

"I had no idea what the court did," he says. "The trade cases are very complicated. The learning curve is very steep, so that was an issue...But the advantage of clerking for a specialized court is that the learning curve sort of plateaus out. If I had been in a regular federal district court I would have had one or two antitrust cases, for example. But this was daily customs and trade matters."

Friedman says clerking for the Court of International Trade has another advantage: "The judges also hear cases from regular, non-specialized district courts, which means clerks get involved as well. This clerkship gave me a great opportunity to learn customs and international trade law in a really detailed way, and to learn things that every other clerk learns about practice and procedure in federal court," Friedman says.

No matter where the judge heard cases, Friedman says, DeCarlo followed the same procedure to come to a decision. "After the clerks read the briefs, listened to the parties' arguments and prepared draft opinions, DeCarlo would argue the case with them. If we could get it past him and he couldn't shoot holes in it, then he would take our opinion and redraft it for his style and content. It was good training for appearing in front of a judge," Friedman says.

Now a customs and trade lawyer with Barnes, Richardson & Colburn in Chicago, Friedman says he has met many lawyers who practiced in the Court of International Trade as a clerk. Friedman says his two years of

experience in the court were extremely helpful in getting in among the relatively small group of lawyers who practice there.

Friedman calls his clerkship the equivalent of getting an LL.M. in customs law, but he says a clerkship is valuable for every lawyer no matter what court they work in or what their career aspirations are.

"A big job of law clerks is writing," he says. "Having someone look over your work who has been doing it for 25 years and telling you where your research is light or where your arguments don't make sense is useful to anyone."

LORI PROKES '88

Lori Prokes '88 was intent on beginning her environmental law practice with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, when U.S. District Court Judge Charles Kocoras offered her the opportunity to clerk for him.

"The opportunity just came up, but it turned out that there was a special similarity between my interests and his docket," she says of the Chicago federal judge. "He was one of the two judges selected to hear pretrials on asbestos litigation. He had several hundred environmental cases in his courtroom."

While her year-long clerkship happened to be an intensive lesson in environmental practice, Prokes says there is no better exposure to the litigation process than through a judicial clerkship. "In private firms it would take years to get the experience that you get in one year with a judge," she says. "Day after day you get

to be in court and sit in on pretrial conferences with the judge. These experiences rarely come up right away in private practice."

The clerkship also turned out to be a lifelong lesson in the value of professional conduct. "The one thing that I really learned during my clerkship is to have integrity in all things. Bring yourself honestly to the table, particularly in negotiations," she says. "I saw the judge in pretrial conferences being honest and frank with the parties—without compromising anyone's positions—and settle the cases. He is an excellent mediator and brings a lot of integrity to the process."

"It also extends to his courtroom practice," she adds. "He had very little tolerance for people who would present themselves to the court and try to misstate the facts. I now know to present myself to the court in the most accurate way I can, while still advocating my client's position."

GRANT DIXON '91

Every time he appears in court, Grant Dixon '91 harkens back to his clerkship with U.S. District Court Judge Charles R. Norgle Sr. '69. He remembers the Chicago federal judge's critiques of lawyers' arguments. He remembers the artful cross-examinations of noted trial lawyers. And he remembers the subtle nuances that impacted the outcome of a case.

"Not only do you learn a lot...but you absolutely become a better lawyer. If you become a better lawyer, you serve your clients better — and that is why we are in business," Dixon says.

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JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP PROGRAM

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An aspiring trial lawyer during law school, Dixon says he thought carefully about the role of clerks at different levels before accepting Norgle's offer. "I thought I wanted to do trial work, but I also wanted to be able to write opinions. In trial courts, at least in Cook County, clerks generally don't do that. At the federal trial courts, clerks get the opportunity to research and write drafts of opinions and also get the opportunity to sit in on trials...For me clerking for a federal court judge seemed like it would be the best of both worlds. It turned out that it was."

Dixon says one of the most beneficial aspects of his clerkship was discussing cases with the judge. He recalls one memorable product liability case where he was at odds with Norgle's opinion.

"The judge took all of my arguments and used them as part of the opinion. It was very gratifying that he respects your opinion so much that he is willing to incorporate your arguments and use them as part of the opinion," Dixon says. "He was conscientious enough to take the time to explain to me why he thought I was wrong and to tolerate disagreement. That is something many people don't tolerate well."

Now a lawyer with Corboy & Demetrio in Chicago, Dixon says the clerkship was looked on favorably during his job search. "The opportunity at this firm was made available to me because of my federal court experience. I had

the inside knowledge of the way the courthouse worked, and the use and practice of federal law and the principles of federalism."

For those interested in becoming judicial law clerks, Dixon recommends taking advantage of the fact that federal judges teach at John Marshall, something many law schools don't have. Norgle taught Dixon's trial advocacy class, which he believes "didn't hurt" his chances when he applied to be his law clerk.

"It's probably something underappreciated by the students," Dixon says. "Those judges have been practicing for a long time...Students should take every opportunity to meet them, because as a litigator you are in front of them every day."

JAMES FESSLER '88

When Jim Fessler '88 went to clerk for the chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, he hoped to figure out what kind of lawyer he wanted to be. He left with an indelible impression of what lawyers should strive to be.

The late Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas Moran taught him the importance of civility, Fessler says.

"The judge said there was no reason you can't go into court and zealously advocate your position, have the other side zealously advocate its position and walk out together and have a beer," Fessler says.

Fessler says that the civility among the appellate lawyers who appeared in the state supreme court was a primary reason for his decision to join their ranks after his clerkship with Moran.

Having learned firsthand, what works in appellate practice didn't hurt either. Now a lawyer in Query & Harrow's appellate practice group, Fessler says he tries to apply the lessons that Moran taught him about brief writing and oral arguments whenever he takes on a new case.

Fessler decided to clerk for Moran, in part, because of his role as chief justice of the court. But clerking for the chief justice meant that Fessler had some duties beyond the scope of researching and writing draft opinions. He also helped write speeches, lectures and seminars that the judge gave as part of his duties as chief justice. The judge's dislike of public speaking made that part of the job difficult, he says.

Fessler has served as a judicial law clerk to Moran and as an extern to U.S. District Court Judge Brian Barnett Duff. The experience of working for a judge is something he urges every law student or new lawyer to try.

"It is like an apprenticeship," he says. "You have an opportunity to review and see what others do. You can take the best of everything and use it for yourself."

JOHN REIDY '91

On his first day of work as an associate with Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue in Chicago, John Reidy '91 was pulled out of an orientation session with another former judicial law clerk to work on a project with a tight deadline. That experience confirmed what Reidy had always heard about the value of judicial clerkships: "We were viewed as ready to go," he says.