

## New Jersey State Appellate/Supreme Court Clerkship Application Guide 2019 (Camden Campus)

### General Information

This handout addresses the application process for post-graduate law clerk positions with the NJ State Appellate Division and Supreme Court.

The New Jersey Supreme Court is the state’s highest appellate court. It is composed of a chief justice and six associate justices. As the highest appellate court, the Supreme Court reviews cases from the lower courts. The Appellate Division of the Superior Court is New Jersey’s intermediate appellate court. It is generally comprised of 32 judges who sit in two or three judge panels chosen from parts consisting of four judges. Appellate Division judges hear appeals from decisions of the trial courts, the Tax Court and state administrative agencies.

### Application Timeline

| Date                         | Task   |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>ASAP</b>                  | Read all clerkship application materials and instructions thoroughly.  |
| <b>ASAP</b>                  | Choose recommenders and request Letters of Recommendation (LOR’s); Meet with your Career Counselor as needed.  |
| <b>ASAP</b>                  | Submit the Faculty Recommender Agreement form to the Center for Career Development. Email completed form to <a href="mailto:clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu">clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu</a> .                         |
| <b>April 30<sup>th</sup></b> | Deadline to submit spreadsheet of judges to Center for Career Development. Email spreadsheet, along with a list of recommenders, to <a href="mailto:clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu">clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu</a> . |
| <b>May 11<sup>th</sup></b>   | All LORs are due to the Center for Career Development. Recommenders will email LORs to <a href="mailto:clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu">clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu</a> .  |
| <b>June 17<sup>th</sup></b>  | Students may begin applying to New Jersey Judges via the application portal.   |
| <b>June 25<sup>th</sup></b>  | Judges may begin contacting students, at which time they can schedule interviews.  |

**New Jersey Judges will begin accepting applications for the 2020 – 2021 court term on June 18, 2019.** Judges may begin contacting candidates for interviews on June 25, 2019.

## Application Methods

The New Jersey Judiciary maintains a Law Clerk Recruitment webpage:

<https://njcourts.gov/public/lawclerks.html>, where you can find general information about clerkships and the application process, and the link to the application portal. This page has links that will help you to identify judges to whom you may want to apply and provide you with each judge's contact information to help you prepare applications. Judicial court/county assignments and chambers addresses can be found in the General Assignment and Judges' Chambers Listing, respectively.

You can download an Excel spreadsheet, prepared by the Center for Career Development, of all NJ state trial judges from the "Resources" section of your Symplicity account for use in conducting your mail merge. **The listings for the NJ State judges are updated from time to time as judicial assignments change.**

1. **Apply directly to individual judges via the clerkship portal.** Create an account and follow the instructions in the portal to search for judges and upload the documents required for each application. **Application materials must be ready to upload the day the portal opens for applications.**
2. **Apply via regular U.S. mail or email.** From time to time, judges will contact the Center for Career Development to post a clerkship job description in Symplicity, or to request that we notify students via email about a clerkship opportunity. Applicants should follow the instructions in any job posting or email, and remember that when applying via email, a single pdf file, containing all the required documents, is recommended.

## OTHER STATE COURTS

The timing and application process for clerkships in other states varies. If you are interested in applying for a clerkship in any state other than New Jersey, you can find application information in the Guide to State Judicial Clerkships produced by Vermont Law School. The Guide is accessible to all Rutgers Law students on-line at:

<http://forms.vermontlaw.edu/career/guides>

username: copper  
password: beech

\*Please note that the username and password are lowercase. A PDF printable version of the entire Guide and PDF printable versions of individual state information are available.

NALP has also produced a guide titled "Insight & Inside Information Guide for Select State Court Clerkships," which is posted in the Document Library under the Resources tab in Symplicity.

## The Application Process

1. **Self-evaluation.** Determine the courts to which you want to apply. **Discuss with your professors whether they are comfortable recommending you for particular levels of clerkships (see step 2).**
  - a. GPA. While there are no published GPA requirements, you will probably need a GPA of at least 3.4 to be considered for a New Jersey State Appellate clerkship; for NJ State Supreme Court clerkships you will need at least a 3.6. (Some state courts are not as competitive as New Jersey).\*
  - b. Law Journal. This is a very important credential for many judges, *particularly those at the appellate level* since those clerkships involve extensive writing. Some judges may consider work as an Legal Writing Teaching Assistant, work as an Research Assistant (especially if you are given a contribution acknowledgment), your own piece published in an academic or law journal publication, research and writing an extensive piece through a job, internship or volunteer position, or other significant writing prior to law school.
  - c. Advanced Moot Courts. Moot Court is another experience that many judges look for, especially if you advanced in the competition or received a best brief or best oralist award.
  - d. Number of Applications. You should apply to as many judges as you wish, within reason. **However, you should not apply to any judge from whom you would not accept a position if one is offered.**
2. **Choose recommenders, complete and submit the Clerkship Recommender Agreement Form ASAP.**

You will need 2 – 3 letters of recommendations. The Center for Career Development processes letters of recommendation to maintain confidentiality. If you have not already done so, you should request letters **as soon as possible**. Recommendation letters may be written by law school faculty, employers (current or former), or college professors.

