PROCEDURES
FOR POST GRADUATE
JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP APPLICATIONS

OVERVIEW

Updated February, 2014
Welcome to OSCAR!

OSCAR is the Online System for Clerkship Application and Review, a web-based system that enables judicial clerkship applicants to review judges and clerkship opportunities of federal judges who are utilizing the system to post available post-graduate clerkships. The system will enable you to apply for federal clerkships online by uploading your application documents at your convenience 24/7. Access to OSCAR is via:

https://oscar.uscourts.gov

Given the end of the Federal Law Clerk Hiring Plan, rising second year, third year and alumni may apply for post-graduate clerkships anytime. Current first year students will be able to access OSCAR starting June 1 (in a read only mode) and can complete a profile, start to build an application and secure recommender letters, but the system will not open for 1Ls to submit applications until August 1, 2014. A resume can be saved in draft and changes can be made in documents during the process, but … once the application is finalized, you cannot change any documents. The judges will open their side of OSCAR immediately after the final application acceptance date in order to start reviewing applications, set interview dates and start making offers.

Before you begin …

You should start the application process by familiarizing yourself with the OSCAR website. Read through all the icons on the Home Page, Frequently Asked Questions, the User Guide and view the applicant tutorial in the Applicant Resources section. Also, review the tabs on the site to become familiar with the system prior to reviewing the judges and building an application. Each application has a tip sheet and video tutorial to assist you through the process.

When logging in, OSCAR will require users to agree to the website terms of use. New security is now in place and once you enter a password, you will be promoted to enter three personal questions in event you forget your password. You will also need to accept OSCAR’s terms of agreement before you can proceed.

Also, OSCAR posts opportunities for Federal Staff Attorneys (or Staff Law Clerks) throughout the 13 judicial circuits. There is a tab for Staff Attorneys and you will apply for those positions separately. Consult the Symplicity Documents Library for an article (Dec. 2008) which describes staff attorney positions.
OSCAR also supports pro se, death penalty and bankruptcy appellate panel law clerk hiring. These positions will appear under judges’ accounts.

As with SYMPLICITY, complete your profile first and note that this sheet automatically accompanies your application to the judges. The new profile form requires you to identify your citizenship status.

Important: Judges will automatically disqualify an applicant if there is a discrepancy between the profile and your resume. The graduation date is the most common error. You will need to change the profile to match your resume. Contact the Elon Law Registrar (Tammy Horn) to determine your exact date of graduation.

Another Profile section includes judicial internships or externships held during law school, as well as a section to include Moot Court participation, if this information is requested by the judges.

Judges can specify their preferences for Bar Membership, specialized work experience and legal experience post-law school (preferred or required) in their position postings. Specialized work experience will display a list of preferred experience types an applicant can select by checkboxes (may include appellate, bankruptcy, immigration, patent, etc., etc.). Applicants can search for positions using these fields under the Advance Search Tab.

Since not all of the federal judges participate in OSCAR, you must utilize some of the websites and publications listed at the end of this document to search for additional judges: “Helpful Websites/Publications for Identifying Courts, Judges.” Application packets should be sent directly to those judges (see below for contents of application packets). If you are in doubt about whether a particular judge is hiring or question the timeframe for applications, you should contact the judge’s chambers and speak with the law clerk or assistant. Federal judges who do not participate in OSCAR may request documents other than those typically requested through OSCAR (i.e., official transcript). Application packets that are mailed should be sent in flat envelopes so the documents are not folded. Recommender letters and transcripts will be sent to you in sealed envelopes to be included with the packet.

If you apply for a listed clerkship and later decide to withdraw the application (or all applications), you should mark yourself “unavailable.” You will be prompted to change your email notifications so you will not receive the periodic updates about new postings. Think twice before withdrawing, since you cannot apply to that particular judge or judges again. However, if you were to receive an offer for fulltime employment with a law firm or other entity and accept before the application deadline, you can mark “unavailable,” in the event you might apply later as a lateral candidate.

