

# United States District Court for the District of Utah

## Community Education and Outreach Program

### Careers With the Court

(here are some of the many court careers that you could pursue)

#### **Judge**

Judges apply the law and oversee the legal process in courts. They ensure that rules and procedures are followed, and interpret the law. Judges also work outside the courtroom, “in chambers.” In these, their private offices, judges read documents, research legal issues, write opinions, and oversee the court’s operations. In some jurisdictions, judges also manage the courts’ administrative and clerical staff. Judges instruct juries on the law. When the law does not require a jury trial or when the parties waive their right to a jury, judges decide the cases. A bachelor’s degree and work experience usually constitute the minimum requirement for a judgeship or magistrate position. A number of lawyers become judges, and most judges have first been lawyers. Federal and State judges usually are required to be lawyers first. All federal judges are nominated by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate, as stated in Article III of the Constitution. Federal judges serve for life unless they are impeached. Magistrate judges are appointed by majority vote of the active federal district judges in their district and serve for 8 years. Every state has its own procedures for becoming a judge. In Utah, you must be admitted to practice law in Utah, have lived here for 3 years and be at least 25 years old (5 years residency and 30 years old to be a Utah Supreme Court justice). Applicants are nominated for review through public comment and investigation. The final list is presented to the Governor who selects the next judge. State judges in Utah are subject to retention elections.



#### **Law Clerk**

Law clerks assist judges in research. Some law clerks work for judges for a very long time and are referred to in federal courts as staff attorneys. Law clerks help draft decisions, jury instructions, and other material. A law clerk arranges the judge’s calendar and schedules meetings and conferences. A law clerk must have a bachelor’s degree. Law clerks are either in law school or have recently completed law school. Some judges require that their clerks have passed the state bar exam and have 1-10 years of legal experience.



#### **Attorney**

*Lawyers*, also called *attorneys*, act as both advocates and advisors in our society. As advocates, they represent one of the parties in criminal and civil trials by presenting evidence and arguing in court. As advisors, lawyers counsel their clients concerning their legal rights and responsibilities. Lawyers spend the majority of their time outside the courtroom, conducting research, interviewing clients and witnesses, and handling other details in preparation for trial. Lawyers who work for state attorneys general or U.S. attorneys, prosecutors, public defenders, and courts play a key role in the criminal justice system. Government lawyers help develop programs, draft and interpret laws and legislation, establish enforcement procedures, and argue civil and criminal cases on behalf of the government. Lawyers often work long hours, and of those who regularly work full time, about half work 50 hours or more per week. Formal educational requirements for lawyers include a 4-year college degree, 3 years in law school, and the passing of a written bar examination.



#### **Paralegal/Legal Assistant**

Paralegals assist attorneys in many ways. They may help prepare the legal arguments, draft documents to be filed with the court, and assist attorneys during trials. Paralegals also organize and track cases and documents. Some paralegals coordinate the activities of other law office employees and maintain financial office records. Additional tasks may differ depending on the employer. There are several ways to become a paralegal. The most common is through a community college paralegal program that may lead to an associate’s degree. Some employers train paralegals on the job, hire college graduates with no legal experience, or promote experienced legal secretaries.



## **Court Clerk**

The court clerk takes care of the judge's papers and files. The court clerk also swears the witnesses in. The court clerk sits at a desk beside the judge. Court clerks also manage the administration of the courthouse, attending to staff needs, building maintenance, computer systems, finance and budget concerns, and the regular operation of the court. In federal courts, clerks have many titles ranging from docket clerk to courtroom deputies. All clerks assist the judges and the public. Court clerks usually have to have a college degree or 2 to 4 years of other court experience.



## **Court Reporter**



Court reporters oversee the recording of all things that occur during court. Some courts use video equipment, while others use a shorthand typing device. Court reporters play a critical role not only in judicial proceedings, but at every meeting where the spoken word must be preserved. The amount of training required to become a court reporter varies with the type of reporting chosen. It usually takes less than a year to become a voice writer. In contrast, the average length of time it takes to become a stenotypist is 33 months. Some states require court reporters to be notary publics. Others require passing an exam.

## **Interpreter**

Court interpreters convert one spoken language into another. They often assist non-English speaking persons in filling out forms and preparing legal documents. Court interpreters work in a variety of legal settings, such as attorney-client meetings, and all stages of a trial. In addition to interpreting what is said, court interpreters also may be required to translate written documents. To become a court interpreter you must be fluent in another language, have a high school diploma, and pass a language proficiency exam. Some courts, including federal courts, require certification of language skills for certain languages. All court interpreters must swear an oath similar to the ones made by witnesses to be truthful in their interpretations.



## **US Marshal**

U.S. Marshals provide security in the courtroom and patrol the courthouse. They maintain order by removing or calming disruptive people, and operating security check points at the doors. Marshals escort judges, juries, witnesses and prisoners to and from the courtroom. They also administer first-aid and assistance during emergencies, accidents or illnesses. U.S. Marshals also execute, or carry out, the warrants and other orders of the court, as well as track fugitives. To become a US Marshal you must be legally eligible to carry firearms, and complete a 2 year training program or have 2-4 years of law enforcement experience. Many U.S. Marshals have college degrees and military training.



## **Mediator**

Mediators are trained in communication and conflict resolution. They assist parties in coming to an agreement about their dispute without going to trial. Some courts and judges require that people try to mediate before coming to court; while other courts offer mediation as a service to the parties who are interested. Many states require court mediators to complete a training program, ethics exams and to have 50 hours to 10 years experience as a mediator. There are many training programs in the community and most schools offer degrees in related fields (such as law, communication and dispute resolution).



## **Probation Officer**

Probation officers supervise people on probation or supervised release through personal contact with the offenders and their families. They investigate the background of offenders, write pre-sentence reports, and make sentencing recommendations. Officers may be required to testify in court as to their findings and recommendations. They also attend court hearings to update the court on the offender's compliance with the terms of his or her sentence and on the offender's efforts at rehabilitation. A bachelor's degree in social work, criminal justice, or a related field usually is required. Applicants usually are administered written, oral, psychological, and physical examinations. Sometimes applicants are required to complete a training program.

