

New Jersey State Trial Court Clerkship Application Guide 2018 (Camden Campus)

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 over 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** (see the Law Clerk Recruitment information page of the New Jersey Courts website - <https://njcourts.gov/public/lawclerks.html> - and the NJ Judiciary's National Association for Law Placement (NALP) Form - <http://njcourts.gov/public/assets/jobs/nalp.pdf>).

The Center for Career Development will collect and mail applications to NJ trial level judges in June 2018. Students may also send their materials directly to judges separately via the clerkship portal or via regular mail (see below). Regardless of the application method you choose, 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. Most trial-level judges expect a minimum GPA of 3.0. Assignment judges and the principal judges of each part are 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 a clerkship) where you went to college, referrals from friends or attorneys, and experiences as former interns or externs.

Although academic credentials are important, judges consider other factors in the hiring process to recognize particular strengths and qualities. 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.

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.**

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. 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.

NOTE: The 2018-2019 General Assignment Order is expected to be issued in July 2018. 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 is also linked on the Law Clerk Recruitment webpage.

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 will be updated in late April/early May.** Career Development will send an email when the updating process is complete.

2. TWO APPLICATION METHODS

The New Jersey Judiciary utilizes two application methods for judicial clerkships:

(a) Apply directly to individual judges via the clerkship portal,

and

(b) Apply directly to individual judges via the Center for Career Development mailing or via regular mail.

a. **Apply directly to individual judges via the clerkship portal.** In June 2017, the New Jersey Judiciary introduced a web-based clerkship application portal to enable students to apply directly for law clerk opportunities. To use the portal (see link above), students must create an account and follow the instructions in the portal to search for judges and upload the documents required for each application.

While most of the judges in the state are now using the portal, some are not. If you find judges missing from the portal or judges on the portal without clerkship positions posted, you may still apply to them via the Center for Career Development mailing in June, or via regular mail (see below).

b. **Apply directly to individual judges via the Center for Career Development mailing or via regular mail.** Students who want the Center for Career Development to mail their applications for receipt by the judges in mid-June may deliver **ASSEMBLED** applications to the office **June 7 – June 11, 2018**. Specific times and location to be announced via the Law School Newsletter and Announcements later in the spring.

Applications should include a cover letter, resume, transcript, writing sample and a list of references. (See below for guidance on your application materials)

Application materials should be assembled for each judge, and each application should be placed in a clear pocket sleeve provided by the Center for Career Development. (You can pick these up from the Center for Career Development in May.) Pre-sort your applications by vicinage and then alphabetically by each judge within each vicinage.

When you deliver your applications, you will insert each application into the binder or box for each judge. Depending upon the number of applications, this process may take an hour or more so be sure to plan accordingly (e.g., if the designated drop-off time ends at 7:00 pm, please begin sorting by 6:00 pm).

3. PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

- a. Resume. Have your resume reviewed by a counselor at the Center for Career Development 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.

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". You should greet the judge as follows: "Dear Judge 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.

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. You can download a spreadsheet of NJ State Appellate & Supreme Court judges from Symplicity (under Resources: Document Library).

- c. Transcripts. Send a copy of your unofficial transcript. (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. 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 is preferred, but an advanced moot court brief (e.g., Hunter Moot Court) 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. 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. List 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.
- f. Confidential Letters of Recommendation (required by some judges on the portal but NOT required for paper applications). Ask faculty members and current or former employers to write confidential letters of recommendations for you. These may be the same people you list in your references. Instruct your recommenders to send the letters to lor@camlaw.rutgers.edu.

If a judge requests a letter of recommendation via the portal, please create a “placeholder document” to upload in lieu of the actual letter. The “placeholder document” should be as specific as possible. For example, a “placeholder document” may read as follows:

Confidential letters of recommendation from Professor A and Professor B will be sent by my law school’s Center for Career Development to chambers via regular mail.

The Center for Career Development processes letters of recommendation to maintain confidentiality. Please have each of your faculty recommenders complete a “Faculty Recommender Agreement” form, indicating the courts to which they authorize release of their letters. Send the form to lor@camlaw.rutgers.edu or hand-deliver it to the Center for Career Development. Non-Rutgers Law recommenders may send a signed PDF copy of their recommendation to the Center for Career Development. These recommenders should use the salutation “Your Honor” in their letters.

