



*Spring 2018*



**RICHMOND**  
School of Law™

## Who should apply?

Federal clerkships are particularly competitive. State clerkships are less so. Factors judges consider in deciding whom to interview include:

- ♦ **Grades and Class Rank:** Some judges will only consider students in the top 10-25% of their class. Other judges do not specify, but grades still play a role.
- ♦ **Journals and Competitions:** Some judges seek students with Law Review, other journal, Moot Court, or other competition experience. Even if not specified, these activities will make students more competitive.
- ♦ **Geographic ties:** Many judges like to employ clerks who will remain in the local legal community and practice before them. Students with geographic ties to the judge's district may be more competitive.

## Timeline: Federal

### Beginning in May before the start of 2L year

- ◆ **Identify recommenders and alert them that you will be applying for clerkships**
  - Provide your recommenders with your resume, grade list, and personal summary describing why you decided to attend law school, your career interests, and why you want to clerk.
  - File FERPA forms with the Career Development Office.
  
- ◆ **Create your account in the Online System for Clerkship Application and Review (OSCAR)<sup>1</sup>**
  - In July, rising 2Ls may create an OSCAR account, upload grade sheets in OSCAR, and begin researching judges.
  - Identify writing samples, edit and revise.
  - Make an appointment with Marka Belinfanti, clerkship advisor.
  - Finalize your cover letters and resume, submit to the Career Development Office for review.
  - Attend fall Judicial Clerkships programs: Interviewing with Judges and Judges' Perspective.

<sup>1</sup> Visit OSCAR website at <https://oscar.uscourts.gov>.

## Timeline: State

### Beginning in January during 2L year

- ◆ **Research state courts and judges for whom you would like to clerk**
  - In Virginia, the Supreme Court of Virginia, the Virginia Court of Appeals, and Circuit Courts all hire clerks.<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ **Draft resumes and cover letters, request letters of recommendation**
  - Some, but not all, state courts require recommendation letters.
- ◆ **Identify the hiring timeline for each court**
  - Deadlines for state court clerkships vary depending on the court.
  - Check Symplicity for postings.
    - Some Supreme Court of Virginia justices and Virginia Court of Appeals judges post their clerkship positions on Symplicity, while others expect applicants to apply individually.
  - Schedule an appointment with Marka Belinfanti, clerkship advisor.
  - Review the Virginia Circuit Courts' Hiring Timeline.<sup>3</sup>
  - Virginia state circuit courts hire clerks during the summer before 3L year or in the fall and spring of 3L year.
  - Certain state circuit courts post in Symplicity or recruit 3Ls during Fall OCI.

<sup>2</sup> Some judges employ permanent career clerks and therefore, do not hire term law clerks.

<sup>3</sup> Available on the judicial clerkships website: <http://law.richmond.edu/career/clerkships.html>

## Writing Samples

- ◆ **Quality:** Use a sample that reflects your best writing. Some judges request a writing sample that has been minimally edited by others or that is solely your own work.
- ◆ **Length:** Observe the page limit provided by a particular judge. You may want to have two versions of your writing sample: an abridged and full-length copy.
- ◆ **Format:** Include a cover page to explain what the piece was written for, if you gained permission to use it (from an employer or judge), and the extent to which you received feedback on your writing.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ **Review:** Have your writing sample reviewed and incorporate feedback. Professor Suddarth may be contacted to review writing samples. Please see the Judicial Clerkships website for guidelines.

<sup>4</sup> Sample cover pages may be found on the judicial clerkships website: <http://law.richmond.edu/career/clerkships.html>

## Cover letters

- ♦ **Quality:** Cover letters introduce you to the judge and are the first example of your writing the judge may see. They should be well written and free from errors. Highly qualified candidates may not be interviewed if they have poorly written cover letters.
- ♦ **Content:** Cover letters should address why you want to clerk, why you are applying to a particular judge, and why you want to clerk in a particular geographic region. They should also describe the skills you possess that will make you an excellent clerk, and explain anything that distinguishes you from the competition.
- ♦ **Template:** The Judicial Clerkships Handbook provides sample cover letters and tips.
- ♦ **Feedback:** Have your letters reviewed by an advisor in the Career Development Office.

## Letters of Recommendation

- ♦ **Number:** Most judges require at least two letters of recommendation; some want three. The CDO recommends obtaining two faculty and one non-faculty letter of recommendation. The non-faculty member should be someone who has supervised your legal work, especially written assignments.
- ♦ **Who to ask?** Consider faculty with whom you have taken more than one class, have had a seminar, interacted with outside the classroom, or for whom you have done research.
- ♦ **Schedule a meeting:** Meet with your prospective recommender in person, or send an email request. Provide your resume, grade list, and a brief personal statement. The personal statement should describe why you decided to attend law school, your career interests, and why you want to clerk.
- ♦ **Investigate:** Contact faculty who have clerked, practiced in courts where you hope to clerk, and/or those who have expertise in the area of law that is a judge's specialty (i.e., bankruptcy).

