

Clerking in the Windy City Beyond the Article IIIs

ILLINOIS STATE COURT HIRING PRACTICES

An excerpt from NALP's Judicial Clerkship Section's
Insight and Inside Information for Select State Court Clerkships

This handout is NOT intended for dissemination to students. It is intended as a "desk reference" for career advisors.

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court Justices almost universally have career law clerks. Applicants interested in securing a clerkship should have a demonstrated connection to the area as well as some practical post-graduate legal experience. It seems as though some justices consistently hire from particular law schools.

ILLINOIS APPELLATE COURT

The Appellate Court is divided into Districts. Generally, there are no term clerk positions as most judges have career clerks. These judges seem to prefer applicants with some post-graduate legal experience over recent graduates. Increasingly, there seems to be a trend to hire law clerks that have served (or are currently serving) on the court as Staff Attorneys. Applicants should do a bit of research - beyond mere geography - before applying to any particular appellate district. The first and second appellate districts tend to be the most active districts and engage staff attorneys in more matters. This additional experience can be helpful to the candidate who ultimately wants to transition into a law clerk position on the court.

ILLINOIS CIRCUIT COURT

The Circuit Courts encourage applicants to check with individual judges regarding their clerkship requirements. It seems, however, that the only Circuit that hires with any regularity is Cook County. The individual judges in Cook County will consider recent law school graduates for clerkships. Applicants should demonstrate their connection to the area in their cover letter and/or resume.

More information is available at <http://illinoiscourts.gov>

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 2/17/15

POSITION DESCRIPTION

- Q: What are the qualifications for the position of staff law clerk?*
- Q: How do the job responsibilities of staff law clerks compare to those of chambers law clerks?*
- Q: How does the salary for staff law clerks compare to that of chambers law clerks?*
- Q: Is there an upper limit to how many years out of law school an applicant may be?*
- Q: When does the position start?*
- Q: Is this a term position?*

GENERAL APPLICATION

- Q: Do you follow the Federal Judges Law Clerk Hiring Plan?*
- Q: Do you ever hire staff law clerks mid-year?*
- Q: When do you begin accepting applications?*
- Q: When do you stop considering applications?*
- Q: Must I have a law degree to apply?*
- Q: Must I pass a bar exam as a condition of employment?*
- Q: Must I be a U.S. citizen to apply?*
- Q: What documents do you require as part of a complete application?*
- Q: How should I submit my application?*
- Q: To whom should I address my cover letter?*
- Q: Can I send my application through the U.S. Mail?*
- Q: Can I send my application via fax or e-mail?*
- Q: Can I drop off my application in person?*
- Q: Can you let me know if you received my application?*
- Q: Do all of the application materials need to be submitted together?*
- Q: How long does the application and hiring process take?*
- Q: How will I be notified if you are interested in interviewing me?*
- Q: Will I be notified if my application is no longer being considered? How do I know if my application is still under consideration?*
- Q: Will you keep my application on file for consideration the following year?*

TRANSCRIPT

- Q: Do you require an official transcript?*
- Q: How should grade sheets or transcripts be submitted?*

WRITING SAMPLES

- Q: What do you mean by "self-edited" writing samples?*
- Q: How many pages should a writing sample be?*
- Q: What kind of writing sample do you prefer?*

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Q: How many letters of recommendation do you require?

Q: Can I send more than two letters of recommendation?

Q: How should letters of recommendation be submitted?

Q: May I submit a list of references in lieu of written letters of recommendation?

Q: Whom should I ask to write a letter of recommendation?

Q: To whom should the letter of recommendation be addressed?

Q: My career services office prefers to submit letters directly. Is that ok?

Q: One of my recommenders prefers to have a phone conversation regarding my application. Is that ok?

INTERVIEWS

Q: How will I be notified if you are interested in interviewing me?

Q: How soon after receiving my application would I be invited for an interview?

Q: What is the interview process? Can you describe the format of the interview? Who will I meet in the interview?

Q: How long will the interview take?

Q: Does the court pay for travel expenses for interviews?

Q: Do you conduct interviews by phone or video?

Q: Do you conduct interviews on the weekends or evenings?

Q: When are offers made?

MISCELLANEOUS

Q: Do you hold on-campus interviews?

Q: Where can I find a posting or job description?

Q: How many positions do you have to fill?

Q: How can I obtain additional information?

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Q: What are the qualifications for the position of staff law clerk?

A: Applicants must have excellent academic credentials and possess superior analytical, research, and writing skills. Law review or moot court experience is preferred.

Q: How do the job responsibilities of staff law clerks compare to those of chambers law clerks?

