

# Fellowships and Clerkships? Planning Issues in the New Regime

*Prepared by NALP's Judicial Clerkship Committee*

Now that most judges are hiring law clerks in the fall of third year, students interested in fellowships and clerkships have a new set of questions to consider in planning their applications. Major issues are highlighted below; these were culled from focus group meetings with public sector employers conducted by NALP's Judicial Clerkship Working Group in early 2003. Remember also to use the resources available to you—your public interest and clerkship advisors can talk through these questions with you, and can direct you to former clerks, fellows, or others who could offer helpful insights.

## **Your Clerkship Plans Will Matter—Find Out How**

Employers will probably ask you if you are concurrently applying for clerkships, and your answer will matter to them. The degree to which it matters will depend on the organization and the fellowship. For employers with their own fellowships, like the ACLU, it may mean that they interview more applicants to compensate for the fact that some will accept clerkships and withdraw from the pool. For those that sponsor candidates for project-based fellowships like Equal Justice Works, candidates' plans could be more significant, since losing a candidate in the fall could effectively shut them out of the fellowship cycle. Do not hesitate to ask about an organization's policies and views on clerkship applicants; you need that information early in the process to make an informed decision about your application plans for fellowships as well as clerkships.

## **Look Broadly**

This is hardly new advice, but it is particularly appropriate this year. If you are seeking a sponsor, look at a wide variety of organizations—some organizations may turn you down if you are applying for clerkships, while others will be more accepting. Consider also a broad range of fellowships—fellowships within organizations, schools, or government entities may have more flexibility. Similarly, if you consider a wide range of judges, you have more chances to find those who are well-matched to your interests and skills and who are hiring on a timetable that works for you.

## **Talk Frankly with Potential Sponsoring Organizations**

Find out how you would fit into an organization's plans if you also apply for clerkships. Will the organization sponsor clerkship applicants? Would the organization's decision depend on your project proposal? Some organizations may be willing to sponsor a clerkship applicant who has developed his or her own project, but less willing to sponsor someone for a project that the organization has developed to meet its core mission. Is the organization willing to sponsor multiple candidates for similar projects? For different projects? If so, how would the organization rank the candidates?

## **Consider Different Timing Scenarios**

Think about whether it makes more sense to concentrate on one set of applications in a given year. For example, you might focus on fellowship applications this year and wait until next year to consider clerkship applications, or vice versa. Both the fellowship and clerkship processes are highly competitive. If you want to apply sequentially, consider which sequence would work best for you—based on your enthusiasm for each option, your relative strengths and weaknesses as a candidate in each arena, and any time limitations or other restrictions placed on applicants for different fellowships. Even if you apply for both in the same year, remember that you do not have to apply at the same time. You may be able to apply to early-hiring judges, then to fellowships with late fall deadlines if you have not obtained a clerkship. If you decide to concentrate on fellowships early, you are likely to find some judges still hiring after the fellowship decisions are made—you just cannot predict how many or where.

Check out the full report, "The New Face of Fall Hiring: The Effects of the New Judicial Clerk Hiring Plan on Other Hiring Practices" on NALP's web site at [www.nalp.org/jobseekers/clerk\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.nalp.org/jobseekers/clerk_rpt.pdf) (in PDF format) for a more detailed discussion of these and other ideas. For more detailed information on the law clerk hiring plan, visit [www.cadc.uscourts.gov/lawclerk](http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/lawclerk).