Tips for 1Ls and 2Ls Interested in a Post-Graduate Judicial Clerkship

A judicial clerkship is a one or two-year job with a judge following law school graduation. Law clerks perform a wide range of duties, and judges use their law clerks differently. Duties often include research and writing on legal issues pending before the judge, drafting legal opinions, helping the judge to manage schedules for individual cases and dockets overall, and acting as a contact between the judge and attorneys.

If you think you might be interested in a clerkship, keep the following in mind:

- Take every opportunity to develop your legal research and writing skills. Make a point of taking upper level courses with writing requirements; participate in Moot Court programs; try for a spot on a law journal. (Although the Law Review is the most prestigious, the writing and editing you do on any of the other journals is valuable too.) You have the opportunity to develop a great writing sample and improve the skills you need to be an outstanding clerk.

- Recommendations from faculty are critical in the clerkship application process - make sure faculty members know you well enough to write you a glowing letter of reference. Take a seminar course or work as a research assistant to get to know your professors better.

- Seek out a judicial internship during the summer or participate in W&L’s Judicial Law Clerks clinical program. You see what life is like behind the bench, get an inside look at a law clerk’s duties, and, if you perform well, gain the support of a sitting judge.

- Talk about your clerkship aspirations to alumni, faculty, family and friends - there is no better source of information than those who have clerked, and no better source of contacts than those who know judges personally.

- Take every opportunity to meet and mingle with judges - attend bar events, conferences and seminars where judges will be speaking, and make a point of introducing yourself.

- Make your grades and academic record your priority. Since judges in federal courts and at the highest state court level often reserve their clerkship spots for students in the upper portion of their class, you have the most clerkship options if you perform well. If you don’t end up in the upper portion of the class, take heart: every year students ranked throughout the class land clerkships.

- Stay open-minded and flexible about clerkship opportunities - consider all courts and geographic locations. Depending on your career goals, the most prestigious clerkship may not be the right one for you. Also, if you really want to land a clerkship in a particular level court, you may need to be willing to go anywhere to get it.

- Attend OCP programming. Every year we host panel discussions on federal and state court clerkships, and present programming on the application process and other aspects of the clerkship experience.

Please feel free to make an OCP appointment to discuss your clerkship aspirations.