A: Staff law clerkships combine the intellectual rigor of a chambers clerkship with benefits not available to chambers clerks. Like chambers clerks, staff law clerks conduct legal research and recommend dispositions on a broad spectrum of cases subject to oral argument at the court, including some of the court's most controversial. Because they work for the entire court, staff law clerks interact with and learn from all of the judges of the court. In addition, each week they attend private conferences at which three-judge panels deliberate and resolve cases that are not subject to oral argument. Also the Office of Staff Law Clerks is exclusively

responsible for assisting the judges in resolving substantive motions that address complex questions of procedure or seek preliminary relief. Finally staff law clerks learn a wide variety of substantive and practical lawyering and writing skills through their work with the experienced supervisory staff.

Q: How does the salary for staff law clerks compare to that of chambers law clerks?

A: The salary for staff law clerks follows the Court Personnel System (“CPS”) scale. The salary for chambers clerks follows the Judicial Salary Plan (“JSP”) scale. Staff law clerks with no prior legal experience start at CL27/25 on the CSP scale (roughly equivalent to grade 11 on the JSP scale). The starting salary for staff law clerks in 2015 is \$64,174. The starting salary may be adjusted depending on the applicant’s level of applicable experience.

Q: Is there an upper limit to how many years out of law school an applicant may be?

A: We have no upper limit, but historically, judicial clerkships are best suited to those at or near the start of their legal career.

Q: When does the position start?

A: Staff law clerk positions begin one week before Labor Day.

Q: Is this a term position?

A: Yes. Staff law clerks serve two-year terms.

GENERAL APPLICATION

Q: Do you follow the Federal Judges Law Clerk Hiring Plan?

A: No. As of November 4, 2013, OSCAR is no longer linked to the Federal Judges Law Clerk Hiring Plan.

Q: Do you ever hire staff law clerks mid-year?

A: Mid-year positions become available very rarely and only as a result of unforeseen circumstances. If such a position becomes available, a message regarding the vacancy will be posted on the Seventh Circuit’s website (<http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/HR/hr.htm>).

Q: When do you begin accepting applications?

A: On March 15, 2015, applicants may begin uploading their applications to OSCAR. Interviews will start near the end of June 2015, and we expect to finish extending offers about six weeks later. Applicants must update their grade sheets with final, second-year grades before we will schedule an interview.

Q: When do you stop considering applications?

A: We stop considering applications when the positions have been filled. We will post a message on our website when this has happened. (<http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/HR/hr.htm>).

Q: Must I have a law degree to apply?

A: Yes.

Q: Must I pass a bar exam as a condition of employment?

A: No. Bar membership is not required to become a staff law clerk. All other things being equal, staff law clerks with bar membership and staff law clerks without bar membership start at the same salary. But bar membership may come into play at a later date when a staff law clerk's eligibility for promotion to a higher salary is evaluated. Staff law clerks start at CL 27 (on the CPS scale), but cannot be promoted to CL 29 without bar membership. Eligibility for promotion to CL 29 may occur in only two circumstances: 1) when a staff law clerk is asked to stay a third year; or 2) when a staff law clerk is eligible for early promotion due to the application of early promotion credit earned as a result of legal work experience after graduating from law school. Both circumstances are extremely rare. If you think you may fall in the second category (i.e., you will be working in a legal position before joining our office as a staff law clerk and you have not taken the bar exam), you should discuss the issue with the Senior Staff Attorney.

Q: Must I be a U.S. citizen to apply?

A: Current appropriations law prohibits the use of appropriated funds to pay for a law clerk working in the continental U.S. unless the clerk is (1) a U.S. citizen; (2) a person from a U.S. territory who owes allegiance to the U.S.; (3) a refugee or asylee who intends to become a lawful permanent resident and then a U.S. citizen; or (4) a current lawful permanent resident who intends to seek U.S. citizenship. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.uscourts.gov/Careers/CareerCitizenshipRequirements.aspx>.

Q: What documents do you require as part of a complete application?

A: A complete application must include a cover letter, a resume, a law school grade sheet, two self-edited writing samples, and two letters of recommendation. Applicants must update their grade sheets with final, second-year grades before we will schedule an interview. Official law school transcripts sent from the career services office of your law school will be required of those whom we interview.

Q: How should I submit my application?

A: We accept applications via OSCAR.

Q: To whom should I address my cover letter?

A: Your cover letter should be addressed to Michael Fridkin, Senior Staff Attorney, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629, Chicago, IL 60604.

Q: Can I send my application through the U.S. Mail?

A: No, unless you are prohibited from submitting your application via OSCAR. Also, you may submit your letters of recommendation through the U.S. Mail, fax (703-935-4353) or email (shelly_tozzi@ca7.uscourts.gov) if they cannot be submitted through OSCAR. They should be addressed to Michael Fridkin, Senior Staff Attorney, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629, Chicago, IL 60604.

Q: Can I send my application via fax or e-mail?