**Do not be surprised if a law school faculty member declines to write a letter of recommendation for a particular court.** Faculty members are well aware of the hiring criteria for each court, and some may be legitimately reluctant to write a letter in support of a candidate whose credentials do not meet the court's minimum qualifications. Keep in mind that by supporting a student's candidacy, a recommender necessarily places her reputation on the line.

Give recommenders an updated copy of your resume and let them know the courts you will be applying to.

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\* Students should meet with a CCD counselor to discuss in greater detail.

3. Email your spreadsheet of judges to the Center for Career Development at [clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu](mailto:clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu) by April 30<sup>th</sup>.

Use the subject line "LOR Request - Your Full Name." In the body of the email include the names of all recommenders and indicate whether each person is a Rutgers Law faculty member. Attach your spreadsheet of judges to your email. You can download a spreadsheet of NJ State Appellate & Supreme Court judges from Symplicity (under Resources: Document Library). Please be sure that your spreadsheets are accurate and complete, and comply with the formatting in the spreadsheets downloadable from Symplicity.

Each time you apply to a judge via the portal who requires letters of recommendation, you will receive an email from the court with a specific code. Forward that email to [clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu](mailto:clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu), and your recommendations will be uploaded by the Center for Career Development.

- a. Rutgers Law Recommenders: Letters written by Rutgers Law faculty will be mail merged (using the spreadsheet you download and will email to [clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu](mailto:clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu)) so that they are individually addressed to each judge, then uploaded to your applications. If your spreadsheets are incomplete or contain errors this will delay the process, and perhaps result in applications missing crucial LOR's. **The deadline for faculty to submit letters to the Center for Career Development is April 30<sup>th</sup>.**
- b. Outside recommenders: Please ask your outside recommenders to email their letter to [clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu](mailto:clerkshiplor@law.rutgers.edu) with the subject "Letter of Recommendation for Student Name" no later than April 30<sup>th</sup>. *A signed PDF copy of the letter is preferred*, but an unsigned word document is acceptable. Outside recommenders should use the salutation "Your Honor." These letters will not be mail merged. **The deadline for outside recommenders to submit letters to the Center for Career Development is April 30<sup>th</sup>.**

4. Prepare Transcripts, Resumes, Cover Letters and Writing Samples.

- a. Resume. Update your resume and have it reviewed by your career counselor. Resume paper is recommended for any paper applications.
- b. Cover Letter. Prepare an original cover letter with a header that matches your resume. Do not copy any samples. Your cover letter should be in your own voice and provide some insight into who you are and what your goals are. Don't try to copy anyone else's style. All cover letters should be individualized as much as possible: why do you want to work for that particular court and judge. Tell the judge what you can bring to the position, not what a clerkship can do for you. Judges are particularly interested in your research and writing abilities, as evidenced by your academic activities and relevant work experience. If you have a particular tie to the jurisdiction in which the judge sits,

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you should mention that in your letter. Judges do read cover letters, and many judges view your letter as a writing sample.

Your cover letters should always be individually addressed to the judges with their correct titles. The judge's name in the addressee section should be as follows: "The Honorable I. M. Able," or "The Honorable I. M. Able, Chief Judge," or "The Honorable I. M. Able, Chief Justice." You should greet the judge as follows: "Dear Judge Able," or "Dear Justice Able," or "Dear Chief Judge Able," or "Dear Chief Justice Able." You should always close your letter with "Respectfully". NEVER send any letters that are addressed simply "Dear Judge". All cover letters must be individually addressed.

