your professors or asking a professor to supervise your note for a law journal. It is crucial that you work on fostering these relationships long before you seek a recommendation.
- **Polished Writing Sample.** Most judges require an applicant to submit a writing sample. If you participated in a judicial internship/externship, perhaps consider asking the judge if you can use a draft of one of the documents you prepared over the internship/externship as a writing sample. Also, consider asking a legal employer if you can use an assignment as a writing sample. (Please note that you will need to get permission from any judge or legal employer before you submit your work as a writing sample.) The legal writing sample should be the best representation of your work.
- **Journal and Moot Court Experience.** Journal experience, while not absolutely necessary to secure a clerkship, certainly helps to strengthen your application. Consider participating in the moot court competition and give it your best effort. Pursue other opportunities to refine your legal research and writing skills.
- **Legal Research and Writing Experience.** If you are not able to secure a legal- related summer job between your first and second year, try to find one that at least requires you to do some writing. Grades in LCR matter.

¹ Federal judges will typically review applications for interns in December and January for the upcoming summer. State judges who hire interns tend to do so at the beginning of the spring semester.

Some judges will hire summer and/or academic year judicial externs. Externs are eligible for academic credit through the College of Law's Externship Program. If you have further questions about externships, please email lawexternships@syr.edu

- **Course Selection.** Choose your courses carefully. Some judges prefer candidates who have taken or plan to take particular courses, such as Conflicts of Law, Evidence, Employment Law, Trial Practice, Administrative Law and Federal Courts. You may also want to consider LCR III: Writing for Trial & Appellate Judges or Legal Writing in Judicial Chambers.

Most importantly, whether you plan to send one or over one hundred clerkship applications, the process takes considerable time. Plan ahead - you should research judges, update your résumé, draft a cover letter, polish your writing sample and approach potential recommenders long before you submit your applications. See **Appendix C** for a year-by-year preparation approach.

IV. The Term Clerkship Application Process

A. Application Timing

Deadlines for clerkship applications are idiosyncratic and depend on the courts that you are applying to. Some may be as early as winter of your second year, as late as fall of the third year or even later. Therefore, the first step in the application process is to research application deadlines and other requirements.

When in doubt about hiring timelines for a court or a judge, check the resources listed below. After reviewing the resources, if you still cannot find the application deadline information, call the judge's chambers to ask.

- For Federal Clerkships: [The Online System for Clerkship Application and Review \(OSCAR\)](#). In 2018, a federal law clerk hiring plan was adopted. For students who enter law school after 2017, the application and hiring process will not begin until after a law student's second year.
 - This is a 2-year pilot program
 - Judges only accepting applications via OSCAR are following the plan.
- For a state-by-state overview of state clerkship hiring procedures and contacts, [The Guide to State Judicial Clerkships compiled](#) by Vermont Law School.
 - You need to have the username and password to view each state's application procedures.
To Access the 2025-2026 Guide - username: *Black*; password: *Walnut*

Some examples:

- In New Jersey the application process begins in mid-June following your second year, and continues until all judges have hired a clerk (although students are encouraged to apply early on in the process).
- The New York Appellate Division, 3rd and 4th Departments regularly participate in the fall On-Campus Interview program, and interview students at the College of Law in September and October.
- For the New York Court of Appeals, applications are accepted between July 1 and September 15 for central staff attorney positions, and typically in the early fall of the 3L year for term clerk positions.

- For the Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and Delaware supreme and mid-level appellate courts, candidates typically apply directly to the individual judges of the courts in the spring of their second year.

B. Selecting the Judge(s)

Try to obtain as much information as possible about a specific judge. Personality, ideology, judicial temperament and work habits of the judge can vary greatly and could make a great difference in the quality of the clerkship experience.

- ✓ For federal clerkships, consult the *Almanac of the Federal Judiciary*, the website www.judicialclerkships.com, LEXIS and/or Westlaw, present law clerks, lawyers and alumni - these can all be very helpful resources when selecting which judges to whom you will want to apply.

