

Clerkships 101:

Jumpstart Your Judicial Job Search



JUMPSTART your *JUDICIAL* Job Search!

WHY WORK FOR A JUDGE?

Working for a judge gives you a unique opportunity to enhance your legal writing and research skills while observing law “in action” from the perspective of a judge. You will gain valuable insight into what makes a good lawyer, a persuasive brief, and an effective oral argument, as well as knowledge about courtroom procedures and state/federal law. Additionally, you are likely to form close personal relationships with your judge(s) that lead to long-term friendships and mentoring. Many private and public sector employers recognize the value of these positions and prefer applicants that have this experience.

You may choose to work for a judge during your law school career, or after you’ve graduated. **During your law school career**, you may choose to have a **judicial internship or externship**, working either full or part-time with a judge and his/her law clerk(s) during the school year or over the summer. As an intern/extern, you would be assisting the judge and law clerk(s) in researching legal issues, drafting memoranda or decisions, and observing courtroom proceedings.

After graduation, you may work for a judge or court for a one or two year term in a professional **judicial clerkship**. As a judicial clerk, you would be conducting legal research, drafting of opinions, preparing bench memoranda, advising the judge(s) on the resolution of motions, assisting the judge during court proceedings, and directly handling inquiries from litigants.

WHERE CAN I WORK FOR A JUDGE?

You can work for a judge at the state or federal level in courts of general jurisdiction, for an administrative law judge ([ALJ](#)), or in [specialized tribunals](#). You can work for a trial-level judge, where the emphasis will be on procedure and the practical application of the law, or you can work for an appellate-level judge, where the emphasis will be a more academic examination of the law, procedure, and theory. Finally, you can work for a judge by serving in a [staff attorney’s office](#), providing legal research, writing, and advisement for the court.

Key Resources for Researching Judges and Courts

- **Judicial Yellow Book (Leadership Directory Series)**
(Access online through the “Useful Resources” box on the Judicial page of the OCPD website.) Provides contact information (mailing addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers and email addresses) and biographical information for federal (trial and appellate) and state (appellate only) judges. Once you have logged in, choose “Judicial” under “Browse” and then expand the pluses on the left to see all court listings. <http://lo.bvdep.com/default.asp?curp=1>
- **BNA’s Directory of State and Federal Courts, Judges and Clerks**,
(Access online through the “Useful Resources” box on the Judicial page of the OCPD website.) Contains contact information (mailing addresses and phone numbers) for all federal and state judges (except for the state courts of limited jurisdiction), as well as diagrams explaining court structure and jurisdiction. <http://courtdirectory.bna.com/ctdw/htm/index.htm>
- **Administrative Law Judge Clerkships**
ALJ agencies may hire law clerks (also called Attorney Advisors in some settings), but they do not have a uniform means of posting vacancies. Check USAJobs for Attorney Advisor positions, but be prepared to contact agencies directly. Consult [NALP’s ALJ \(OCPD Judicial section\)](#) spreadsheet as a starting point.

HOW DO I LOCATE OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK FOR A JUDGE?

- For **internships**, check [CareerLink](#) for postings, and call chambers directly if you are interested in their court. Start researching at least three (3) to five (5) months before you wish to work there.
- For **externships**, start by contacting Avis Sanders in the [WCL Externship Office](#) and accessing the [Externship Database](#) on her website.
- For **judicial clerkships at the federal level**, opportunities are listed on the Online System for Clerkship Application and Review ([OSCAR](#)), including the judge, the court, the location, the term start/end dates, and the application instructions and deadlines. If a judge is listed on OSCAR but their hiring information is “greyed out,” contact chambers to inquire unless specifically prohibited. [Judicial clerkships for ALJs](#) are found on USA Jobs or by contacting the agency directly.

- For **judicial clerkships at the state level**, opportunities are listed on the individual court website, but it is best to start with the [Vermont Law School Guide to Judicial Clerkships](#), which lists clerkship opportunities by state, court, division, application instructions and deadlines, and occasionally, salary. Always be sure to independently verify this information with the court directly. State clerkships in the DC Metro area (300 mi. radius) are posted to [CareerLink](#) as they are made known to OCPD.

Key Resources for Locating Opportunities to Work for a Judge

- **CareerLink** (<https://law-american-csm.symphlicity.com/students/>) Within the jobs & resume collection section, choose Judicial Clerkship as the Position Type to see judicial clerkship openings (mostly state courts). Choose the Temporary or Summer Position Types, with Judicial as the practice area, to find judicial internship openings.
- **Online System for Clerkship Application and Review (OSCAR)** – *Only for Federal Judicial Clerkships* (<https://oscar.uscourts.gov/>) Several hundred federal judges are using this Internet-based application system to hire clerks.
- **The Guide to State Judicial Clerkship Procedures (Vermont Law)** – *Only for State Judicial Clerkships* (<https://www.wcl.american.edu/career/gsjc/index.cfm>) Provides a general overview of the hiring process for the courts within each state. The username/password changes annually and is listed in the Judicial section of the OCPD website.
- **WCL's Externship Database** – *Only for Judicial Externships* (www.wcl.american.edu/externship/externshipapp) Searchable database of externships, including judicial positions.