Application procedures and deadlines for state clerkships, including North Carolina, can be found in the Symplicity Documents Library and in the Vermont Law School Guide to State Judicial Clerkship.
Procedures. They can also be found at www.washlaw.edu. Elon Law’s subscription to the Guide will be renewed in Summer 2014 and we will apprise you of the new username and password as soon as it is available. You should check the new edition for any new judges who may be listed. The Guide can be accessed via the following site:

http://www.vermontlaw.edu/Resources/Judicial_Clerkship_and_Internship_Resources.htm

Username: sugar  Password: maple

Application Packet

Judicial Clerkship Application Packet materials include the following:

(Note: Important for OSCAR: All documents (w/ exception of cover letters) must be in .pdf format before loading into the system. You can view all of your documents before the application is finalized.)

Cover Letter (use a template form or create manually and upload in .pdf format).
Storage Limit: 25 letters.
Resume
Writing Sample (your own and best work, but not lengthy, i.e., no more than 8-10 pages. See Symplicity Documents Library for “Guidelines for Submitting Writing Samples”
Letters of Recommendations (from Deans, Faculty, Former Employers)
Letters from former employers or professors outside of Elon Law (“outside recommenders”) can be uploaded into the system, as well.
Important: Check the Recommender Lists first before adding a new one. Elon faculty members are currently in the system and you can add the outside recommenders by clicking on Add New and completing the information requested.
Online Grade Sheet

Rather than submitting a transcript, you will need to complete the online GRADE SHEET FORM. OSCAR judges expect to receive the grade information in this format and will request an official transcript if you are selected to interview. When mailing application packets, you should request and send an Elon Law transcript. (Reminder: The Registrar’s Office fills requests for transcripts on Tuesdays & Thursdays via online request (form available on Elon Law’s website under the Registrar’s Office Tab. Request a transcript in a sealed envelope.)

Elon Law’s grading system can be found in the Symplicity Document Library – see documents with AJC prefix. It will be helpful to have your law school transcript, undergraduate and any other transcripts in front of you when you complete this section, since OSCAR will time out after 55 minutes. Click on UPLOAD to generate a .pdf document of your grade sheet. There is an optional field for entering a cumulative GPA.
Letters of Recommendation

Make every effort to contact faculty members and deans about writing letters on your behalf before leaving for the summer months. These letters are critical to your application packet. You can also include former employers and they can be added to your recommender letters in the OSCAR system. Elon Law professors, as well as the assistants who will be preparing the letters of recommendation and uploading them into the system, have already been added to the pick list of recommenders. You may add outside recommenders on the Recommenders Tab by clicking on “Add New.” First, check to make sure the outside recommender is not already in the system. Typically, three letters are needed and two should be from a faculty member or dean.

IMPORTANT: In order to expedite the letter preparation for non-participating OSCAR judges (and State Judges), you should prepare an EXCEL spreadsheet (sample attached) with the names of the judges to whom you are applying, full addresses, application deadlines, etc.) and send it to the designated faculty assistants. The letters will be prepared in mail merge form and sent to you in sealed envelopes to send with your application packet.

When a recommender letter is requested via OSCAR, the recommender receives an “Evite,” indicating that a student has requested a letter of recommendation for the first time. Subsequent requests do not generate an “Evite” email, but our system is set up to send weekly email reminders to faculty recommenders regarding pending requests. It is imperative that you have the letters completed well before the submission date and we encourage you finalize the application at least a week before the deadline. Remember: Once you SUBMIT IN FINAL, you cannot retrieve your application; only the judge can open your application after this point.

*Click on Update Application to save in draft and generate an Evite email to the recommender. You can start this process with only a resume in storage, but an Evite will not be generated unless you have started to build an application.

IMPORTANT NOTE...
A recommender letter can be uploaded up to 30 days after an application has been submitted. However, the best impression on the judge is having all of your recommender letters in place when the application is opened.

In order for faculty members to write the best letter on your behalf, it would be helpful if you could provide them with a copy of your resume, a transcript (copy will suffice) and a brief summary of the work you have done for them. Also let them know WHY you are interested in the clerkship.

REFERENCES
Like staff attorney offices, judges will now be able to request a list of references in lieu of letters of recommendation. If instructed to do so, applicants can enter the names of the references and their contact information in the Build an Application box. NOTE; this does NOT trigger any
notification (e-invite) through OSCAR. Make sure you have the permission of your references before adding their names and indicate that they may receive a call from judge or his/her staff.