Issues that should be addressed in selecting the judge:

- What type of reputation does the judge have?
- Does the judge have an ideology you may find objectionable?
 - Could you work on cases that are decided in a way that goes against your own personal ideology?
- Does the judge work in a trial or appellate court?
- How approachable is the judge? How often are you expected to meet?
- How many other, if any, term clerks work in chambers, and how are responsibilities divided?
- Is the Judge a Syracuse University College of Law alumni? Visit the Orange CORE Resource Library for an updated list of Federal Alumni Judges.

C. Elements of a Clerkship Application

Most federal clerkship applications will require a résumé, cover letter, law school transcript, writing sample and two to three letters of recommendation. However, this may vary depending on the judge or the court.

The OSCAR system will list the application procedures and materials needed to apply for a particular federal judge. State clerkship application information can be found in the Vermont Law School's *Guide to State Judicial Clerkships*. The *Guide* includes application instructions and deadlines for each court within each state. States also maintain judiciary websites that can list current or future openings within that state court system.

Take care to closely follow each judge's particular application instructions. Judges and their clerks tend to disregard applications that are missing elements or are sent using the wrong method (for example, email vs. paper). Sometimes, on OSCAR, the application will include a separate document with further instructions on how to submit your application. Make sure to check diligently when reviewing the instructions.

a. Résumé

First and foremost, your résumé should reflect the skills that are most relevant to a clerkship, such as legal research, writing and analysis. Remember to include detailed descriptions of prior or current judicial internships or externships, as well

as journal or research experience.

Your résumé should also include relevant non-legal interests and experiences that will add an interesting dimension to your application and spark the interest of a judge. Do not disregard prior, non-legal work experiences as irrelevant. For example, a prior career in publishing reflects favorably on your writing and editing skills as well as your attention to detail, while starting a business reflects favorably on your self-discipline. You can also include an interest section listing travel, musical or foreign language skills - these aspects of your experience will set you apart from other candidates. Often times, judges are excited to talk about something other than your academic experience.

b. Cover Letter

A cover letter is an opportunity to highlight your experiences, how they have prepared you for a clerkship, and to articulate why you are interested in a position with this judge or court. At the same time, you want to come across as credible and sincere. A well-drafted cover letter may increase your chances of obtaining an interview; a poorly-written, unprofessional letter will almost certainly negatively impact those chances.

NOTE: Cover letters to judges should be addressed per the Guidelines in the Appendix. Please review carefully!

Your letter should contain, at a minimum, the following information:

- Your status as a student at Syracuse University College of Law along with your year of graduation.
- The term for which you are applying for a clerkship in the judge's chambers.
- Any geographic or personal tie that you have to the judge or the court that you are applying to.
- Optional: The names and phone numbers of the people who will be sending your letters of recommendation to the judge (if recommendations letters are not requested).

There is no formula or template for an effective letter—each judicial clerkship cover letter is different. Your letter should be concise and not longer than one page. It should be candid, formal and professional, and should convey the same attention to detail that you will display as a judicial law clerk.

Above all, avoid any grammatical or typographical errors in your cover letter or in any other element of your clerkship application.

c. Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are a critical element of a judicial clerkship application. As a rule of thumb, you should secure three letters of recommendation. For state court clerkships, at least one of your letters of recommendation should come from a professor. For federal clerkships, it is best to have two letters of recommendation from faculty.

You should choose recommenders who you believe will write strong letters on your behalf. While certain professors or employers may seem more “connected” or well-

known, you should still choose individuals with whom you have strong connections. Your recommendation letters should speak to your legal research and writing skills. A professor for whom you served as a research or teaching assistant, or wrote a paper for, would be an ideal recommender.

In some instances, judges, professors and employers may be willing to make phone calls to judges on your behalf, in lieu of a letter.

Request letters of recommendation early, giving your professors and employers at least 4 weeks to prepare strong letters on your behalf. Writing a letter of recommendation takes time - so it's not only important to give recommenders enough time to prepare a letter, but it's also imperative that you are certain that that you will be applying for clerkships. Your recommenders are busy professionals, so you do not want to create unnecessary work for them.

Your method of requesting a letter depends largely on your relationship with your potential recommenders. Many recommenders will request a copy of your résumé and/or a short personal statement outlining your reasons for applying for a clerkship. Be sure to provide your recommender with all of the information that he or she requests.