## Procedure for Faculty Recommendation Letters

- ◆ Ask faculty if they would be willing to write letters for you. Submit a FERPA waiver form to the CDO for each faculty member who agrees to recommend you. [FERPA forms](#) are available on the judicial clerkships website.
- ◆ Faculty will draft and submit letters to the CDO.
- ◆ To request letters of recommendation, you will submit an Excel spreadsheet to [Marka Belinfanti](#) and [Dawn Siedlecki](#), with the name(s) and contact information of the judge(s) to whom you are applying, and the format (paper or electronic) in which the letters are needed. The spreadsheet, which instructs the CDO to personalize and format the letter(s), must be in the same format as the Sample Judge List Spreadsheet under “Examples & Forms” on the [Judicial Clerkships website](#).
- ◆ Based on the spreadsheet you submit, the CDO will either upload letters of recommendation to OSCAR (federal clerkships only) or print hardcopy letters (federal or state clerkships) and notify you when they are available for pickup.
- ◆ Spreadsheets for federal court judges are created using Symplicity’s clerkship module. The



clerkship module allows you to import a judge's mailing address directly into Excel. By using the module, you will not have to research each judge's mailing address. Please refer to **page 43** of the [Judicial Clerkships Handbook](#) for step-by-step instructions. Contact the CDO if you cannot find a mailing address for a specific judge.

- ◆ You may use the [Virginia's Judicial System](#) website, Leadership Directory (available through the Muse Law Library website), and the [Guide to State Judicial Clerkships](#) (for state courts outside of Virginia)<sup>5</sup> to develop spreadsheets for state court clerkships.
- ◆ For federal judges who are accepting applications via OSCAR, you must create your applications in OSCAR before submitting your Excel spreadsheet so that there will be an application to which the CDO can attach your letter(s) of recommendation.
- ◆ Once the CDO notifies you that hardcopy letters of recommendation are available for pick up, you will pick up sealed letters from our office, assemble your clerkship application (including sealed letters of recommendation in your envelope), and mail it to the judge.
- ◆ For state court clerkships, you must also submit an Excel spreadsheet to [Marka Belinfanti](#) and [Dawn Siedlecki](#). However, most state court judges will require hardcopy letters of recommendation, as they do not use OSCAR.

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<sup>5</sup> Contact the CDO for login information.

## Procedure for Non-Faculty Letters of Recommendation

- ◆ Generally, the CDO does not upload non-faculty letters of recommendation to OSCAR and does not print hardcopy letters for non-faculty recommenders.
- ◆ It is the non-faculty recommender's responsibility to upload letters of recommendation to OSCAR or provide a hardcopy letter of recommendation to the student.
- ◆ Please refer to **page 19** of the [Judicial Clerkships Handbook](#) for further information about this policy.

## Where to apply?

- ◆ **Fourth Circuit:** Although the University of Richmond School of Law is best known in Virginia, our “area of influence” includes the entire Fourth Circuit. There are three federal alumni judges in the Fourth Circuit. States included in the Fourth Circuit are Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.
- ◆ **Other Regions:** We also have an alumni judge in the Southern District of Florida, and alumni have clerked in many different districts, including Puerto Rico. Recently students have had success in Kentucky. Check the Judicial Clerkships website to see where alumni have clerked.
- ◆ **Geographic Ties:** If you have connections (family, school, work, etc.) to an area outside Virginia or the Fourth Circuit, apply. In your cover letter, address your connection to that locality. Judges often prefer to hire someone who intends to settle in that community, but this is not a requirement.
- ◆ **Know Before Applying:** For state court clerkships, Virginia appellate judges may live and have their chambers anywhere in Virginia. Hiring for state circuit courts tends to be clustered in larger metropolitan areas.

## Final Thoughts

### 1. Attend all clerkship programs offered by the CDO:

- ◆ The Judges' Perspectives Panel and Clerkship Interview Program, among others, provide an opportunity to hear from judges, professors, and clerks about the application process.

### 2. Meet with the clerkship advisor:

- ◆ Submit your resume and cover letters to the CDO for review.
- ◆ Submit your writing sample to the writing faculty for review.
- ◆ Submit properly formatted judge spreadsheets to CDO to generate recommendation letters.

### 3. Keep the CDO informed regarding:

- ◆ What you have learned about a particular judge's hiring plans.
- ◆ Offers to interview.
  - The CDO will connect you with alumni clerks or practitioners who may provide insight about interviewing with a particular judge.
- ◆ Any issues during the interview process.

### 4. Summarize your interview in **Symplicity** so that future applicants may benefit from your experience.