- c. Unofficial Transcripts. NJ state judges do not require official transcripts at the application stage. You may download your unofficial transcript from the Rutgers website and save it to your files, or make photocopies for each paper application as necessary.
  - d. Writing sample. You should submit your best and most polished written work. Length should be approximately 5-15 pages. You may take an excerpt from a longer piece of work or you may submit a few short pieces of work. A brief or memo from a practice setting, an advanced moot court brief (e.g., Hunter Moot Court) or a scholarly writing, such as a law review article are all appropriate writing samples. If you wish to use something that you produced at a job or internship, you should contact your supervisor beforehand to make sure they have no objections. The supervisor may require you to redact any identifying or confidential information before submitting it to anyone. If you wish to use a publication, include a statement regarding how much editing was done to it. Avoid using writing samples that were heavily edited by others. *Please discuss your choice of writing sample with your career planning counselor.*
  - e. Mail merge cover letters. A mail merge is a time saving process by which a document (such as a cover letter) and a data source (such as a spreadsheet of contact information) are merged together. The result is individual letters addressed to each contact in the data source. Instructions for Word Mail Merge can be found on the Career Planning website under Judicial Clerkships. Helpful instructional videos on how to complete a mail merge, in both PC and Mac operating systems, can be found on YouTube as well.
    - i. Spreadsheets. You can download a spreadsheet of NJ State Appellate & Supreme Court judges from Symplicity (under Resources: Document Library). **Please be sure that your spreadsheets are accurate and complete, and comply with the formatting in the spreadsheets downloadable from Symplicity.**
5. **Interviews**. Judges may begin contacting students to schedule interviews on June 25, 2019. If you are contacted for an interview, alert your recommenders ASAP so that they will be prepared when the judge calls. If your resume has changed (e.g., with an Externship or AY position), e-mail your recommenders an updated resume.

## New Jersey State Appellate/Supreme Court Clerkship Application Guide 2018 (Camden Campus)

Judges are inundated with applications every year, but most judges interview only a handful of applicants. Some judges have their current law clerk(s) pre-screen applications and assist in selecting applicants to be interviewed. In many courts, the current law clerk(s) may interview you first before you actually meet the judge.

If the judge requests an interview, you should prepare yourself beforehand by finding out as much about the judge as you can. Since judges are public figures, they can usually be researched on the internet and in legal publications. You may also research published opinions on Westlaw and Lexis. Also talk to professors, Career Planning, and other students or graduates who previously worked for or are acquainted with the judge.

Send out a thank you letter, not just an email, after an interview. Many judges consider it rude if they do not hear from you.

**Fill out an Interview Evaluation** for each judge with whom you interview in your Symplicity account under Clerkships: Interview Evaluation.

- 6. Accepting Offers.** Offers for judicial clerkships are not like other job offers. It is not unusual for applicants to be offered clerkships at the first interview and many judges expect an answer on the spot. At most, expect to have twenty-four hours in which to accept. Be aware that requests for an extension might not be looked upon favorably by the judge.

It is not wise to turn down a judge when she or he offers you a clerkship. If you do not want to work in a particular location or in a particular court, do not apply! Do not interview for a position that you would not accept immediately if offered. Try to space out your clerkship interviews more than 48 hours apart so that, if you accept an offer from one judge, you will not be canceling an interview with another judge at the last minute.

If you receive an offer from a judge, you should accept it, unless you have a good reason not to that you could not have anticipated at the time of the interview. Turning down an offer in the hopes of getting a "better" one may backfire. Judges talk to each other about clerkship applicants, and word will spread quickly regarding an applicant who declined an offer. Each offer should be taken seriously, and a delay in answering needs to be handled diplomatically. Moreover, rejecting an offer may have repercussions for future Rutgers applicants. In any case, it is unlikely that a judge will leave an offer open for more than a day or so without cause.

If you receive an offer from one judge but are still waiting to hear from a judge in a more preferable location or court *with whom you have already interviewed*, it is permissible to say something like: "I just interviewed with Judge B, and would like to give her the courtesy of a telephone call to let her know I received an offer from you before I respond." Then call Judge B to say that you have an offer and must respond as soon as possible. Of course, if Judge B is not prepared to make a decision, then you must decide. Some judges will be upset by this, a few may even withdraw their offers at this point, but most are usually willing to defer for a short time to another judge (typically 1-2 days, or, at the most, one week).

## New Jersey State Appellate/Supreme Court Clerkship Application Guide 2018 (Camden Campus)

If you know, after interviewing with a judge, that you would not accept an offer from him or her even if it is the only offer you receive, you should withdraw your name from consideration immediately by telephone. Withdrawing before receiving an offer will usually not affect future opportunities. If, however, you withdraw an application after interviewing, additional interviews and acceptances in that same court need to be handled with care. Discuss this with Career Planning before acting.

**Once you have accepted an offer, you have made a commitment that must be honored.** Failing to honor your commitment is personally unprofessional and can have very negative consequences for future Rutgers School of Law – Camden applicants and the reputation of the law school.

Once you accept an offer from a judge, make sure you call or write to all the judges with whom you interviewed, to immediately withdraw from consideration. This practice should also be followed if you change your mind about wanting a clerkship in a court to which you have applied. You may also want to accept a clerkship formally by writing to the judge, even after accepting verbally. The letter can be short and to the point, telling the judge how much you look forward to working with them in the upcoming year, and perhaps detailing when you will be in touch to set your starting date.

- 7. Etiquette.** Let your recommenders know how your interviews are going (an e-mail is fine). If you accept a position, let your recommenders know by sending either an e-mail or a thank-you card. Also, let Career Planning know ASAP. This will allow us to have updated information for your classmates on which judges are still interviewing.