

**“Judicial Clerkships: From Mainstream to Off the Beaten Path”**  
**NALP Educational Conference Session, April 30, 2010**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT CLERKSHIPS AND CLERKSHIP  
APPLICATIONS**

**What is a clerkship?**

Individual judges at almost all levels of the state and federal judiciaries employ recent law school graduates as clerks to assist them in their duties. In addition, some state supreme courts and federal courts of appeals employ recent graduates as staff attorneys who work for the court as a whole on such matters as preliminary motions and *pro se* appeals. Most clerkships are for one or two year terms.

The nature of a law clerk’s work varies with the court and with the individual judge. In general, however, judicial clerks research legal issues in cases, observe and participate in various judicial proceedings, and write draft opinions and/or advisory memoranda for their judges.

**Why encourage your students or incoming associates to clerk?**

Working for a judge can provide enormous and otherwise unavailable insight into the legal system, the nature of the judicial process, and the business of being a lawyer. Clerks have an opportunity to work for and develop a close personal relationship with a senior government official in an essential part of the legal system. A clerkship provides an incomparable training ground for improving one’s research and writing, analytical skills, and even time management abilities. It serves as an excellent bridge from formal legal education to the practice of law. The expertise gained through the clerkship is valuable to litigators and transactional attorneys alike – see the article titled “The Value of Judicial Clerkships to a Transactional Career” in the January 2009 issue of the *NALP Bulletin* for further information about the value of clerkships to attorneys in a transactional practice.

Law firms and other legal employers recognize the value of a clerkship to a new lawyer. Many firms give an associate coming from a clerkship credit in both salary and seniority. Further, in the “internal market” of the firm, a clerkship can help a new hire to stand out from many of the other associates.

**How do candidates apply for clerkships?**

Typically, a clerkship application consists of:

1. Brief Cover Letter,
2. Résumé,
3. Writing Sample(s),
4. Law School Transcript, and
5. Letters of Recommendation or List of References.

Judges may receive hundreds or even thousands of applications for each position. Usually, the current clerks will screen the applications and present 10-20 strong candidates to the judge, and the judge selects 2 to 10 applicants to interview. The interviews usually focus heavily on fit between the chambers and the candidate, rather than on substantive legal issues.

### **Where can I find more information about clerkships?**

#### **General information:**

<http://www.law.umich.edu/currentstudents/careerservices/Documents/ClerkshipManual2011Term.pdf>

<http://www.law.umaryland.edu/students/careers/sectors/judicial.html>

<http://www.law.northwestern.edu/career/clerkships>

#### **Domestic Clerkships:**

<http://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/lawclerk.nsf> - the Federal Law Clerk Hiring Plan

<https://oscar.uscourts.gov> - the Online System for Clerkship Application and Review

<http://www.ncsconline.org/> - National Center for State Courts website

<http://forms.vermontlaw.edu/career/guides/> - Vermont Guide to State Court Clerkships (subscription required; most career services offices have the password)

#### **International Clerkships:**

<http://www.ncscinternational.org> - International court links

[http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/CDO\\_Public/IntltribunalsPUBLIC-cdo-FINAL2008.pdf](http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/CDO_Public/IntltribunalsPUBLIC-cdo-FINAL2008.pdf)

- Yale Guide to Opportunities With International Tribunals and Foreign Courts