
APPLYING FOR A SUMMER JUDICIAL EXTERNSHIP

Office of Career & Professional Development
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Working for a judge is one of the most rewarding, educational, and formative experiences a law student can have. Please note that these externships are unpaid.

The Application Process

- **Deciding which court:**

Are you most interested in criminal or civil matters? If you are interested in family law, it makes sense to apply to Family Court judges. If you prefer financial issues, working for a Bankruptcy Court might be a great experience.

A court's location is of less importance than the kind of court (civil vs. criminal, trial vs. appellate). Think flexibly about where you are willing to go to get this wonderful experience. San Francisco is particularly competitive; increase your chances of being hired by applying to judges in surrounding counties, Sacramento, or other places in California.

- **Selecting Judges:**

Many judges and courts do not post listings, so if you wait for listings, you will miss out on a number of great opportunities. Check HCO regularly, but be prepared to do some independent research. Check the resources on the [Judicial Externships website](#) to identify judges who regularly hire.

Consult the Daily Journal's California Court Directory (available in the Career Office or the Law Library), or visit the website www.uscourts.gov for contact information of courts both in and outside of California. There are also directories of courts and judge on Lexis and Westlaw.

Hastings students' evaluations are also great resources regarding the personalities of local judges. These are in files in the Externships and pro Bono Office, on the 3rd floor of the 100 McAllister Street building (the Tower). You can also look at "Summer Surveys" (online at [HastingsCareersOnline](#) .) If a classmate has completed a survey about a judge either on HCO or in the Externship Office, it is a good bet that the chambers regularly takes externs.

- **Application Materials**

Application materials consist of a cover letter, resume, writing sample (5-10 pages), references and an unofficial transcript/grade sheet. You can access samples of all of these documents on the Career Office page at uchastings.edu (go to "[Career Guides and Handouts](#)").

The **cover letter** is a sample of your business writing style just as the writing sample is of your legal writing ability. Both must be perfect; be sure to have both carefully vetted by an expert. Letters to judges within a particular court will be very similar but they should be tailored to the type of court. For example, in an application to a bankruptcy court, you would highlight any finance or tax interest or background you have.

The proper way to **address your cover letter** is “The Honorable Judith Jones” in the address line and “Dear Judge Jones” or “Dear Justice Jones” (for judges in the CA Supreme Court or CA Appellate Courts, not the Ninth Circuit) in the salutation.

The sample cover letter included in this publication is just an example; your letter should be tailored to highlight your own best qualities.

Judicial externs are hired mainly to do legal research, analysis and writing, thus you will want to highlight those skills and your interest in that work. You also should discuss any other personal qualities or experience (for example, previous legal or business experience, independence, team orientation, detail orientation, etc.) that you feel will be relevant to the job, *citing specific examples for any claims you make about yourself*. If you are applying outside California, include some information about why you are applying there, such as your intention of practicing in that region after law school or personal connections to, or knowledge of, the area.

Consult the Career Office Handout “[Crafting a Law Resume](#)” for advice on how to present your qualifications in the most professional way. It is also a very good idea to have more than one other person review your resume for typos or grammatical errors; the Career Office counselors are happy to review resumes and cover letters with you.

You won’t need an official transcript to apply to the judges; an **unofficial transcript** is fine (See [Creating a Grade Sheet](#) handout). For an unofficial transcript, you can print out a screen shot from Web Advisor or type out a clean copy of your existing grades, labeling it “Unofficial Transcript.” Be careful, if you are typing it, to be absolutely accurate about your grades/grade point average. If you wish to round your average, never round up, only down. You don’t ever want to be accused of grade misrepresentation.

Your **writing sample** is usually your best memorandum from Legal Writing and Research or a portion of your Moot Court brief, edited down to 5-10 pages. Be sure to review and edit it carefully to make it as perfect as you possibly can; all of your application materials serve as samples of your writing and of your attention to detail so they must not contain errors or you will be eliminated immediately from consideration. Attach a cover sheet to the writing sample explaining what it is (i.e., “The attached writing is an excerpt from my Moot Court brief”) and mention the citation system you used.