Your professor's administrative assistant will typically finalize his or her letter using a mail merge, and provide you with sealed, addressed letters that have been personalized. To facilitate this process, you will need to complete and send an excel spreadsheet containing the names and addresses of the judges to whom you are applying. (See **Appendix** for a sample and the Resources tab on Orange CORE to download a copy.) Once the letters are ready, it is your responsibility to pick up the sealed letters from your professor's office and then include the letters with your application materials.

To submit a letter of recommendation via an OSCAR application, you will send a link to your recommenders where they will upload the letter of recommendation themselves. Make sure to tell them to click the option to automatically send the letter for every application you send in. Otherwise, they will receive an email every single time you submit an application asking them to reupload the letter.

Just as you should with a networking contact, please show respect to your recommenders and keep them informed on how your clerkship search. Let them know about interviews and offers.

d. The Interview

- The interview starts when you receive the call from chambers saying the judge would like to meet you. Judges often have very close relationships with their staff. Assume that anything you say to a staff member will be repeated to the judge. Many judges have every member of his/her staff evaluate and meet with candidates during the in-person interview. Be professional and courteous at all times.
- If you receive a voicemail from a judge or his/her staff, return the call promptly.
- At the interview, the judge is evaluating whether your personality and skills would make a proper fit for the chambers.
- Be prepared to talk intelligently about your courses and why you selected them,

about the topics of your papers or publications and the substance of your work experience.

- If possible, it is important that you know about the judge's recent decisions and the type of cases s/he most frequently handles (LEXIS/Westlaw can help).
 - The judge may propose hypotheticals or conduct a more personal examination of your attitudes and opinions.
 - For interviews with federal judges, know the Justices of the Supreme Court, what Circuit you are interviewing in and which states are in that Circuit.
 - For state court judges, know the basic structure of the court systems, the names of other courts and the jurisdiction covered by the court you are interviewing with.
- ✓ A successful clerkship experience typically turns on the relationship between the clerk and the judge.
 - ✓ Typically, you will also be interviewed by a judge's current clerk or clerks. Their input will be carefully considered by the judge.
 - ✓ Do not apply anywhere you would not or cannot go for an interview.
 - ✓ Do not apply to a court or judge from whom you would not accept an offer.

e. Accepting the Clerkship

- Unlike the law firm offer process, judges are not governed by offer timing guidelines. Many judges will expect an immediate response to their offer or grant a very short time to consider the offer. From a professionalism standpoint, you should not turn one judge down in the hope that another judge will offer you a position. This technique may lead a judge to rescind the offer and could possibly affect pending applications with other judges within that court system.
- If, upon leaving the interview, you are convinced, for whatever reason, that you do not want a clerkship position with that particular judge, call the judge's chambers and respectfully withdraw yourself from further consideration.
- If granted time to consider an offer, it will often be 24 hours or possibly a weekend to accept the offer. Therefore, start asking yourself the question, "What will I do if I am offered more than one position?" Your answer to this question should guide your decisions as to which judges to apply and in what time frame.
- **Absent truly extraordinary circumstances, do not accept a clerkship position and subsequently turn it down for another position elsewhere.** Turning down an offer for a non-valid reason not only reflects poorly on you but could reflect poorly on the law school and result in a judge not considering further applications from the law school.

APPENDIX A

JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP RESOURCES

The Office of Career Services has a number of resources as well as several information sessions throughout the academic year that are related to judicial clerkships. Written materials are available in the Office, and on Orange CORE.

You can also find several books in the Office of Career Services resource library as well at the Law Library.

A. Books and Directories

Behind the Bench: The Guide to Judicial Clerkships

A comprehensive guide to federal and state courts, the judicial clerkship application processes, interviewing and research. This resource includes personal stories, quotes and valuable insights from members of the judiciary.

- Available in Career Services

Almanac of the Federal Judiciary

Contains in-depth background and biographical information on federal judges, including education, noteworthy rulings and commentary by lawyers who have appeared before that judge.

- Available [online](#) and in the Law Library

BNA's Directory of State and Federal Courts, Judges and Clerks

Most comprehensive directory of contact information for state and federal judges, including telephone numbers, email addresses and websites.

- Available in Career Services and the Law Library

Federal-State Court Directory

Comprehensive guide of federal judicial contact information as well as the court structure for each state.

