

Judicial Clerkship FAQ

What is a Judicial Clerkship?

A judicial clerkship is a full-time position working for a federal or state judge, usually (but not always) right after finishing law school. Clerkships may be with any level of court.

What is the Value of a Law Clerk Experience?

Judicial clerkships offer new graduates the opportunity to work closely with a judge, gaining unparalleled insight into the judicial process and broad exposure to various areas of the law. Many lawyers view clerkships as the most prestigious and distinguished way to begin a legal career, and most employers highly value the learning experience judicial clerkships provide.

What Are the Duties of Law Clerks?

The judicial clerk is an assistant to the judge and performs a broad range of functions that includes researching, drafting memoranda and opinions, editing, proofreading, and verifying citations. Clerks often attend conferences in chambers with the attorneys in a case and engage in conferences and discussions with the judge regarding pending cases. Law clerks also are expected to work cooperatively with fellow legal staff and court personnel.

Clerks may also assist their judge with special projects such as speeches and publications, committee work, mediation, classroom preparation, and formal ceremonial events. The work of a clerk can include a myriad of opportunities to develop several skills valuable in a future law career.

What Are the Benefits and Costs of Applying for a Judicial Clerkship?

Judicial clerkships are valuable credentials and offer a unique opportunity to experience the judicial process first-hand as well as to enhance the value of your resume and to increase your career opportunities. Clerkships allow you to improve your skills, gain a mentor, obtain practical training, and learn insights into the workings of the legal system.

Even so, there are reasons why you might decide not to pursue the opportunity. First, applying for a clerkship requires a significant commitment in terms of researching opportunities and carefully preparing application materials. Second, there are monetary as well as time costs in pursuing a clerkship. A few judges are willing to do telephone interviews, but the vast majority expects candidates to travel to interviews at their own expense. Finally, judicial clerkships are competitive, requiring that you apply and interview widely. You have a lot to do, and you need to wisely use the time you have available for job search activities.