Timing Your Application

You may begin applying for judicial externships anytime **after December 1st of your first year** of law school. If you are applying to judges who require a transcript and you

have not yet received your grades, indicate in your cover letter that you will update your application with grades as soon as they become available (if you are applying to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, however, make sure to carefully review the Externships page of their website. Some judges ask you to hold off on applying until grades become available. **In fact, it's important to check the website of any court to which you are applying to determine whether they have a specific externship application process.**)

You can mail, email (court websites will tell you if a particular judge has a preference for paper or online applications), or even hand-carry applications to the judges' chambers. Hand delivery gives the people in the chambers a more personal first impression of you than simply sending materials. If you decide to hand deliver your packet, be sure to dress professionally and approach the clerk/receptionist politely, offer your materials, and be prepared in case the judge decides to do an "on the spot" interview. NOTE: if you are going to hand deliver applications, be persistent and polite! Some students report remarkable success with going directly to chambers, others are stopped by the Clerk of the Court. Accepted practice varies greatly from court to court.

Interviewing for an Externship

Either the judge or her "elbow clerks" or both can conduct the interview for a judicial externship. The kinds of questions they ask will vary but you should be prepared to talk about your specific skills with a short anecdote for each point that gives evidence for and illustrates the assertions you are making about yourself. For example, if you say you are someone with good attention to detail, how do you show that? Have you been praised for it in the past? Have you gotten good grades based on the perfection of your work? Give the interviewer reasons to believe what you say about yourself. Most questions will be asked in the context of the job you are applying for; keep your answers simple and to the point. Because the work you will do for the judge is mainly research, legal writing and analysis, be prepared to speak about your skills and interest in that kind of work. For example, if you indicated on your resume that you wrote a Thesis, seminar paper, or journal note-be prepared to discuss it. A very significant portion of the interview is about "fit." A judge's chamber is an intimate environment and you need to get along with everyone. For federal externships, you will often meet with both the judge and her clerks. In almost all cases, the highly valued judge's secretary casts an important vote as well.

Accepting or Declining Offers

Some judges will give an "**exploding offer**" at the end of the interview, an offer that you must either accept or decline on the spot. Others will give you time to think about it, especially if you are a first year student. Even when you are given time, there are some etiquette concerns you must consider.

Some legal employers are open to negotiation of the date for accepting or declining a job offer; generally, it's not a good idea to do this with a judge. Usually, the judge will let you know how long you have to consider the offer. If you need time to decide, you can certainly ask for it but do so carefully and with deference. Many students screen

all incoming telephone calls during this process. That way, if you receive a call after the interview (most likely to extend an offer) you might have time to touch base with other chambers with whom you already have completed interviews to see when their decisions will be made.

If you find during the interview that the job or the people are not a good fit for you, don't wait for the judge to offer you the job; withdraw your application by calling the chambers immediately after the interview, thanking them for taking the time to interview you and explaining that you are withdrawing from the competition for that job. Keep in mind that the legal world is small and your reputation already has begun building; treating judges with respect and deference is critical to your success, even if you are not destined for litigation.

Sample Judicial Externship Application Cover Letter

Lee Anne Horseheads
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San Francisco, CA 94102
415.555.1212
horsehea@uchastings.edu

Date

The Honorable Judith Jones
Name of Court
Street Address of Court
City Address of Court

Dear Judge Jones,

Please consider this letter, enclosed resume, writing sample and law school transcript as my application for a summer 2016 externship in your chambers. I spoke with John Smith, a 2L classmate who externed in your chambers last summer and he specifically encouraged me to apply.

As a first year student at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, I enjoyed being introduced to legal research, writing and analysis; I received an A in that class and am eager to do more research and writing in your chambers next summer. As my long term goal is to pursue a career in litigation, I am excited about the idea of seeing practicing attorneys at work and learning more about the functioning of the court system.

My previous experience includes working as a manager at WalMart where I learned how to organize my time effectively and to establish positive relations with my co-workers. I supervised a staff of five and our team received the store award for customer service excellence more frequently than any other department.

If there is any additional information you need, please don't hesitate to call or email me. I am available for an interview at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Lee Anne Horseheads

Enclosures