

2019 NEW JERSEY TRIAL COURT INFORMATION GUIDE

This handout addresses the application process for law clerk positions with the **Superior Court of New Jersey (Trial Court)**. This information does not apply to the clerkship application process for clerkships with federal courts and New Jersey's higher courts (Appellate Division and Supreme Court).

The New Jersey Superior Court is a trial court of general jurisdiction that hears a variety of cases involving criminal, civil and family law on the county level. There are fifteen (15) Superior Court vicinages, each with an Assignment Judge (head judge) and Chancery, Law and Family Divisions. There is a Courthouse in each of New Jersey's 21 counties and there are approximately 400 Superior Court judges in the state. In addition, there are several tax court judges that also hire law clerks.

Clerkships with the Superior Court are a great way to start your legal career and can provide valuable experience to those who plan to practice in New Jersey. A Superior Court law clerk learns about state law and local rules and procedures, observes court proceedings and develops contacts with local judges, attorneys and court personnel. As a result, law clerks will gain an inside perspective on New Jersey's court system, which will be highly valued by many employers in the State. More generally, it is experience that will be well regarded both inside and outside of New Jersey.

All judges in New Jersey hire law clerks for a one year term. The application and hiring process occurs on a rolling basis; however, many judges begin interviewing candidates in the summer and early fall. The Center for Career Development will collect and mail applications to NJ trial level judges in June 2019 (see below for details). Students may also send their materials directly to judges separately and mail them at any time or submit their application through the Judiciary's centralized electronic system (see below). However, the Judiciary encourages early applications (June – September) to increase the likelihood of securing interviews.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

1. SELF-EVALUATION

Students with a broad range of credentials are successful in securing trial level clerkships. Although less competitive than other clerkships, in part simply because of the much larger number of positions available, clerkships with state trial judges are competitive and provide valuable experiences. Assignment judges and the principal judges of each part are much more selective than other trial judges and tend to hire earlier. Some judges have preferences for law journal and moot court experience, while others look for credentials such as prior experience (such as involvement in public service or experience with family law issues) local ties (if you are from the area, or will work in the area after relocating,) where you went to college, referrals from friends or attorneys, and experiences as former interns or externs.

You should apply to as many judges as you wish, within reason. But **you should not apply to any judge from whom you would not accept a position if one is offered.**

2. Applying to Judges through the Application Portal

Apply directly to individual judges through the New Jersey Judiciary clerkship portal: <https://portal.njcourts.gov/webe3/sso/register.do?action=register&appId=CLERKSHIP>. Send a strong detailed cover letter and resume (with J.D. month/year) to the judges' chambers. It is highly recommended that applicants apply early in the process (June – September 2019) to increase the likelihood of securing interviews. It is anticipated that a large number of trial court judges will hire clerks by the fall of 2019. Accordingly, students should begin submitting their applications for these positions over the summer.

The cover letter and resume should emphasize skills (legal research, writing, analytical and communication skills, etc.) as well as past work and prior legal experience that relates directly to the law clerk position. Although academic credentials are important, judges consider other factors in the hiring process to recognize particular strengths and qualities. Applicants may also choose to include a transcript and a list of references (letters of recommendation and writing samples are generally **not** necessary); however, you can contact each judge's chambers to confirm each judge's preferences.

The New Jersey Judiciary maintains a Law Clerk Recruitment webpage: <http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/public/lawclerks.html>, where you can find general information about clerkships and the application process. At the bottom of this page are 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 your applications. Judicial court/county assignments and chambers addresses can be found in the General Assignment Order (<https://njcourts.gov/notices/2019/n190708a.pdf>) and Judges' Chambers Listing (<http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/public/assets/directories/judgtara.pdf>), respectively. **NOTE: The 2019-2020 General Assignment Order is expected to be issued in June 2019.** From time to time, a judge's assignment may change. To get the most up-to-date information about a judge's status and to see if there are any new assignments, you should check the Notices to the Bar, which are posted on the Judiciary's main website: <http://www.njcourts.gov/attorneys/notices.html>.

You will be able to download an Excel spreadsheet list of all NJ state trial and PA Court of Common Pleas judges from the "Clerkships" section of your Symplicity account for use in conducting your mail merge. **The listings for the NJ State judges will be updated in late April/early May.** Career Development will send you an email notifying you when the updating process is complete.

