

---

# A Toolkit for Creating a Regional Judicial Clerkship Database:

## The Northwest Consortium of Law Schools Model

---

### Background

State court judicial clerkships provide recent graduates with opportunities to enhance their legal skills and develop relationships with respected individuals in the community. While opportunities to clerk for state courts abound, identifying these opportunities can be difficult. Unlike federal judges who can publish clerkship hiring information on the Federal Law Clerk Information System (FLCIS) and the Online System for Clerkship Application and Review (OSCAR), state judges and courts have no centralized mechanism for collecting and publishing clerkship hiring information. Vermont Law School goes a long way in filling the gap by compiling — and making available to other schools by subscription — general information *by court* in its annual *Guide to State Judicial Clerkship Procedures*. But currently no national resource lists state clerkships *by individual judge*. The NALP Judicial Clerkship Section’s State Court Work Group alternatively presents this toolkit for creating a regional database based on an existing model from the Northwest Consortium of Law Schools. Schools in other regions hopefully can adopt and adapt the model for their particular needs.

### The Northwest Consortium of Law Schools Model

The Northwest (NW) Consortium of Law Schools is a group of law schools that work together on various projects including the topic of this kit, the Judicial Clerkship Database Project. The NW Consortium has developed a common website and database designed to assist students at the sponsoring law schools in locating judicial clerkships. Consortium members include, in alphabetical order: Arizona State University, Brigham Young University, Gonzaga University, Lewis & Clark College, Seattle

University, University of Arizona, University of Idaho, University of Oregon, University of Utah, University of Washington, and Willamette University.

Each school is responsible for contacting the judges in a certain geographic region and inputting their data into the system. There is one URL and password for users and a different URL and password for editing. Each school has an individualized password for editing purposes. The record automatically updates with the date it was last edited and the school’s name. This makes it easy to determine if each school is performing their updates.

One school is the “host” school, meaning the database is stored on its servers. In addition, the host school controls password access and monitors the completion of assignments. In the following discussion, the logistical, technical, and other requirements will be explained.

The site contains information about judicial clerkship vacancies and application procedures and requirements. The database allows students to search by judge’s last name, court type, vacancy date, and/or state. Students can search by one or several criteria to learn about judges and clerkship opportunities. The database does not offer students downloadable information such as addresses for mailing labels. School administrators do have the ability to download information into a delimited text (CSV) format and manipulate that information according to the school’s needs. Figure A on page 2 is a screen shot of the school administrator view. The student/user view is almost identical, but does not have the function tabs at the bottom of the screen, nor does it indicate who updated the record.

The NW Consortium database is designed to handle input for all 50 states. However, the focus has been on obtaining and updating information about the judges in the western states, where students from the NW Consortium schools tend to apply most frequently. Currently, the database contains information for judges in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Washington.

# Steps to Creating a Judicial Clerkship Database

## A. Determine which regions you want to include.

Gather some data about where your most recent graduates have sought state or federal clerkships. Prioritize the regions or states you want to include in your database.

## B. Determine levels of clerkships to include: federal and/or state.

Evaluate the resources already available to your students. With OSCAR and the FLCIS, you may want to begin by compiling information on the harder-to-locate state court clerkships. The NW Consortium database contains information about both federal and state clerkships, at the trial and appellate levels. However, the NW Consortium does not contact and gather information from OSCAR and FLCIS judges; it simply references those websites in the database. It does contact federal judges who are not listed in either the FLCIS or OSCAR and inputs details about their clerkships into the database. If you similarly decide to contact federal judges, try to use wording that subtly encourages them to use the national resources (e.g., “We did not find recent information about your clerkships in the

FLCIS or OSCAR, so we wanted to ask about your hiring plans/status.”)

## C. Decide what information you want to collect and make available to students.

What fields/criteria will they be able to search? Think about what information students will use to research potential clerkships or how they might want to use the database. For consistency’s sake, you should require all schools to enter data and titles using the same format (e.g. “May 18, 2008” or “US Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit”).

