

Non-Traditional Legal Careers In and Around the Courts

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As the job market tightens, JD candidates and attorneys are seeking employment opportunities off the beaten path. While judicial clerkships are typical post-graduate alternatives, additional opportunities exist in and around the courts in practice and non-practice roles. Although many positions require experience, in some cases a JD can substitute for experience. This article explores some of the opportunities available.

Court Administrators/Court Executives are the unsung heroes who “keep the lights on” so judges and their law clerks can administer justice. Like law firm or law school administrators, court administrators are responsible for facilities management, hiring and training staff, maintaining the court’s calendar, managing dockets, and many other administrative functions.

Lawyers with administrative experience may be strong candidates for positions calling for staff management, labor relations, and interdepartmental oversight. Labor and employment law or human resources experience can be relevant, as court administrators may monitor productivity or effectiveness of court staff and resolve disputes. Some courts require administrators to serve as liaisons to other governmental departments or agencies, making prior experience in government organizations useful. Further, administering budgets and determining best administrative practices require attention to detail and analytical skills, which tend to be lawyers’ strengths.

High-level administrative positions often call for development or oversight of institutional efforts like guardian ad litem programs, child support or

protection initiatives, interpreter programs, and special drug courts. Attorneys or law students with experience shepherding clients through these programs would be excellent job candidates. Depending on the size of the jurisdiction and the court, senior administrative annual salaries may range from \$75,000 to well over \$100,000. To find these positions, job seekers should review state judiciary or U.S. courts websites.

Pro Se Law Clerks at the federal level provide assistance related to pro se prisoner petitions and complaints. These clerks provide substantive legal analysis of pleadings, research case law, draft orders and opinions for judicial review, and recommend dispositions of motions and cases. In addition, they screen incoming petitions and complaints for procedural compliance and help clerks’ offices resolve case management issues.

A recent posting for a pro se clerk in the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts called for law school graduates (top quarter or law review preferred) with analytical skills and one year of post-graduation legal or legal administrative experience. Following a two-year federal district court clerkship, attorney Monica Sullivan became a pro se clerk at the U.S. District Court, Southern District of California. Sullivan says she enjoys her work because of “the opportunity to tackle complex Constitutional law issues, and to draft recommendations and orders for all of the magistrate and district judges in the Southern District.”

Administrative Hearing Officers conduct hearings to make decisions or recommendations on disputes with respect to government programs or gov-

Key Words and Job Titles to look for:

- Bankruptcy Administrator
- Board of Pardons
- Counsel to Office of Judicial Administration
- Deputy Clerk
- Ethics Counsel
- Family Law Facilitator
- Financial and Procurement Specialist
- Guardian ad litem Attorney
- Human Resources
- Jury Administrator
- Law Librarian
- Probate Investigator
- Probation and Pretrial Services
- Reporter of Decisions

Websites of Interest:

- www.uscourts.gov/Careers.aspx — Jobs in federal courts
- www.ncsc.org/Education-and-Careers/Jobs.aspx — National Center for State Courts
- www.nacmnet.org/jobs/index.html — National Association for Court Management
- www.beyond.com — Find Court Jobs at www.Beyond.com