- Available in the Law Library

Directory of State Court Clerks and County Courthouses

Geographical listing of all contact information for state and local level.

- Available in the Law Library

Judicial Clerkships: Legal Methods in Motion

Provides introduction to clerking in both trial and appellate courts; teaches a combination of analytical and practical skills.

- Available in the Law Library

A Short & Happy Guide to Judicial Clerkships

A walkthrough of details of judicial clerkships, benefits of clerking, and detailed advice on applying and interviewing for clerkships

- Available in the Law Library

The All-Inclusive Guide to Judicial Clerking

A resource providing insight not only on clerkship applications, but the clerkship experience itself, with advice on drafting judicial opinions, orders and bench memos.

- Available in the Law Library

Judicial Clerkships: Legal Methods in Motion

A book by our very own Professor Aliza Milner on clerking on the appellate and trial court level, as well as how-to's for legal writing.

- Available in the Law Library

Judging: A Book for Student Clerks

A collection of stories and advice from judges on things they think clerks should know.

- Available in Career Services

B. Internet Resources

[Almanac of the Federal Judiciary](#)

[Federal Judiciary Homepage](#)

News and information on the federal judiciary, as well as links to federal courts.

[Online System for Clerkship Application and Review \(OSCAR\)](#)

Address and contact information for all federal judges, list of judges seeking clerks, online application system and a guide to the federal judiciary application procedures.

[Federal Judicial Center Website](#)

Biographical information for judges in the federal judiciary.

[The Guide to State Judicial Clerkships](#)

Password protected guide to the application procedures for the high, mid and trial courts within each state. **To Access the 2025-2026 Guide - username: *Eastern*; password: *Hemlock*.**

[National Center for State Courts \(CORA portal\)](#)

A new portal for state court clerkships. CORA is a free online portal that allows students and graduates to apply for multiple state clerkship positions throughout the country using a common application.

[National Center for State Courts](#)

Links to state, federal and international courts, also includes job announcements for court positions.

[Orange CORE Resource Library: Judicial Clerkship Folder](#)

[Your Clerkship Source](#)

Information and advice on judicial clerkships as well as a forum for students and judicial clerks to exchange information about applying for a judicial clerkship.

Federal Judicial Vacancies

List of current Federal Judicial vacancies with current nominations for replacement. Newly appointed judges often hire on a different timeline based on their needs.

Senate Judiciary Committee - (click on 'Nominations')

Provides information on recent and pending Executive, Judicial, and Supreme Court nominations considered by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

LEXIS and WESTLAW*

Best resources for finding judicial opinions. [LEXIS](#) also houses the NALP State Judicial Clerkship Directory which contains application information for a number of state-level judges. WESTLAW also provides a searchable judicial database.

* For more information on each of these directories, please contact the [LEXIS](#) and/or WESTLAW representatives for the College of Law.

U.S. Courts of Appeals by Circuit -

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| First | http://www.ca1.uscourts.gov |
| Second | http://www.ca2.uscourts.gov |
| Third | http://www.ca3.uscourts.gov |
| Fourth | http://www.ca4.uscourts.gov |
| Fifth | http://www.ca5.uscourts.gov |
| Sixth | http://www.ca6.uscourts.gov |
| Seventh | http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov |
| Eighth | http://www.ca8.uscourts.gov |
| Ninth | http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov |
| Tenth | http://www.ca10.uscourts.gov |
| Eleventh | http://www.ca11.uscourts.gov |
| District of Columbia | http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov |
| Federal Circuit | http://www.cafc.uscourts.gov |

Special Courts -

[U.S. Tax Court](#)
[U.S. Court of International Trade](#)
[U.S. Court of Federal Claims](#)
[U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces](#)
[U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims](#)

Native American Tribal Courts

Clerkship openings are often listed in the periodical [Indian Country Today: The Guide to Tribal Court Law Clerks and Judges](#), published by the University of Colorado Law.

APPENDIX B

JUDICIAL CLERKSHIPS: IS ONE RIGHT FOR ME?

A judicial clerkship can be a rewarding and professionally beneficial post-graduate position. This is meant to serve as a brief self-assessment for students contemplating a post-graduate judicial clerkship.

