

## PAIRING ECONOMIC REALITY WITH COURT NEEDS— A JUDICIAL FELLOWSHIP

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The First Judicial District of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia is located amongst some of Pennsylvania's finest law schools: Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, Villanova University, Drexel University and others. This beautiful city, rich with culture and history, attracts law school students from across the state and country and each year graduates smart, energetic lawyers yearning to put their newly acquired skills to practice. Here is where dreams also meet reality: the economic reality that businesses have downsized; law firms are using second and third level associates instead of training law school graduates; and the court system is operating with fewer judges than usual under a state budget freeze. Where are these bright, talented graduates supposed to find a legal home? For many graduates, resume after resume leads to no interview or no offer, and dreams begin to slip away as young lawyers contemplate turning to other jobs as a second choice.

Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas Judge Lisa M. Rau realized the predicament of graduating students. She also had a full understanding of the state's mandate that the judges who recently retired from the bench would not be replaced, and the remaining judges were moving full speed ahead on judicial efficiency systems. The judges were now expected to carry a heavier load than ever. Opinions needed to be written, but the paid law clerks were already overworked, with no money in the budget to bring more on. That's when Judge Rau started thinking creatively. *What if these recent graduates would be willing to come to the First Judicial District as an unpaid Fellow, learn how to be a law clerk and assist the existing staff with the pressing caseload? What if there were some judges willing to take on the unpaid Fellows, and train them, knowing full well that at any time, they could get a job offer and the time spent training would follow them out the door? And if the answer to both of these questions was yes, could the fellows' time spent in training be an actual benefit for both the law graduate and the judge willing to take them on?* The questions hung unanswered in her mind, but an idea had begun to form.

With the support of then President Judge Pamela Pryor Dembe and Administrative Judge D. Webster Keogh, and the assistance of Chief Deputy Court Administrator Charles A. Mapp, Sr., the program was launched in the spring of 2011. Initially, Judge Rau contacted the three schools in the immediate Philadelphia vicinity: Temple University Beasley School of Law, University of Pennsylvania Law School and Drexel University Earle Mack School of Law. All schools seemed eager to direct students to the program. Before two weeks had passed, Judge Rau received a call from Villanova University School of Law wanting to join the program. By the end of the first season, seven area law schools were involved, including Widener School of Law, Rutgers School of Law-Camden and Penn State Dickinson School of Law. The welcome cooperation and reception from area law schools was not Judge Rau's only pleasant surprise. In the first season of the program, 38 judges volunteered to participate in the program. Because Judge Rau wisely set up the program to be self-sustaining, each law school was given a list of participating judges with their contact information and law school students contacted the judges directly and were interviewed by the judges. From 2011 to 2012, 30 graduates participated from seven law schools. Of the 30 Fellows, 88% went on to find paying jobs in a year or less. In fact, 25% of the fellows were hired as paid law clerks when a judge was seeking to fill a position.

Forwarding to the current year, 2014, the program has gained the continued support of current Administrative Judge John W. Herron, and has grown. Some notable success stories have evolved. Shannon Cunningham graduated from Temple University in 2011. She had part-time work at a small law firm in Philadelphia, but could not find full-time work. At a Philadelphia legal event, she met Judge Lachman, who told her about the Judicial Fellowship program and invited Shannon to apply to assist her. Two weeks later, she found herself as a Fellow for Judge Lachman, while she kept her law firm job part-time. Eventually, she was hired as a full-time law clerk with Judge Sandra Mazer Moss. During her clerkship, she saw the need for and started a monthly brown-bag lunch session for all fellows so they could exchange experiences, leads, and interview tips.

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In 2013, Shannon was hired by a mid-sized defense firm in Philadelphia. She stated, "When I look at my journey since law school graduation, I can't imagine what it would have been like without the Judicial Fellowship." She described her continued connection with the fellows, "We are like family, and I am still making sure that the judicial brown-bag luncheons continue." The luncheons are now carried on by Natalie Young, another former Fellow who was hired as a law clerk.

Fellow Jessica Shawaluk heard about the program through the career services center at Temple Law School, where she was a graduating student. After searching for some time during the summer of 2011, she applied for and received a Fellowship. A short time later, in February of 2012, she was hired by a law firm who valued the experience she had gained as a Fellow. Within one year, her firm was seeking to hire another associate, and decided they wanted to hire someone with a similar background to Jessica.

Jessica contacted Judge Rau, who sent the job posting to the email listserv for all fellows. Another Fellow was hired into Jessica's firm and the two associates currently still work there. Jessica, recalling her journey, stated, "I can't imagine where I would be today if it wasn't for the Fellowship program... I am so grateful that Judge Rau has taken the steps to initiate such a program and keep it in place."

Two law school graduates, roommates at the time, were both searching for jobs after graduating from law school. After searching unsuccessfully for over 6 months, Nate Bohlander decided to try the Judicial Fellowship in the Fall of 2012, while his roommate continued to search. Nate applied for a Fellowship with six judges, and was offered a position with all six. He chose to work with Judge Charles J. Cunningham III, based on the kind of cases he would be handling. After listening to Nate's experiences, his roommate also applied and was hired as a Fellow for Judge Daniel J. Anders. In January of 2012, newly elected Judge Edward C. Wright wanted to hire a law clerk from the Fellowship pool. Both Nate and his roommate applied, competing for the same position. Without knowing the two were roommates at the time, the Judge hired both. Today, both are still working with Judge Wright, one as a tipstaff, the other as a legal clerk. Nate said, "Judge Rau is so personable and she has made this program successful; I am as big of a proponent as I can possibly be."

Such experiences have kept this Judicial Fellowship Program vibrant and growing. The program now accepts applications on a rolling basis. The latest numbers, tallied early this year, shows that 149 graduates have participated to date; currently there are 43 active Fellows in the program. Fifty-three judges are participating; and 18 positions are open. The Fellows come from up to 30 different law schools. The percentage of Fellows who left the program having obtained paid employment is 85%. Approximately 30% moved into a paid judicial clerkship, while another 25% moved into a law firm. Judge Rau summarizes the program well in her statement, "This mini-clerkship provides experience to recent grads while judges benefit from new legal talent. The mutual selection process is key: fellows apply to individual judges and judges select their own fellows."

Hard economic times can result in creative alternatives. Thanks to Judge Rau and the continued support of Judge Herron, the First Judicial District continues with a program that results in a win-win scenario for unemployed law school graduates and over-worked judges in a bleak economy. The heartwarming success stories speak to the participants involved, the spirit of the program, and the dedication of the Judges who are offering their time to make it work and whose efforts are, in turn, rewarded.

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