

How can I participate in the program?

Each tribal court judge will set his or her requirements for the clerkship. Applicants for clerkships need only follow the listed requirements and those of any law school externship program if applicable.

The Program requests that each tribal judge who wishes to participate in the Program agree to the following:

- Be willing to teach, support and closely supervise the law clerk so that he or she has a rich valuable learning experience.
- If the law clerk is working for the judge as part of an externship, the judge must assist the student in meeting the externship requirements
- To utilize the [Guide for Tribal Court Law Clerks and Judges](#) to assist the law clerk in fulfilling his or her responsibilities in a professional, competent, ethical and culturally-sensitive manner.
- To consider allowing any non-confidential judicial opinions generated through the clerkship to be published on-line on NAICJA's National Tribal Justice Resource Center's free searchable database of tribal court opinions at: www.ntjrc.org/legal/opfolder.

The Program will provide guidance, advice and support to all participants as needed.

Co-Sponsors

- ◆ University of Colorado American Indian Law Clinic
- ◆ National American Indian Court Judges Association (NAICJA)
- ◆ National Native American Law Students Association (NNALSA)

Hands-On Learning In a Tribal Court Setting

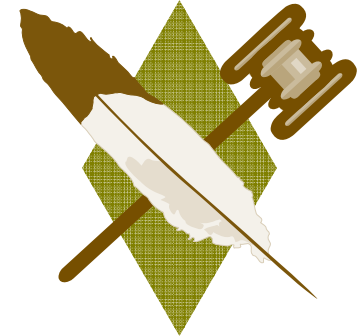
The National Tribal Court Law Clerk Program was established in recognition of the fact that written tribal court opinions are the primary means by which the legal community and the public comes to know and understand tribal justice systems. These written opinions are important ways in which tribal law is developed and shared, tribal values are honored and tribal traditions and customs are preserved. The Program gives law students an authentic and meaningful educational experience while providing tribal courts with much needed research and writing assistance.



Program Director,
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conferring with
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The National Tribal Court Law Clerk Program



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American Indian Law Clinic
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**The National American
Indian Court Judges
Association**



**The National Native American
Law Students Association**

About the National Tribal Court Law Clerk Program

The National Tribal Court Law Clerk Program provides law students and recent law graduates with direct experience working in a tribal court setting while supplying research and legal writing support to tribal judges and justices. For the first time, tribal courts will benefit from a program, similar to that enjoyed by federal and state judiciaries, which facilitates the placement of law students in tribal justice systems.

The Program, housed at the University of Colorado Law School, is a collaborative effort between the Law School's American Indian Law Clinic, the National American Indian Court Judges Association ("NAICJA"), and the National Native American Law Students Association ("NNALSA"). The program has received the support of the American Bar Association's Tribal Courts Council and has received initial funding through a grant from the University of Colorado's Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement.

What does a law clerk do?

A law clerk is either a law student or recent law school graduate who helps a judge with legal research, writing or other court-related tasks. The position is separate and distinct from a "court clerk" who is a court employee responsible for filing papers, issuing process, and keeping records of

court proceedings. Among the types of duties a law clerk may be responsible for are: researching applicable law, both written and traditional, drafting judicial opinions, writing memoranda of law to assist a judge in conducting legal proceedings, and drafting orders for the judge to issue.

What are the Program benefits?

The clerkship is where academic law school classroom learning is put into practical application in the context of a real case in which a decision regarding the life, liberty and/or property of another will be made. For many law students working closely with a tribal judge, it will be an opportunity not only to improve their research and writing skills, but provide insight into the judicial decision-making process. The law clerkship is seen as the capstone of one's legal education.

Tribal courts are often required to apply a unique blend of tribal tradition, tribal custom and American legal principles. It is a highly challenging and rewarding task for the law clerk and judge alike to craft a written opinion that not only decides the case, but may also be used to educate the tribal community and the American public at large in the principles and traditions of tribal law. There are more than 300 tribal courts currently functioning in the United States. Unfortunately many of these systems are severely under-funded. The Program will give tribal judges access to the wealth of law students interested in studying federal Indian and tribal law. The judges will receive invaluable research and writing assistance—often at no cost.

How does the Program work?

The Program has created a centralized mechanism in the form of an on-line national database of tribal court law clerk opportunities. The database found at: <http://lawweb.colorado.edu/TribalCourts> contains information about the available clerkships, the kinds of assistance sought by the tribal judge, the desired qualifications of an applicant and whether the clerkship is a paid position or one that may be undertaken for law school credit. The Program facilitates matching law students with available tribal court placements. Individual law students who are earning law school credit for their clerkship will need to coordinate with their own schools to ensure they are meeting the individual school's requirements. Jill E. Tompkins (*Penobscot*), Director of the CU Law American Indian Law Clinic and an experienced tribal court appellate justice, oversees the Program.

How can I obtain free law clerk services?

Many law schools allow a student to earn credit for working in the form of externships (also known as internships). Most schools require that the work the student performs for the tribal court be uncompensated. The law clerk's externship work must be legal in nature and have a substantive writing component generally. The tribal judge must be willing to supervise the work and serve as the student's field supervisor. Each law student should check with their school for requirements for approval of this kind of externship.