Do you enjoy working in a relatively small setting with few co-workers?

- Most judicial chambers have few staff members; depending on the court and judge, there may be one other clerk present, and one or more office staff.

Do you prefer a more academic-type experience, reviewing legal briefs, and do you enjoy conducting legal research and writing?

- Judicial clerkships are, at their heart, research and writing positions. If you do not enjoy these tasks, a clerkship is probably not the best job for you. Appellate-level courts, in particular, provide a more academic experience. Clerks in appellate courts will delve more deeply into a given substantive area and the relevant case law than their trial court counterparts.

Do you prefer a lively work environment?

- If so, then a clerkship in a trial court may be ideal. Trial courts will provide insight into the courtroom's day-to-day operations. Clerks are involved in every stage of the proceedings, and are often called upon to not only research legal issues and draft opinions, but to organize evidence and receive trial exhibits, interact with counsel and handle jury management during trials.

Do you have financial, familial, or other constraints that make your starting salary an overriding concern?

- Clerking is an investment in your legal career with a long-term payoff. Clerkships typically pay less than associate positions with law firms, but this should not discourage you from pursuing a clerkship. A clerkship will allow you to improve your credentials while searching out new opportunities, removed from the atmosphere of hiring at law schools. Furthermore, you can take the bar exam before clerking and be admitted to the bar by the time you are back in the job market - a great additional credential, particularly with employers in small firms and the public sector seeking candidates who can handle a case early in their careers. Every year we have graduates with high debt burdens who take clerkships. They manage in creative ways: they live on a manageable budget; they try to clerk in a location where the cost of living is low; they defer their loans or make a deal with their lender to pay only interest on the loan during a period of time. Our graduates report great satisfaction despite the short-term financial sacrifice. Also, if you plan to go to a law firm after clerking, the firm may pay a clerkship bonus.

Advisors in the Office of Career Services are available to help you further explore whether a clerkship is for you. The Office can assist you with the clerkship application process, court/judge selection and the interview process.

APPENDIX C

CLERKSHIP PREPARATION: A BRIEF YEAR-BY-YEAR APPROACH

First Year:

- **Study!** Many clerkships will require a strong academic performance to be a competitive candidate. The College of Law's first year curriculum will give you a solid base upon which to build a well-rounded and tailored legal education.
- Develop a relationship with one or more of your professors. This will help pave the way for personalized letters of recommendation down the road. Research Assistant positions and upper-level advanced coursework can help accomplish this.
- Many courts and judges look favorably on law review or other journal experience. Also, consider participating in the process that frequently determine journal positions.
- Seek out a judicial internship. Meet with a counselor in Career Services to plan your strategy for contacting courts and judges for internships - which frequently are unadvertised. Winter break and early in the spring semester are the ideal times to contact chambers to determine whether they will consider hiring a summer intern.
- Apply for a judicial externship for 2L year through the [Externship Program](#)
- Seek out a summer position that will provide an opportunity to further hone your legal research and writing skills.
- Attend Career Services programs related to clerkships.

Second Year:

- Meet with the judicial clerkship counselor in Career Services by December of your 2L year to discuss your clerkship application strategy and timeline. (For some courts, such as the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the deadline is the spring of 2L year. It can be helpful to compile a chart of deadlines for the courts to which you plan on applying.)
- For federal clerkships, familiarize yourself with the OSCAR website when it opens for 2Ls in February of 2L year. Approach faculty members whom you hope will write your letters of recommendation late fall. Do not wait until the summer break, as faculty members are often unavailable. Many federal judges are following the federal hiring plan and will not interview 2L candidate until June after your 2L year (going into 3L year).
- Continue to focus on your coursework. Many 2Ls overburden themselves with activities and other programs. While these are important, your coursework and grades should not suffer as a result.
- Apply for a judicial externship for 3L year through the [Externship Program](#)
- Become a Research Assistant for a professor. It will help cultivate a relationship with a potential recommender and allow you to strengthen your research and writing skills.
- Consider taking LCR III - Writing for Trial and Appellate Judges or Legal Writing in Judicial Chambers.
- **Depending on applications, finalize/send materials spring 2L/summer into 3L.**

Third Year:

- Study. Your academic performance is still important.
- Depending on the court, prepare and send your application materials.

