

Pursuing a Judicial Clerkship

Why is a judicial clerkship a great first job after law school?

- Judicial clerks are an **integral part of the judicial system**. They have a unique opportunity to observe and understand the legal process.
- Judicial clerks **hone their legal skills**, through research and writing tasks under the direction of an experienced jurist and through observation of lawyers engaged in litigation.
- The experience judicial clerks gain makes them **more confident as practicing lawyers** and increases their marketability to future employers. Clerks are also exposed to many areas of the law, which can help them select future areas of interest.
- The position **opens doors in the legal community**. Judicial clerks typically develop close relationships with their judges, who can serve as important references in the future. They also become acquainted with lawyers in that community who practice before their judges.

How do I find out about opportunities and deadlines?

Here are the main resources:

- **Federal judicial clerkships.** Information on opportunities, requirements and other topics can be found on the Web site:
<https://lawclerks.ao.uscourts.gov>.
- **Minnesota judicial clerkships.** Career Development posts all notices of vacancies online as the notices are received and publicizes appellate court application deadlines in *The Docket*. Information on appellate clerkships and many district court clerkships is also available on www.courts.state.mn.us.
- **Clerkships from other states.** Each state differs in its application timelines. Consult the individual

state judicial sites and www.ncsc.org.

General guidelines for application deadlines:

- **Federal judicial clerkships.** Most federal appellate and district court judges participate in the coordinated federal judicial clerkship hiring plan, in which their **candidates apply in the late summer/early September before their last year of law school** for a one or two year term that would begin in late summer following graduation.

Consult the federal clerkship Web site

<https://lawclerks.ao.uscourts.gov> for specific timelines and requirements for clerkships you are interested in. Many judges only accept applications submitted online using the new OSCAR system. However, some judges continue to accept or prefer paper applications. Know your judges and find out from their current clerks the details on each judge's preferences and timelines for accepting applications.

- **Minnesota Supreme Court and Appeals Court.** The Minnesota Supreme Court and Appeals Court take applications from candidates in their **second year of law school** (or who are in their third year of a part time program). The one-year term starts in August after graduation.
- The Minnesota Supreme Court will hire 9-11 clerks, while the Minnesota Appeals Court will hire approximately 16 clerks. Applications are usually due in April and August, respectively. The announcements will be posted in *Symplicity* and at www.courts.state.mn.us.

Minnesota District Courts. There is no central process or timeline by which state district court judicial clerks are hired. State district court judges hire during the third or final year of law school or after graduation. Opportunities occur throughout the year and may also be available to recent graduates.

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- Be aware that many Minnesota district court clerkship openings are neither posted nor published. Rather, resumes are accepted during the year by the court administrator or by the judges. The length of the clerkship varies.
- **Judicial clerkships in other states.** Each state differs in its application timelines and procedures. Consult *The Guide to State Judicial Clerkship Procedures* in the Career Development Office and www.ncsc.org for specific information.

Do I have to be on Law Review and in the top 10 percent of my class?

Not necessarily. Judges select their clerks after consideration of several factors, including:

- **Grades.** The better your grades are, the greater your chances of obtaining a clerkship, particularly at the federal and state appellate level where competition is more intense. But with the extensive number of clerkships available, there are openings for those who are not in the top 10% of the class.
- **Law review.** Law review membership may be crucial for the most competitive clerkships.
- **Writing and advocacy programs.** The advanced writing and advocacy skills acquired in Moot Court and other competitions, research assistantships, judicial externships, and advanced legal writing coursework are valued by judges.
- **Legal work experience,** including work that is volunteer, paid or obtained in clinics.
- **Prior work experience.** Non-legal work experience can demonstrate maturity and a unique perspective and background that judges appreciate.

• **Interesting background and “fit” with the judge’s work style.** The final decision often rests on the judge’s determination of which candidate will “fit” best with the judge’s work style.

How long can I wait to decide after a judge offers me a judicial clerkship?

Judges expect that you will accept the judicial clerkship immediately. Therefore, you must withdraw your name from consideration as soon as you know you will not accept a judicial clerkship for which you have applied.

But can I afford to be a judicial clerk?

Judicial law clerks typically receive a salary that is less than the average salary for new graduates in private practice. The average salary for state judicial clerkships ranges from \$46,000 – \$60,700, with a complete state of Minnesota benefits package. Federal clerkships for new graduates have average salaries of \$51,800 – \$62,800 with full benefits. However, given the experience and connections to the legal community made by judicial clerks, many feel that this one or two year commitment is a wise investment in their future career paths.

Where can I get more information?

Consider purchasing or checking out from the library *Behind the Bench: The Guide to Judicial Clerkships*, written by Debra M. Strauss or *Judicial Clerkships, A Practical Guide*, written by Mary Dunnewold, Beth A. Honetschlager, and Brenda L. Tofte. These are comprehensive guides that will assist you in pursuing or positioning yourself for a judicial clerkship in the future.

You are also encouraged to utilize our staff, who can assist with resumes, cover letters, job search strategies and interview preparation.

Contact: careers@mitchellhamline.edu (651) 290-6326