



## FINDING A SUMMER JUDICIAL INTERNSHIP

### **Finding a Summer Judicial Internship**

An internship with a judge is a good way to learn about the judicial process, how trials are conducted, and the inner workings of the court. You will see how judges make decisions, learn what judicial clerks do, and observe trials and hearings in court. It is a wonderful opportunity to gain experience that will help you on the path from law student to lawyer. The experience also may help you obtain a post-graduate judicial clerkship if you decide to pursue one. While most judicial internships are unpaid, they usually will qualify for a Summer Public Service Fellowship from the School of Law.

#### *Where Should You Consider Applying*

Many judges, both federal and state, take on summer interns. You could apply to a judge in your home city or state, a jurisdiction where you have connections or plan to practice after graduation, or judges in the Richmond area. Check with family and friends who may have a connection to a judge and may be willing to assist you with an introduction.

The jurisdiction and level of court may play a role in where you decide to apply. State circuit court judges preside over state civil and criminal matters, and also decide some family law matters. Federal district court judges preside over cases that raise a federal question involving the United States government, Constitution, or other federal laws, and cases regarding diversity of citizenship. Federal courts hear criminal, civil and bankruptcy cases. Federal magistrate judges decide preliminary matters such as warrants, initial appearances and bonds; they conduct probable cause and motions hearings; and preside over some trials. Bankruptcy judges preside over bankruptcy proceedings, which may encompass many areas of law, including corporate, tax, family, and intellectual property law. State and federal courts of appeals judges hear appeals from lower courts. Occasionally, juvenile and domestic relations courts may hire interns.

As a general rule, appeals courts and federal courts will be the most competitive, and judges often only will consider applications from those in the top ranks of a given class. However, other considerations may play a role, such as personal connections, or a special status (veterans, for instance). Finally, many judges in Virginia, particularly at the state level, are alumni of the law school, and enjoy providing internship opportunities to Richmond Law students. Consult with your career advisor for more information about reaching out to alumni judges.

Some judges only hire first-year law students as interns, and some hire both first- and second-year students. Some hire students only for half a summer; some will provide students a full-summer opportunity. The CDO maintains a list of Virginia judges who frequently hire Richmond law interns. Some post their internship opportunities via Symplicity or participate in the Government and Public Interest Interview Program. Others prefer that you demonstrate the initiative to reach out to them about internship possibilities.

### *How to Find Judicial Internships*

If you are interested in interning with a judge, you can apply to advertised internships through Symplicity, participate in the Government and Public Interest Interview Program, or mail an application directly to a specific judge. Since many judges prefer to hire those who reach out and apply on their own initiative, you may research judges using a variety of sources including: the Leadership Directory (available through the Muse Law Library website); the [Virginia Judicial System](#) website; the [Guide to State Judicial Clerkships](#) (for state courts outside Virginia; contact the Career Development Office for login information); Symplicity (especially for contact information for federal judges); and individual court websites. You may find court websites on the internet by using search terms such as “California Superior Court,” “New Jersey Courts,” and “Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas”.

While there is no particular “season” when judges hire interns, it is best to apply early. As noted above, consider applying early in December (before you get caught up in exams!) to avoid missing opportunities.

### *How to Apply for Judicial Internships*

Judges want to see your resume, a well-written cover letter, transcript, and a legal writing sample. If you are applying prior to the release of your first semester grades, you may want to include your undergraduate GPA on your resume because your law school transcript will not be available. To have the best chance of being considered for an interview, have your materials reviewed by your career advisor before applying. Judges expect applications to conform to traditional standards, and to be completely free of errors. Creative cover letters or distinctive resumes are not likely to be considered. You may request and submit an official transcript from the registrar’s office.

*When applying to intern with a judge, consider the following:*

- A judge’s chambers is the most formal of all legal settings. Your communications with a judge should reflect this.
- Excellent writing skills and attention to detail are two of the most important factors that judges consider in making hiring decisions.

- Before you apply, research the court and the judge. Know what kinds of legal matters the court has jurisdiction over, and what law applies. For instance, if you are applying to a federal judge, who rarely decides matters under state law, you will not get far if you say your interest in an internship is based on your desire to learn more about Virginia law practice.
- Research the judge. What kind of law did she practice before being elevated to the bench? Has the judge decided any important cases? Does the court have any specialized programs, such as a drug court?
- If you plan to practice in a particular community, or are from that community, express this in your letter.
- State why you are interested in interning in that court.
- Include the best sample of your legal writing. Your writing sample should demonstrate your legal research abilities, incorporate any feedback you received from your professor, and contain no errors. Add a cover page to your writing sample. See the CDO website for examples.
- Internships with judges are not paid. If you are considering applying to be a judicial intern, make sure you timely meet the requirements and file the proper documents for a Summer Public Service Fellowship.
- Unless specifically invited to, do not email a judge. It is best to send unsolicited application materials through the mail.
- Check with the CDO for information about specific courts, judges, and internship opportunities. You may also review materials on the CDO's clerkship page.

### *The Interview and Offer*

If you are chosen for an interview, prepare by researching the court, the judge, and recent cases that the court has decided or for which it is known. You should know what kinds of cases the court hears, whether a judge recently decided a significant case, or if important cases are pending. Keep abreast of recent Supreme Court decisions or the highest court in the state where you are applying. During an interview, judges often include other chambers personnel. As a result, you should be prepared to interview with clerks and judicial assistants, as well as the judge. Be prepared to answer questions about your writing sample, about where and what kind of law you plan to practice, and why you decided to attend law school. At the end of the interview, you will be expected to ask questions. Prepare these in advance.

Make sure you write down or memorize the names of any clerks or other assistants who participate in interviews; you will need to send thank you notes to all after the interview. When applying to intern for a judge, it is expected that if an offer is extended, you will immediately accept. If not, the offer is likely to be extended to another applicant. If you accept an offer of employment elsewhere before receiving an offer, immediately notify the judge's chambers that you are no longer available.

Note: another way to gain experience working with a judge during law school is to participate in the clinical placement program in your second or third year.