A: No. Applications submitted via fax or e-mail will not be considered. But letters of recommendation may be sent via fax (703-935-4353) or e-mail (shelly_tozzi@ca7.uscourts.gov) if they cannot be submitted through OSCAR. Official law school transcripts (for those who have been invited for an interview) should be sent from the career services office of your law school via e-mail (shelly_tozzi@ca7.uscourts.gov), or U.S. mail (Shelly Tozzi, Staff Attorney Coordinator, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629, Chicago, IL 60604), but may not be faxed.

Q: Can I drop off my application in person?

A: No. Applications submitted in person will not be considered.

Q: Can you let me know if you received my application?

A: No. Because of the large volume of applications we receive, we do not acknowledge receipt of applications. Please do not contact us to see if your application has been received. We will not be able to return these messages.

Q: Do all of the application materials need to be submitted together?

A: No. The law school grade sheet and letters of recommendation can be uploaded via OSCAR after you have uploaded the rest of your application. But ordinarily your application must be complete before the Office invites you for an interview.

Q: How long does the application and hiring process take?

A: Applicants may begin uploading their applications to OSCAR on March 15, 2015. Interviews will start near the end of June 2015, and we expect to finish extending offers about six weeks later. Interviews are conducted and offers are made on a rolling basis, so the longer you wait to apply, the more you reduce your chance of receiving an offer. You can find out if we have filled all available positions by visiting our website (<http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/HR/hr.htm>).

Q: How will I be notified if you are interested in interviewing me?

A: Invitations to interview with our office are usually sent to applicants via e-mail. If we do not receive a response within a couple of days, we then call the number listed on your

resume. Please do not call our office to inquire about an interview unless you have received a message from us.

Q: Will I be notified if my application is no longer being considered? How do I know if my application is still under consideration?

A: Rejection letters are sent to all applicants after all positions have been filled. Until you receive a rejection letter from us, your application remains under consideration. Please do not call our office to inquire about your application. You will receive no additional information.

Q: Will you keep my application on file for consideration the following year?

A: We keep all application materials as required by federal record-keeping statutes. But applicants must reapply with a complete application package for any subsequent positions.

TRANSCRIPT

Q: Do you require an official transcript?

A: We do not initially require an official transcript. A law school grade sheet uploaded via OSCAR is sufficient. If you are invited for an interview at any time, you will be required to submit an official transcript sent from the career services office of your law school.

Q: How should grade sheets or transcripts be submitted?

A: Law school grade sheets should be uploaded via OSCAR. Official law school transcripts (for those who have been invited for an interview) should be sent from the career services office of your law school via e-mail (shelly_tozzi@ca7.uscourts.gov) or U.S. mail (Shelly Tozzi, Staff Attorney Coordinator, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629, Chicago, IL 60604), but may not be faxed. Official law school transcripts must come directly from the career services office of your law school. Copies will not be accepted.

WRITING SAMPLES

Q: What do you mean by "self-edited" writing samples?

A: We prefer a writing sample that has not been edited by others. If your writing sample has been edited by others, please mention that in your application.

Q: How many pages should a writing sample be?

A: The ideal length is between 8 and 15 pages, double-spaced. Writing samples outside of this range are acceptable, but the further that you deviate from it, the more you risk that we will not get an appropriate sense of your writing skills or do not read your entire sample.

Q: What kind of writing sample do you prefer?

A: The ideal writing sample resembles a judicial opinion: It presents a set of facts, sets forth

some principles of law, and applies the law to the facts to arrive at a reasoned conclusion. Law review articles tend not to meet this standard and are therefore disfavored as writing samples. Nonetheless your contribution to a law review is an important measure of your achievements. Therefore you should list those contributions on your resume.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Q: How many letters of recommendation do you require?

A: Two.

Q: Can I send more than two letters of recommendation?

A: Yes, but only two are required.

Q: How should letters of recommendation be submitted?

A: Letters of recommendation should be submitted through OSCAR. If they cannot be submitted through OSCAR, they may be sent via fax (703-935-4353), e-mail (shelly_tozzi@ca7.uscourts.gov), or U.S. mail (addressed to Michael Fridkin, Senior Staff Attorney, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629, Chicago, IL 60604).

Q: May I submit a list of references in lieu of written letters of recommendation?

A: No. Two letters of recommendation are required.

Q: Whom should I ask to write a letter of recommendation?

A: The best recommendations come from those who know your work well and can give detailed support. Law school professors, law firm partners, or other workplace supervisors who meet these criteria and have worked with you recently provide useful recommendations.

Q: To whom should the letter of recommendation be addressed?

A: Letters should be addressed to Michael Fridkin, Senior Staff Attorney, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629, Chicago, IL 60604.

Q: My career services office prefers to submit letters directly. Is that ok?

