

Midyear Meeting News

Judicial Clerkships: Great Opportunity and Smart Career Move for Minority Law Students



Oregon Court of Appeals Judge Ellen F. Rosenblum discusses law clerkship opportunities with law students

Despite the seemingly overwhelming number of applicants for judicial law clerkships, opportunities abound for minority law school graduates—even those who are not at the top of their class—if they’re willing to put in the time, planning and perseverance necessary to secure these prime posts.

U.S. District Court Judge Jose E. Martinez of the Southern District of Florida receives between

300 – 350 law clerk applications each year. What’s he looking for?

“Something that makes you stand out in a crowd. Something that differentiates you from everyone else,” he told a roomful of law students attending the panel discussion “What Do Judicial Clerks Do?,” one of a series of programs presented to a select group of law students who attended the two-day 7th Annual Minority Judicial Clerkship Program during the ABA Midyear Meeting in Miami.

Certainly the students with top grades draw the attention of those judges seeking to fill posts with the best candidate, but other virtues are also sought.

“You have to have the personality and the drive to do the job,” said Appellate Court Judge Terri F. Love, Louisiana Court of Appeal, Fourth Circuit. She noted that law clerk

hopefuls need to consider the responsibilities that go with the job. “As a law clerk you are an extension of that judge. That judge’s reputation is based on the ‘product’ he or she puts out and on the image that judge portrays to the community.”

“Law clerks are our life’s blood. If they’re not good, we’re in trouble,” said Martinez, noting that his law clerks are involved in reviewing “every piece of paper” and making recommendations on how to proceed, every step of which he scrutinizes.

The benefits of becoming a law clerk are broad, said Oregon Court of Appeals Judge Ellen F. Rosenblum. As an experienced law clerk, “You’re going to have a more satisfying career as a lawyer.”

Rosenblum included among those benefits:

- Lawyers with law clerk experience gain a professional self-confidence far earlier in their careers than lawyers who haven’t served as clerks.
- Judges, unlike lawyers, don’t bill by the hour, so they can take time to mentor.
- Law clerks hone their skills in thinking objectively, like judges.
- A judge’s recommendation carries weight for a law clerk seeking a job.
- A law clerk’s reputation is forever linked to the judge for whom they clerk. Law firms note this when making hiring decisions.

The Minority Judicial Clerkship Program, which debuted in 2001 at the ABA Midyear Meeting in San Diego, brings judges, minority students, and former law clerks together for structured networking. Students demonstrate their knowledge and research skills in small group settings while interacting with judges and former clerks in team-building projects.

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