WHAT DO I SUBMIT WITH MY APPLICATION TO WORK FOR A JUDGE?

For **internships/externships**, be sure to follow the directions in the posting, or ask when you inquire about opportunities. Typically, your internship/externship application packet will mirror that for a judicial clerkship.

For a **judicial clerkship** application, you will need to submit a cover letter, resume, writing sample, law school transcript/grades, and two (2) or three (3) [letters of recommendation](#). [An overview of each piece](#) of your application can be found on the OCPD website in the Judicial Section.

WHEN DO I APPLY TO WORK FOR A JUDGE?

For **internships/externships**, follow the instructions on the posting, but begin your application process at least three (3) to five (5) months before you want to work.

For **judicial clerkships at the federal level**, you are permitted to access OSCAR on a [read-only, research basis beginning June 1st](#) following your first year of law school. You may begin to apply to opportunities starting on August 1st following your first year of law school. Without a clear timeline for federal clerkship hiring, you may expect judges to start interviewing and selecting clerks *as early as* the fall of your second year of law school for clerkship terms beginning in the fall after you've graduated.

For **judicial clerkships at the state level**, you must pay attention to and closely follow the application instructions and deadlines posted by each judge and court, as they all vary from one another. Without a clear timeline for state clerkship hiring, you may expect judges to start interviewing and selecting clerks *as early as* the spring of your second year of law school for clerkship terms beginning in the fall after you've graduated.

HOW ELSE CAN I JUMPSTART MY JUDICIAL JOB SEARCH?

- Read [Behind the Bench: The Guide to Judicial Clerkships](#), by Debra M. Strauss, Esq. (*copies available in [OCPD Resource Library](#)*).
- Join the Judicial Clerkships [Faculty Practice Group](#); speak with faculty about clerking and applying.
- Join the OCPD Judicial Clerkships ListServ on CareerLink.
- Attend OCPD programs geared toward judicial clerkships, internships, and externships.
- Speak with WCL alumni who have interviewed with judges and served clerkships by visiting the **Judicial Clerkship Alumni Survey Database** http://intranet.wcl.american.edu/career/clerkship_search/ This searchable database includes feedback (e.g., clerkship experience, interview process, tips) and contact information from alumni who clerked with federal and state judges around the country.
- Visit the **Judicial Section of the OCPD Website** at www.wcl.american.edu/career/clerkships to learn more about application information, as well as Washington, DC specific details.
- Meet with the [Judicial Clerkship Advisor](#) in OCPD to discuss your questions and strategy. Make an appointment on CareerLink today!

Your Next Steps to Jumpstart Your Judicial Job Search

- 1. Intern/extern** with a judge/court during the school year or summer. This experience will distinguish you as an applicant, provide you with valuable writing samples, and can lead to a clerkship with that judge/court or a judge/court in the same jurisdiction.
2. Spend time now thinking about who you could ask for **letters of recommendation**. Make efforts to get to know professors, and think about taking classes/seeking out opportunities that will enable your professors to attest to the strength of your legal research and writing skills. Try working as a Dean's Fellow or research assistant, visiting professors during office hours, working with a professor on your upper level writing requirement, or taking a small seminar or clinic.
- 3.** Look for ways to develop **additional writing samples**. Seminars, clinics, moot court, internships, journal submissions, and volunteer brief writing projects are all excellent ways to gain additional writing experience. First, develop a strong piece of practical analytical writing—an IRAC-style brief or memo—and then focus on a more academic writing sample.
- 4.** Get your **GPA as high as possible**, and then work hard to keep it that way. Seek out academic counseling from the Office of Student Affairs if necessary.
- 5.** If you are on journal or a brief, seek out **editorial or executive board positions** as an upper level student. For all other extracurricular activities, seek out **leadership positions**.
- 6.** Talk to **current and former judicial clerks** about their clerkship experiences. Don't forget about WCL's Judicial Clerkship Alumni Survey Database. Contact OCPD for a list of alumni clerks.
- 7. Be flexible about the location and type** of post-graduate judicial clerkships. It is only one or two years, and the experience will be an asset for the rest of your career. Clerkships in the DMV area tend to be competitive and are numbered, so do expand your search beyond the DMV area.
- 8.** Consider all potential clerkships, including all levels of state courts, staff attorney positions, magistrate judge clerkships, pro se clerkships, and administrative law judge clerkships. In this legal market, **all clerkships are prestigious**; federal circuit and district court clerkships are only *some* of the amazing opportunities available.
- 9. Research application timelines now.** Each court/judge follows its own hiring schedule, and there is no longer reliable predictability as to when postings will appear or hiring decisions be made. For federal circuit and district court clerkships, you may now begin applying to posted vacancies as early as the summer before your 2L year. State court hiring is traditionally a bit later than federal courts, but this may change given the new hiring landscape.
- 10.** Subscribe to the **Judicial listserv**, join the **Judicial Clerkship Faculty Practice Group**, and make an effort to **attend events** here at WCL and around the city (bar association meetings, etc.) to ensure that you are well-informed and up-to-date. ;
- 11. Make an appointment with the Assistant Dean Traci M. Jenkins, on CareerLink to discuss your judicial job search options.**