

Guide to Judicial Clerkships

Symlicity Profile

Only students who have listed "Clerkship/Judicial" in the job preference section of their Symlicity profiles will continue to receive information about judicial clerkships. If you need help entering your information, contact Kim Bunge at kbunge@indiana.edu, 855-8433.

What Does A Clerk Do?

The responsibilities of a judicial clerk vary, depending on the type of court and the specific judge. A judicial clerk is considered the judge's "right hand person," which usually means that he or she will be performing tasks such as legal research, drafting of memoranda and court opinions, proofing and cite checking.

Why Apply For A Clerkship?

Clerkships have been described as invaluable to one's legal career. Judicial clerkships usually last one or two years, and are the perfect transition between law school and the practice of law. Clerks obtain a "top down" access to the judicial process - an experience that many employers view as priceless. A judicial clerk is exposed to a number of legal issues and is often able to take part in the judicial decision-making process. Being in close contact with a judge gives a clerk an insider's view of the law and court system, and also facilitates incredible contacts and personal relationships that last throughout one's legal career.

Process and Procedures

For Federal Judicial Clerkships, applications cannot be received before the Wednesday after Labor Day each year. For other judicial clerkships, the application process and deadline dates vary. You should check with the individual courts to be sure you are following their requirements. Regardless of the court you are applying to, if you want the Office of Career & Professional Development to prepare your materials you must follow all the guidelines below.

In the Spring Semester of the student's second year, prior to submitting applications, each student must meet with a faculty member of the law school's Clerkship Committee or their designees to discuss strategies for applying.

The Law School will merge, copy, and print clerkship applications (cover letters, resumes, transcripts, writing samples and letters of recommendation) through the OCPD. The school is

willing to process up to 100 paper applications per student. Student needs to electronically submit a list of judges to whom they wish to apply, including their court (United States Court of Appeals for the xth Circuit; United States District Court for the xth District of Y state, etc); a copy of their resume, a copy of their cover letter and a copy of a writing sample. All of this **MUST** be submitted electronically to kbunge@indiana.edu. The student is also responsible for lining up faculty members to write letters of recommendation and providing a list of judges to the faculty.

The OCPD will develop a merge list for the purpose of cover letters, letters of recommendation and mailing labels and will print all of those documents for the student. In addition the OCPD will print and copy the student's resume, transcript and writing samples - for up to 100 applications with no cost to the student. There will be a charge for any application material printed by OCPD that exceeds the limit of 100 or for any reprints needed based on student mistakes or changes in their documents. Responsibility for packaging and mailing the packets will rest with the student. Although we will strive to complete any materials submitted to us, OCPD cannot guarantee the completion of any material needed based on student mistakes, changes in their documents or late submissions.

The deadline for submitting cover letters and your list of judges to OCPD is in early July prior to the student's third year. The deadline for submitting resumes and writing samples is early August. Student packets will be available in the OCPD at the end of August for signing of cover letters and the packaging and mailing by the student.

Applications Packages

Most judges will require the following documents as part of your application package:

- Cover Letter
- Resume
- Writing Sample
- Transcript
- 2 - 3 Letters of Recommendation

COVER LETTER

Your letter should include:

- Your status as a student at Indiana University Maurer School of Law - Bloomington, and your year of graduation.
- The term for which you are applying (i.e. the 2009-2010 term)
- The items enclosed (resume, transcript, writing sample, recommendations)
- The names and phone numbers of your recommenders, and their titles or relationship to you (a professor for whom you serve as a research assistant).
- Your contact information (which will probably be the header of your letter)
- Any travel plans you have that would facilitate a visit to the judge's chambers for an interview. Judges know that you are personally incurring interview travel expenses, and may be willing to accommodate your schedule.

You may expand your cover letter to include particular information relevant to the clerkship, including:

- A connection to the court's geographical area, and/or a desire to practice law in that area
- If, in fact, you really do know this judge's work and very much want to work for him/her, an explanation of the impact the judge's work has had on your desire to clerk
- Any personal connection (e.g., the professor for whom you serve as research assistant knows the judge and recommended that you apply to clerk for him/her)
- If the judge has not historically hired from Indiana Law, you might include information about the law school's ranking, prominent professors, or well-known alumni.
- Current courses that do not yet appear on your transcript, if relevant to the clerkship, e.g., Evidence, Federal Courts, Jurisdiction, Criminal Procedure, or any judicial externships.

RESUME

Your clerkship resume need not differ substantially from the resume you use for other employment, but you might consider adding the following if they are not already on your resume:

- GPA and class rank
- Pre-law school experience, such as management, entrepreneurial ventures, or

other ventures that demonstrate interesting individual attributes

- Transferable or relevant skills, such as foreign languages, community service or travel
- Resist the impulse to add so much that you're required to drastically reduce margins or print size. Don't go smaller than .75" margins, or 11 point type and it should be one page in length.

WRITING SAMPLE

The most frequently asked questions about writing samples are: what type and how long?

