

SUMMER CLERKSHIPS DURING COVID-19

By **Kristen Shaffer**, ISBA Young Lawyers Division Secretary

One of the quintessential parts of a law student's legal education is a summer clerkship. Summer clerkships provide law students with hands-on legal experience outside the classroom. Clerkships also provide law students the opportunity to meet and network with practicing attorneys, learn more about the firm or organization where they are employed and observe attorney work-life balance. The importance of summer clerkships for law students cannot be underscored enough. Summer clerkships are equally as valuable for employers for recruitment, retention and succession planning. As attorneys and firms are adjusting to the new normal in light of COVID-19, it is important to keep in contact with your summer clerks and begin planning how to structure their clerkships if the current circumstances continue into the summer.

Typical assignments for law student clerks include research, writing and attending hearings with attorneys. Due to COVID-19, most attorneys are working from home and attending hearings by telephone and video conference. Fortunately, the work typically assigned to law students can be completed remotely. Additionally, clerks will still have the opportunity to attend hearings with attorneys by phone and video conference.

Another important aspect of summer clerkships is attending bar association lunches, meetings and continuing education programs. To date, spring bar events are being held by telephone conference, postponed or canceled. Law students will not have the normal opportunities to network with the legal community, so try to provide as many meaningful opportunities as you can this summer.

Here are a few ways legal employers can implement their summer clerk programs during the COVID-19 pandemic while working remotely:

- ▶ Ensure that summer clerks have the hardware and software they need to work remotely, and set up a time for them to pick-up what is needed to work remotely during the summer.
- ▶ To introduce the clerks to your office, schedule "Zoom" lunches, breakfasts, coffees or virtual happy hours with members of your office or firm. Keep in mind that the clerks have been doing this

for almost an entire semester, so they're likely used to communicating through teleconferencing tools. Try to make the experience as normal as possible for them

- ▶ Take clerks out to lunch and other meals. While it is not possible to do that in-person, consider ordering takeout that your clerks and attorneys can pick-up on their own. Perhaps after picking-up their meals, they can get together for a "Zoom" call.
- ▶ Assign projects to clerks that can be completed while working remotely.
 - ▶ Legal research projects
 - ▶ Draft memos, pleadings or other documents
 - ▶ Draft articles for your website on current legal issues
- ▶ Invite clerks to attend telephone and video hearings/trials.
- ▶ Assign a mentor to the clerk as you would do in a normal office setting.
- ▶ Schedule regular telephone or video calls with clerks.
- ▶ Ask associates, if you work in a firm with associates, to take the lead in planning afternoon virtual social gatherings to make the clerks feel welcome to the office.

If your office is considering canceling summer clerkships, consider other alternatives such as shortening the length of the clerkship, employing clerks for discrete tasks only, inviting clerks to

social "events," and introducing clerks to other lawyers in the community.

Additionally, if you have a summer clerk who will need to make local housing arrangements for the summer, talk to them early about the potential structure and timeline of their clerkship to ensure they can obtain housing for the duration of their clerkship. This is the time of year they will need to negotiate summer leases.

Law students are expecting changes to their clerkships due to COVID-19. They are prepared to adjust start/end dates or work remotely, but still look forward to their summer experience.

As a final note, on behalf of the entire Young Lawyers' Division and all of its law student members, thank you for your flexibility this summer. Law students will forever remember their summer experiences, and they will particularly remember the compassion and care that their summer employer exhibited during these unprecedented times.



Kristen Shaffer is an attorney at Shuttlesworth & Ingersoll, P.L.C.

Other contributors to this article include Shannon Holmberg, Associate Attorney at Davis Brown Law Firm; Kathryn Atkinson Overberg, Director of Career Development at Drake University Law School; and Abhay Nadipuram, Vice President, Government Relations and Legal Counsel for the Iowa Hospital Association and YLD President.

MEDIATION AND ARBITRATION SERVICES



All types of Civil Litigation, including:

- Business and Commercial
- Construction
- Employment
- Intellectual Property
- Personal Injury

Michael A. Dee
515.242.2475
dee@brownwinick.com

BW BrownWinick
ATTORNEYS AT LAW