A: Because applications must be submitted through OSCAR, your career services office should submit the letters through the OSCAR system. If they cannot be submitted through OSCAR, they may be sent via fax (703-935-4353), e-mail (shelly_tozzi@ca7.uscourts.gov), or U.S. mail (addressed to Michael Fridkin, Senior Staff Attorney, Office of Staff Law Clerks, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 219 S. Dearborn St., Room 1629, Chicago, IL 60604).

Q: One of my recommenders prefers to have a phone conversation regarding my application. Is that ok?

A: We require that you select recommenders who are willing to provide written recommendations. If you have additional references who would be willing to speak with us over the phone, you may provide us with their names, but it is not required. Unsolicited phone calls are not necessary.

INTERVIEWS

Q: How will I be notified if you are interested in interviewing me?

A: Invitations to interview with our office are usually sent to applicants via e-mail. If we do not receive a response from you within a couple of days, we then call the number listed on your resume. Please do not call our office inquiring about an interview if you have not received a message from us.

Q: How soon after receiving my application would I be invited for an interview?

A: It varies. Some applicants are invited for an interview right away, while others are not invited until later in the hiring process.

Q: What is the interview process? Can you describe the format of the interview? Whom will I meet in the interview?

A: Interviewees will typically meet with the Senior Staff Attorney, two Deputy Senior Staff Attorneys, two Supervisory Staff Attorneys, and two Staff Law Clerks. The interview is usually conducted in groups of one or two interviewers and follows a traditional interview format.

Q: How long will the interview take?

A: The interviews typically take about three hours.

Q: Does the court pay for travel expenses for interviews?

A: No. All travel expenses you incur for the interview are your responsibility. The court does not reimburse candidates for any travel expenses.

Q: Do you conduct interviews by phone or video?

A: No. Interviews take place only in our offices in Chicago.

Q: Do you conduct interviews on the weekends or evenings?

A: No. We only conduct interviews during regular business hours, which are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. central time.

Q: When are offers made?

A: Offers are usually made within a couple of weeks of the interview, but it could be longer.

MISCELLANEOUS

Q: Do you hold on-campus interviews?

A: No.

Q: Where can I find a posting or job description?

A: Our posting, including a description of the staff law clerk positions, can be found on the Seventh Circuit's website: http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/HR/Staff_Attys/SA_position.pdf. Postings are also submitted to career services offices of various law schools through OSCAR.

Q: How many positions do you have to fill?

A: We typically have about eight positions to fill each year. That number may vary from year to year, depending on our hiring needs.

Q: How can I obtain additional information?

A: If you have a question that is not answered by this list of Frequently Asked Questions, please e-mail Shelly Tozzi, the Staff Attorney Coordinator, at shelly_tozzi@ca7.uscourts.gov. No phone calls please.

**United States Court of Appeals
for the Seventh Circuit
219 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, Illinois 60604**

**JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT - OFFICE OF STAFF LAW CLERKS
POSITIONS AVAILABLE – FALL 2016**

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit is now accepting applications for staff law clerkships that start in August 2016 and last two years.

At the Seventh Circuit, one of the most prestigious appeals courts in the country, staff law clerkships combine the intellectual rigor of a chambers clerkship with benefits not available to chambers clerks. Like chambers clerks, staff law clerks conduct legal research and recommend dispositions on a broad spectrum of cases subject to oral argument at the court, including some of the court's most controversial. Because they work for the entire court, staff law clerks interact with and learn from all of the judges of the court. In addition, each week they attend private conferences at which three-judge panels deliberate and resolve cases that are not subject to oral argument. Also the Office of Staff Law Clerks is exclusively responsible for assisting the judges in resolving substantive motions that address complex questions of procedure or seek preliminary relief. Finally staff law clerks learn a wide variety of substantive and practical lawyering and writing skills through their work with the experienced supervisory staff.

Each year the court hires about eight staff law clerks from recent graduates of the nation's top law schools. Applicants must have excellent academic credentials and possess superior analytical, research, and writing skills. Law review or moot court experience is preferred.

To apply, please submit a cover letter, resume, law school transcript or grade sheet, two self-edited writing samples containing fact and case analysis, and two letters of recommendation. We accept applications through OSCAR. OSCAR is the Online System for Clerkship Application and Review at <https://oscar.uscourts.gov>.

On March 15, 2015, applicants may begin uploading their applications to OSCAR. Interviews will start near the end of June 2015, and we expect to finish extending offers about six weeks later. Applicants must update their grade sheets with final, second-year grades before we will schedule an interview.

For more information, watch the video of Chief Judge Diane Wood discussing the program at http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/video_library/StaffAttorney_program.html, or see our FAQ's at http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/HR/Staff_Attys/SA_faqs.pdf. No phone calls, please.

The Court of Appeals is committed to equal opportunity for all applicants.