- **Type:** If you're applying to a trial court, choose a practical document such as a brief or memorandum. These are also appropriate for an appellate court, but you might choose a more theoretical or policy-oriented paper for higher courts. If you choose to use a writing sample from summer employment, always check with your employer for permission, and indicate that authorization on the sample. Always redact names of clients and identifying information. Even if you are submitting a document that has become public, it is important for you to demonstrate to the judge that you understand the importance of confidentiality. You should always introduce your writing sample with an explanation of the purpose and context in which the sample was prepared. The work should be original and unedited. Although it is tempting to use a published law review article, these generally undergo an exhaustive review and editing process that make them inappropriate as an example of your original work, although an early draft would probably be acceptable.
- **Length:** The sample must be long enough to demonstrate your legal reasoning and analytical abilities, and your organizational skills, but should not be so long as to be burdensome to read. Ten to twelve pages is a good number to keep in mind, even if it means that you must use an excerpt from a longer work (and of course you'll include an introduction and possibly a concluding statement to put the excerpt in context). A judge will simply stop reading a writing sample once they are convinced for your writing capability or read the entire sample if it is one in which they are interested.

TRANSCRIPT

You must include a current law school transcript, which you can obtain from your Symplicity account. Some judges will also want an undergraduate transcript. Neither need be official, unless the judge so requires.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Choose three people for whom you have done exceptional work, who will be able to speak warmly and enthusiastically about your abilities, particularly your legal research and writing skills. Ideally, you will use law professors and judges (if you have worked closely with a judge through an externship program). You might also choose an attorney with whom you have clerked, particularly if this person is prominent in the area where the judge is located. Do not use undergraduate college professors, family members, or celebrities (Presidents, Governors, or Senators, unless you have actually performed professional duties under their supervision, and they know you and your work very well).

Timelines for Applications

State:

The timeline for applying for state judicial clerkships varies according to the court and even within courts by judge. Check the 2007 Guide to State Judicial Clerkship Procedures (Contacts / Useful Links / State Government or State Judicial) to locate state courts.

Federal:

Only currently rising 3Ls and graduates are eligible to apply for federal judicial clerkships for the next annual year term. All applications should be mailed out so they are received beginning the Wednesday after Labor Day. The judges have a 5 day reading period and then begin setting up interviews. Check OCPD for specific mailing dates each year.

References

Most judges, federal or state, want 2 or 3 written letters of recommendation from professors or judges. Contact your references before leaving for your second summer to ask them for letters of recommendation, in order to have them when you need them (Reminder: federal judges have a standardized hiring schedule; state judges do not so you may need to reach out to your recommenders earlier or later for state judges based on their deadlines.) Once a faculty member agrees to write the letter you should get them the list of judges as soon as possible. All faculty letters for federal clerkships must be sent to the OCPD for merging and printing - specific date to be posted annually..

What are Judges Looking For in Clerks?

Since, in most cases, you are not known by the judges to whom you are applying, judges will look for objective or standard indicators of abilities, such as grades, writing skills, journal membership, and law school activities, when selecting candidates for interviews. As a general

rule, the more prestigious the position, the higher those standards will be.

- **GRADES:** Successful federal judicial clerkship candidates are often in the top 10 and 20% for circuit and district courts respectively. State Supreme Courts and Court of Appeals generally look for candidates in the top 20% and 30% of the class respectively. Remember these are only loose guidelines and there are regularly exceptions to the rule.
- **WRITING SKILLS:** Clerks spend the majority of their time performing research and writing, and judges want to see evidence (i.e., your writing sample) that the applicant has highly developed practical skills.
- **JOURNAL/MOOT COURT EXPERIENCE:** Because these activities demonstrate research and writing ability, judges value them. Journal is generally given greater weight than moot court.
- **REFERENCES:** Critical. Most judges (federal and state) require two or three references. References from faculty members and other judges carry more weight (usually) than letters from employers. List your references in your cover letter.
- **CHARISMA:** Obviously this won't have much effect on your application, but your ability to get along well with everyone in the judge's chambers is very important. Judges want to feel that you are trustworthy, competent, polite, and respectful of everyone with whom you will be working.
- **GEOGRAPHIC CONNECTION:** If you have a connection to the geographic area where the clerkship is located, great. This appears to be more important to state court judges than federal judges, but to the extent that all judges believe that the clerkship is an investment in the future bar of the area, it will work for you if you're connected.

Finding Clerkship Vacancies

- Judicial Clerkships - <http://www.judicialclerkships.com>
- The Nation's Court Directory - <http://www.courts.net>
- OSCAR (online system for Clerkship application & review) - <https://oscar.symplicity.com>

Finding Interested Judges

- Judges who have hired IU grads: Go to the OCPD website
- IU Faculty Clerkships: listed on the OCPD website

How to Research Judges

- Almanac of the Federal Judiciary
- The American Bench
- State and Federal Clerks - <http://www.courts.net>
- BNA Directory of State and Federal Courts, Judges and Clerks
- Directory of Minority Judges of the United States
- Lexis/Nexis

Judicial Clerkship Information

Web Sites

Created by author of [Behind the Bench](#) as comprehensive clearinghouse of judicial clerkship information

Federal Law Clerk Information System , permitting searches for federal clerkship vacancies, federal judges' biographies, new confirmations, and more

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions and other information regarding the federal law clerk hiring plan <http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/lawclerk.nsf/home?openform>

OCPD website: includes information about how and when to apply, resources, and lists of clerkships held by IU faculty and alumni

Print (available in OCPD library)

Behind the Bench: A Guide to Judicial Clerkships, Debra Strauss

Almanac of the Federal Judiciary

The American Bench

NALP State Judicial Clerkship Directory

Directory of Minority Judges of the United States

BNA Directory of State and Federal Courts, Judges and Clerks