

DUKE LAW

1L/2L Summer: Working as a Judicial Intern

What are judicial internships?

Judicial internships are a great way to gain valuable experience and judicial exposure while still in law school. Interns work closely with law clerks and are often asked to research and write memoranda, attend trials, summarize cases and perform other administrative work. Having interned for a summer, many students often find their coursework more fulfilling, having built a solid foundation and practical understanding of the law.

What are the benefits of judicial internships?

While the experiences will vary from judge to judge, most former interns will agree that their summer interning was extremely valuable, and provided them with an experience that helped them both in school and after graduation.

Experience: Working as an intern gives students a glimpse into the inner workings of the court. Interns are often exposed to a larger number and variety of legal actions than those working as summer associates with firms, public interest groups, or other agencies.

Perspective: One of the primary focuses at Duke Law is to train students to be sound advocates. As an intern, students benefit by having the opportunity to see advocacy through the eyes of a judge. This additional perspective is difficult to reproduce outside of chambers, making it a valuable asset for any attorney to acquire.

Opportunity: Along with the exposure and perspective gained as an intern, there are also many practical and immediate benefits of a judicial internship. Interning can lead directly to a post-graduate clerkship. Some judges prefer to hire former interns, and those who don't look highly on clerkship applicants with experience in the court. Aside from the courts, judicial internships can also help to set you apart in the eyes of other potential employers. Many legal recruiters and employers look very highly on judicial internships, which can help in finding the right job after graduation.

Networking: Interns also tend to make a significant number of valuable legal contacts in their time spent in the court. The best contacts interns make are the judge and his/her staff, but they often make contacts outside of their chambers with other judges and legal practitioners of the court.

What does a judicial intern do?

Internship experiences vary between judges and their respective courts. When deciding which judges to apply to, there are some important choices to consider:

- *Appellate Courts:* In an appellate court, most of an intern's time is spent researching and writing. A student may cite check opinions, observe oral arguments, research points of law and write memoranda for review. Some appellate courts allow interns to sit in on judicial conferences where judges discuss their decisions. As these courts handle both civil and criminal appeals, interns also have the opportunity to learn a great deal of procedure and evidence.
- *Trial Courts:* In trial courts, interns will have the opportunity to observe a great number of trial proceedings (both civil and criminal) to go along with research and writing. These courts also issue written opinions to the litigants. Because some opinions are published, interns are often required to fine-tune their writing skills.

How do I apply for judicial internship?

The best way to obtain a judicial internship is to apply directly to the court or judge. For summer internships, the deadline for applications is usually February 1st. Please note that judges may set their deadlines differently so it is a good idea to contact them as early as possible (December 1st) to find out when they will be accepting applications. For state courts, you can also check their websites for deadlines. Federal judges can be contacted directly.

1. Decide where to apply

Before you begin contacting chambers, you need to make sure you have thought about which judges with whom you are interested in applying. The following items are extremely important when making your judge list:

- *Court Location* – While the court location may not affect the work you do as an intern, you need to make sure that you will be willing and able to live near the court. Remember that judicial internships are unpaid, so you will need to consider living costs and arrangements when deciding where to apply.
- *Court Type* – Federal courts or state courts? While federal courts are usually more sought after, remember that state courts offer the same experience, and can be equally beneficial to your law career. State courts are also a great addition to your resume should you choose to practice law in that state.

2. Create your judge list

Once you have decided where you are interested in interning, you should create a list of judges where you intend to apply. The following resources are available to you to help create your judge list:

- *Judicial Yellow Book (Available in Career Center Library)* – Contains judges contact information for all federal courts. Also includes contact information for state supreme courts and state courts of appeal.
- *Leadership Library* – This is essentially the Judicial Yellow Book online. This resource also contains contact information for non-judicial areas of law. Website: <http://lo.bvdep.com/> (Username: cpdc, Password: bluedevils).
- *Vermont State Guide* – This is a contact list of state courts issued by the Vermont School of Law. To access this list please visit <http://www.vermontlaw.edu/x1101.xml> (Username: green, password: mountains).
- *State Court & Federal Court websites.* Most state and federal courts have very informative and comprehensive court websites that offer contact information and biographical information about judges. Visiting these websites is a great way to get background information before making your calls.

3. Call Chambers

Contacting chambers may be the most important step in finding a summer internship. Rather than sending out a blind application to the judges on your list, it is important that you contact their chambers directly. Aside from getting the details of what to send and when, calling the judge's chambers shows interest in working for him/her, and may help to set you apart from other applicants. Having called the judge also gives you something to follow up on in your cover letter when you do apply.

Judges often have different timelines and required different materials for hiring summer interns. It is important that you find out what they require in your application, and when you need to have them submitted.

4. Build Applications

When contacting chambers, it is important to find out what their application requirements are and when they will be taking applications. The specifics may vary from one judge to another, but most courts require the following:

- a. Cover Letter
- b. Resume
- c. Writing Sample
- d. Transcript
- e. List of references*

*You will want to contact three individuals (including one or two Duke Law faculty members) that you can use as references.

5. Send Applications in a Timely Manner

Judges may take applications starting as early as December. However, given the academic & finals schedule, contacting and applying for internships over winter break is generally timely enough. Some judges may prefer not to review applications until after grades are released in January. For those who will accept applications before grades are released, getting you applications in early can be beneficial. Sending your updated materials with your transcript later on is also a good way to follow up.

Judicial internship application timeline:

Fall Semester

- Consider applying for a summer judicial internship
- Research which judges hire interns

Winter Break

- Draft Resume and cover letter
- Ask three individuals (Including 1 or 2 faculty recommenders) to serve as references

Spring Semester

- Request an unofficial transcript with the most recent grades; update resume
- Submit judicial internship applications (usually by February 1st)