## D. Decide who your partners will be for this project.

Who are your already existing consortia members? Are there other schools in your region? Are there other schools that would have an interest in the same regions? If you do not have a consortia of law schools you work with already, think about who your natural partners may be for this project. By partnering with other schools, you share the burden of collecting the information rather than

### Judicial Clerkship Database System

<p><b>Judge Number:</b> 0032</p> <p><b>Name:</b> Judge Edna Turnblat</p> <p><b>Court:</b> US Court of Appeals for the 1st Circuit</p> <p><b>Address:</b> 123 Anywhere Street Anytown, AK 12345</p> <p><b>Court Type:</b> CRCT    <b>Federal Circuit:</b> 1st</p> <p><b>Next Hire:</b> 2008 Fall</p> <p><b># of Positions:</b> 2</p> <p><b>Apply By:</b> October 2007</p> <p><b>For:</b> 2008-2009 Term</p>	<p><b>Hiring Criteria:</b> Practically perfect in every way.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Cover Letter</b>                      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Resume</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Writing Sample</b>                      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Transcripts</b></p> <p><b>Letters of Recommendation:</b> 5</p> <p><b>Application Notes:</b></p> <p><b>Salary:</b> \$100,000    <b># of Clerks:</b> 5</p> <p><b>Schools of Clerks:</b> Hogwarts</p> <p><b>Years of Term:</b> 1            <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Bar Required</b></p> <p><b>Contact Person:</b> Troy Bolton</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Extern for Credit</b></p> <p><b>Apply By:</b> March Each Year</p> <p><b>Following Federal Law Clerk Hiring Plan:</b> Yes</p> <p><b>Updated:</b> 12/3/2007    by CONSORTIUM</p>
--	--

Edit Record Edit Judge Number Delete Location Main

**Figure A.**  
A screen shot of the school administrator view of the NW database. The student/user view is almost identical, but does not have the function tabs at the bottom of the screen, nor does it indicate who updated the record.

each school “reinventing the wheel” and making duplicate phone calls to the same judges. In turn, all of your students will get the benefit of your joint efforts.

### **E. Determine how to divide the work.**

Each spring, NW Consortium members meet and divide the workload for updating the database. Usually, work is divided by zip code/metro area and the school, or schools in that area take that region because they already have a working relationship with those judges. If a school takes a particular region, they are responsible for gathering information on all the federal and state judges in that area. The size of the career services staff and size of a school’s student body are also taken into consideration when assigning regions for updates. Larger areas with more judges may get assigned to larger schools with more staff available to gather the information. However, you may want to collect information from a region and have no logical “partner” schools in that area. In that case, it’s usually a matter of staffing — better staffed schools may agree to take those regions or you could devise a system to rotate the work year to year among different school members. In the NW Consortium, *changes* in assignments are rarely made as most schools have established patterns of working with certain judges.

### **F. Discuss how to gather and process information.**

How will the information be collected from each judge? Some NW Consortium schools have summer work study clerks who call each judge’s chambers to gather the needed information. Other schools do a postcard or mailing to each judge, asking them to review the current information and send back corrections if needed.

How will information be input into the database or collected? The NW Consortium database allows for direct input by each Consortium member using a “backdoor” editor password. The host school can view the database to see when updates were last done and by whom. The database automatically updates the date and the school name if any changes are made to a particular record.

### **G. Determine the timeline.**

When will your deadline be for collecting information/updating your portion of the database? Consortium members agree on a deadline date. Usually, NW Consortium members agree on a deadline that is two months from the time of the assignment, and all updates must be in the system by that date. Because the Consortium usually meets in May to assign regions, updates are done over the summer months. Summer is also a slower time of year for most career services offices and it is easier to set aside the time to collect the information.

BYU is the host school for the NW Consortium database and has control over the password that allows students to access the information once it is complete. BYU can change the password if needed and provide it only to the schools that have completed their updates by the deadline. This “carrot” tends to keep schools on task.

## **Technical Requirements**

There are a number of databases which can store judicial clerkship information, and choosing one will involve discussions with your information technology staff and your partner schools. The NW Consortium Database is a simple relational database system on a HP Alpha-Server ES40 running Tru-64 Unix. The system is written in Perl 5.0 and Javascript 1.6. It requires secure socket layer (SSL) technology to keep username/password, address and other personal information transmissions encrypted.

As the host school, BYU also has an administrative password which allows them to run reports, clear out the system easily and change pop down menus (i.e. date or court options).

## **Conclusion**

A regional database has proven to be a very useful tool for providing a breadth of information quickly to a large group of students. For questions, feel free to contact NW Consortium members Beth Hansen of BYU Law School (hansenb@law.byu.edu) or Ellen Jones of Lewis & Clark Law School (ekjones@lclark.edu).