STATUS OF RECOMMENDER LETTERS - When reviewing the status of letters of recommendation, you will see a green check mark for completed letters.

Getting Started …

Identify the federal and state judges to whom you wish to apply for a clerkship in the geographic area(s) of choice. Select judges and geographic locations carefully, keeping in mind that you will bear the expense of mailing applications and traveling to a subsequent interview.

Prepare cover letters CAREFULLY! Proof your cover letter several times and do not rely on spell-check. Additionally, have someone else read it over to make sure it is your very best effort. Career Services strongly suggests you have your resume and cover letter reviewed by our office before applying to judges. Your letter will reflect your writing abilities and will be the judges’ first impression of you. Address judges and justices as “The Honorable” in the inside address and Dear Judge or Justice in the salutation. Additionally, you may consider having a faculty member review your writing sample before uploading into the system.

Research the judges before composing your letter and let them know of your interest in working with them, specifically. Read recent opinions of the judge(s) before applying and interviewing. Search the Judges Almanac for peer reviews and use the bibliography at the end of this document to gather information.

Unwritten Rule: If you receive an offer from a judge, you should accept it. Not doing so is a reflection on you and Elon Law School. Realize that a judicial clerkship is not another job opportunity. A judicial clerkship is an honor and an invaluable experience, be it state or federal for one year or two.

If you are called for an interview with a federal judge, be prepared for a name and background check, as well as mandatory fingerprinting.
ADDITIONAL FEATURES OF OSCAR

Batch Options Icon on lists of Judges, Staff Attorneys, Recommenders
  • Save positions in custom folders
  • Replace multiple application documents in one step
  • Finalize multiple applications

Online Help Feature plus tip sheets for each application

Resources
Consult FAQ Section
Click on Resources Tab to find tip sheets and video tutorials

For further assistance…

Should you experience difficulties with any part of the process, contact the OSCAR Help Desk between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. (EDT), Monday – Friday at 1.866.666.2120 (toll free). You can also email the help desk at:

  oscar-support@ao.uscourts.gov

Additionally, you may contact Career Services for assistance:
kchisnall@elon.edu or dmc Dowell@elon.edu
HELPFUL WEBSITES / PUBLICATIONS
FOR IDENTIFYING COURTS, JUDGES

www.washlaw.edu
A plethora of Court information on all levels. Click on courts & cities for full addresses.

(http://www.vermontlaw.edu/Resources/Judicial_Clerkship_and_Internship_Resources.htm)
Information compiled for state courts throughout the United States. Updated throughout year.
Username: sugar Password: maple

www.uscourts.gov
Information and links to Federal Courts

www.law.emory.edu/FEDCTS/
Federal Courts Finder

www.ncbusinesscourt.net
Contact information for Business Courts in Greensboro, Raleigh & Charlotte

www.nccourts.org

www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm
State, county and city directory.

http://ldi.bvdep.com
Leadership Library (online service replaces former “Yellow Books” housed in Law Library)
Includes Federal and State Court Who’s Who. Also, source for Administrative Law Judges:
Research Federal Directory – keyword search: Administrative Law Judge. Pull up offices within
agencies. Or … Use List Feature, type in Job Function (Administrative Law Judge) & Submit.

materials & deadlines.

www.usajobs.gov – Federal Government positions throughout United States

www.nalpdirectory.org – (Quick Search) New York State Supreme Court, Appellate Div., Fourth
Department, New York, NY (16 – 50 positions)

www.judiciary.state.nj.us/lawclerks New Jersey Courts
Over 480 one-year trial court clerkships. New Jersey Bar membership & NJ residency not
requirements. Announcements & Application Procedures included.
HARDBOUND PUBLICATIONS IN LAW LIBRARY

Almanac of the Federal Judiciary – Vols. I & II
  Profiles and Evaluations of all Judges of the US Circuit Courts & US Supreme Court
  Includes bios, noteworthy rulings, lawyers’ evaluations

Federal-State Court Directory

BNA’s Directory of State & Federal Courts, Judges and Clerks
Hardbound editions are available in the Elon Law School Library – on the same shelf with the Martindale-Hubbell directories. Most law firms and city law libraries should have the same publications.