APPENDIX D

BREAKDOWN OF CLERKSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Federal Courts

- U.S. Supreme Court
- U.S. Circuit Courts of Appeal
 - 13 Circuits in all: The eleven numbered, and the Federal and DC Circuits
- U.S. District Courts
 - 94 in all; this is the trial division of the federal courts
- U.S. Bankruptcy Courts
 - Each judicial district has a bankruptcy court which acts as a separate unit of that court
- Special Courts:
 - U.S. Court of Federal Claims
 - U.S. Court of International Trade
 - U.S. Tax Court
 - U.S. Court of Veterans Claims
 - U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces

State Courts

- High Court
- Intermediate Court of Appeals
- Trial Level Court
- Tax Court
- Courts of Special or Limited Jurisdiction (vary by state, but may include: District, County or Municipal Courts; Juvenile or Family Courts; Probate Court; Commercial Court; and Criminal Court)

Administrative Agencies

Approximately 29 Federal Government Departments and Agencies have Administrative Law Judges (ALJs):

- Department of Agriculture
- Commodity Futures Trading Commission
- Department of Education
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Federal Communications Commission
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
- Federal Labor Relations
- Federal Maritime Commission
- Federal Mine Safety & Health Review Commission
- Federal Trade Commission
- Departmental Appeals Board (part of the Department of Health & Human Services)
- Food & Drug Administration (part of the Department of Health & Human Services)
- Department of Housing & Urban Development
- Department of the Interior
- International Trade Commission
- Drug Enforcement Agency (part of the Department of Justice)
- Executive Office for Immigration Review (part of the Department of Justice)

- Department of Labor
- National Labor Relations Board
- National Transportation Safety Board
- Occupational Safety & Health Review Commission
- Office of Financial Institution Adjudication
- Securities & Exchange Commission
- Small Business Administration
- Social Security Administration
- Department of Transportation, Office of the Secretary
- U.S. Postal Service
- Department of Veterans Affairs Board of Veterans' Appeals

Tribal Courts

Native American tribal courts are generally established by an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal government whose function is the resolution of disputes and/or the punishment of offenses through the application of tribal law. Tribal courts may be established under a tribal constitution or other tribal law. Most tribal trial courts are of general jurisdiction with a varied trial docket. In the civil context, tribal trial courts might hear issues ranging from family-related conflicts to environmental law violations. Many tribal trial courts will hear criminal cases, but due to the complex nature of criminal jurisdiction on Tribal territories, the types of crimes are limited.

APPENDIX E

How to Address Justices and Judges in Your Correspondence & Letters of Recommendation

It is important to correctly address your letters to judges and justices in various courts. Remember that they are “Justices” if they sit on a “Supreme Court” - which includes state supreme courts! [See Orange CORE Resource Library for Resume and Cover Letter Resources.](#)

It is helpful to faculty support if you provide your recommenders with a spreadsheet of the judges that you intend to apply to - that way they can “personalize” your cover letter by including the judge/justices name and mailing address.

Sample fields for Mail Merge (which can also be used for your Cover Letters!**²) Copy and paste fields in Excel spreadsheet

| Title | First Name | Initial | Last Name | Suffix | Court | Address 1 | Address 2 | Address 3 | City | State | Zip | Salutation: [Dear xxxx Last Name] |
|---------------|------------|---------|-----------|--------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|----------|-------|------------|---|
| Chief Judge | John | A. | Smith | Jr. | U.S. Court of Appeals | 100 Federal Building | U.S. Federal Courthouse | 123 Main Street | New York | NY | 12345-1234 | Chief Judge |
| The Honorable | Jane | A. | Smith | | U.S. Court of Appeals | 100 Federal Building | U.S. Federal Courthouse | 123 Main Street | New York | NY | 12345-1234 | Judge |

Who to ask for a letter of recommendation

- Assume 3 are required unless judge notes otherwise.
- Recommenders should be those who will write the strongest, most detailed letters and who know your writing. Meet with them and provide them with information about yourself to help them write strong letters.

² Once you have created your spreadsheet: [Mail merge instructions](#)