Be sure to correctly address your cover letter. On the envelopes and in the address section of the cover letter, refer to the judge as "The Honorable," followed by the judge's full name. The next line should identify the court in which the judge sits (i.e., "Superior Court of New Jersey"), followed by the judge's address. For the salutation in the cover letter, use the title appropriate for the particular judge followed the judge's last name. The title for a judge on the Superior Court of New Jersey is "Judge." It is also customary to end your cover letter with "Respectfully."

**This section will be updated as more information is provided by the New Jersey Judiciary.*

3. PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

- a. Resume. Have your resume reviewed by a Career Development counselor if you have not done so since adding your last job. Resume paper is recommended.
- b. Cover Letter. Prepare an original cover letter with a heading that matches your resume. Do not copy any samples. Your cover letter should be in your own voice and should 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, particularly work in a court. If you have a particular tie to the jurisdiction in which the judge sits, you should mention that in your letter. Judges do read cover letters, and many judges view your cover letter as a writing sample.
- c. Transcripts. If you include a copy of your transcript, it can be an unofficial version, unless an official transcript is specifically requested. (NJ state judges do not require official transcripts at the application stage.) You may download your unofficial transcript from the Rutgers website and make photocopies for each application.
- d. Writing Sample. If you include a writing sample, it should be 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 is preferred, but an advanced moot court brief (e.g., Baker Mock Trial) or a scholarly writing, such as a law review article are also 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.
- e. List of References. If you include a reference list, it should include the names and complete contact information of three to five references on a separate sheet of paper with a heading that matches your resume. References can be current or former employers or professors (law school or undergrad). Do not include personal or family friends. Be sure to request permission from references first and provide them with information about your job search.

4. 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. Mail merge directions can be found in Symplicity in the Document Library under the Resources tab. Helpful instructional videos on how to complete a mail merge, in both PC and Mac operating systems, can be found on YouTube as well. **Remember to sign each letter.**

5. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Previously, most trial level judges did not seek letters of recommendation; however, last year a small group of judges included letters of recommendation as one of the application documents they wished to receive. In light of this change, we are recommending that students try to obtain a letter of recommendation in case they are interested in applying to a judge who indicates such a letter is required.

- **Rutgers Law recommenders:** Letters written by Rutgers Law faculty will be mail merged (using the spreadsheet you download and will email to careerdevelopment@law.rutgers.edu) and printed by Career Development for inclusion in your applications. If your spreadsheets are incomplete or contain errors this will delay the process, and perhaps result in applications missing crucial LORs. **The deadline for faculty to submit letters to the Center for Career Development is April 26th.**
- **Outside recommenders:** Please ask your outside recommenders to upload their letters directly to the clerkship portal via the “professional recommendation” button on the Law Clerk Recruitment webpage.

6. OTHER STATE COURTS

If you are interested in applying for a clerkship in New York or any state other than New Jersey at the state court level, you can find application information in the 2016 Guide to State Judicial Clerkships produced by Vermont Law School. The Guide is accessible to all Rutgers-Newark law students on-line at:

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

username: silver
password: maple

*Please note that the username and password are lowercase. You can print the Guide from the attached document or from the web (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.

7. INTERVIEWS

Judges may begin contacting students one week after the mid-June start date, at which time they can schedule interviews. If you are contacted for an interview, alert your recommenders ASAP so that they will be prepared if the judge calls. If your resume has changed (e.g., with an externship), e-mail your recommenders an updated resume.

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 Development, and other students or graduates who previously worked for or are acquainted with the judge.

Judicial biographical information may be found at <http://www.judiciary.state.nj.us/public/assets/directories/judgebiographies.pdf> . This listing presents the appointment and assignment history of each judge currently serving in the New Jersey Judiciary. The information is presented by judge in alphabetical order and includes current assignment, initial oath date, all assignments since appointment, law school graduated from, whether the judge has tenure, reappointment date, and year of mandatory retirement. This information is updated monthly by the judiciary.

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

8. 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 some judges may 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.

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).

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 Development 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 Law School 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.

9. 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 Development know ASAP. This will allow us to have updated information for your classmates on which judges are still interviewing.