Each time you apply to a judge who requires letters of recommendation, send an email to lor@camlaw.rutgers.edu to request mailing of your recommendation(s). Please use “Hard Copy LOR Request” in the subject line, and include the name(s) of your recommender(s) in the body of the email. You must attach (1) the “placeholder document” you submitted through the portal when applying, along with (2) an Excel spreadsheet with the complete mailing address for each of the judges you applied to. This should be the same spreadsheet used to format/mail merge your cover letters. **Please be sure that your spreadsheets are accurate and complete, and comply with the formatting in the spreadsheets downloadable from Symplicity.** The Center for Career Development will then mail all recommendations directly to the judges on your spreadsheet.

4. OTHER STATE COURTS

If you are interested in applying for a clerkship in any state other than New Jersey at the state court level, you can find application information in the 2018 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: maple
password: leaf

*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.

Pennsylvania

The hiring process and length of clerkship for the PA Court of Common Pleas varies depending upon the county and the individual judge. Full-time judicial law clerk positions, either as personal clerks for a judge or pool positions are available when vacancies occur. Judges will hire their clerks via job postings on various court websites and other lists, or, Judges may contact Human Resources when looking for clerks, so applicants should submit materials to HR to be included in an "eligibility file":

Office of Human Resources
Administrative Office of PA Courts
PO Box 719
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-0719
(717) 795-2080
(717) 795-2086 (fax)
human.resources@pacourts.us

Some Eastern PA Judges contact the Center for Career Development to post openings as they become available. Pool positions in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, when available, are posted at <http://courts.phila.gov> (see Employment Opportunities section, which includes an application form).

If you are interested in clerking in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, you might consider the Judicial Fellowship Program, where Fellows (law graduates) volunteer their time, have the same responsibilities as regular paid judicial law clerks, and gain the benefit of training by judges in the Philadelphia courts. Each judge and fellow team designs a flexible schedule (minimum of 20 hours per week) that ensures reliable service to the judge but permits the fellow to seek a paid position. A full description of this program and application process can also be found in the Employment section of <http://courts.phila.gov>.

5. **Interviews.** If a judge requests an interview, you should make yourself available as soon as possible. Strategic note: If you are applying to several judges in the same city or general area, and one judge requests an interview, you might contact the other chambers and ask whether their judges would be interested in seeing you.

Alert your references 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 references an updated resume. **Bring a copy of your application materials with you on your interviews.**

Judges are inundated with applications every year, and 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 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. The Center for Career Development has resources with biographical and other information about many judges. Since they are public figures, they can be researched on the internet and in legal publications. You may also research published opinions on Westlaw and Lexis. Talk to professors, your career counselor, and other students or graduates who previously worked for or are acquainted with the judge. Also, keep in mind that the judge's entire staff will be "interviewing" you. Everyone you meet in the judge's chambers will form an impression of you and those impressions are an important part of the interview. Do not treat secretaries and other support personnel as subordinates: give them the respect they deserve as the structural backbone of the chambers. Many judges will not hire an applicant after the secretary expresses disapproval.

You are likely to be questioned about your writing sample, so be sure that you are prepared to answer questions about it and to defend your position. Since most judicial clerkships involve a close working relationship between the judge and his clerk, judges frequently use the interview process to get a sense of the personality and compatibility of the applicant. In addition to looking for excellent research and writing ability, judges generally prefer to hire people who are articulate, interested in legal problems, and able to work productively without close supervision.

Because each judge does his own hiring, the criteria used and the person selected is something that she or he alone can articulate. Remember how competitive these interviews are. Receiving an interview is an accomplishment.

Send 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, particularly state trial 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 county need to be handled with care. Discuss this with the Center for 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 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 references know how your interviews are going (an e-mail is fine). If you accept a position, let your references know by sending either an e-mail or a thank-you card. Also, let the Center for Career Development know ASAP by filling out a Graduate Employment Survey through your Symplicity account. This will allow us to have updated information for your classmates on which judges are still interviewing.