Docket Clerk
Carmen

“Everything goes through the docket clerk, from beginning to end.”

- Knowledgeable about processes
- Proud of work
- Detail-oriented
- 8 years in role, 20 years at the Court

Carmen is part of a team of 13 Docket Clerks, including one Docket Clerk Supervisor and one Assistant Docket Clerk Supervisor. She loves her job and loves being a key member of the team who keeps cases moving along. She works in the system all day, ensuring documents are accurate, sending to the Judges to take action, uploading and processing case documents, assigning event codes, and answering questions as needed. She knows what cases she’s responsible for because each docket clerk has a digit assigned to them that corresponds to the last digit of the docket number. She also sometimes works the cases of other Docket Clerks when they are out. After serving orders, she prints a service list and checks it to make sure that everything is served correctly; she doesn’t trust the system to do this accurately. She has the trust of several Judges; they ask for her specifically to process their documents, and she loves being trusted with that responsibility.

Goals

- Identify priority items so they can be processed first
- Understand what action to take on a case (e.g., which orders are needed)
- Record case notes
- Run and analyze reports to reconcile filings, review case status, view performance stats
- Prevent cases from being calendared prematurely
- Confirm that documents are filed in the correct case
- Ensure service of orders is completed in a thorough and timely fashion

Frustrations

- Getting cases ready to send to appeals court “is a mess,” have to write in document numbers manually, can only save one document at a time, file size limit is too small so they have to break cases down into many parts, ect.
- Only one person at a time can scan exhibit documents into a case
- Pro se petitioner can change service type from paper to electronic at any time, so she checks service preference again at 2:30pm before the batch service to make sure it’s still the same
- Searching is done between several independent systems and doesn’t always yield helpful results
- Have to check each queue continually throughout the day to make sure she doesn’t miss anything

Environment

USTC office, home

System Usage

- Enters and reviews information
- Manages and processes trial documents
- Moves cases through the Court
- Manages case communication
- Searches for case information
- Scans and uploads documents

Close Collaborators

- Assistant Deputy Counsel
- Calendar
- Chambers
- Trial Clerk

Wish List

- Notifications for due dates and case status changes
- Ability to add notes to documents
- Have real way to flag case so it doesn’t get scheduled for trial, instead of their workaround “9s” report
- Ability to create own event codes
- Receive trial transcripts electronically
- Run any kind of report
- Dashboard with pending motions, access to form templates, and anything set for trial

Trial Clerk
Cynthia

"I prepare all case files for trial and ensure trial sessions run smoothly."

- Knowledgeable about processes
- Detail-oriented
- Trusting relationship with Chambers
- 8 years in role, 8 years at the Court

Cynthia is part of a pool of nine Trial Clerks. Her supervisor assigns her to a trial session and Judge, so she works with many different Judges throughout the year. She makes sure case information is up to date and prints case files two weeks before the trial date and ships them to the trial location. In the week leading up to the trial, she manually checks all cases again to see if new information has come in, then prints and ships it if it has. She's usually managing three calendars/trial sessions at a time—next week, this week, and last week.

She travels with Judges to the trial session location and is responsible for ensuring all needed documents are available during the session. This involves a lot of printed case files, since Internet access at trial locations is often unreliable. She also verifies and manages all the logistical information for the trial. During the trial, she keeps track of everything that's happening—who appears, what cases go to trial, what exhibits are presented in the case, and she documents it on the Minutes Sheet. She drafts and proofreads orders for Judges during the trial session and tries to get the Minutes into the system as soon as possible, because Docket can't process the case without them. While onsite at the trial, she often feels disconnected from the D.C. office and wishes communication could be improved.

Cynthia also mails all the exhibit documents received during the trial session back to D.C. to get scanned into the system there. Once the trial is over, she doesn't interact with the case except to help track down missing files.

Goals

- View all information for assigned cases such as case status, pending items, and trial schedule (including location details) in a single, easily accessible place
- See all information about a single trial session in one place, including which cases no longer need to be tried
- Communicate important information and receive answers to questions from USTC personnel in D.C. during trial sessions
- Easily take notes for the Minutes Sheet and get them into the system quickly
- Make the trial session run as smoothly as possible for the Judges and taxpayers by having the most up-to-date case information available at the trial
- Easily create orders from previous ones the Judge has issued or through templates

Frustrations

- No easy way to check case status before trial preparation, must click into each case
- Has to manually check for new filings each day in order to print and mail documents that come in after the case file has been mailed to the trial location
- Can't bulk download or print all documents for a case; printing documents individually takes a lot of time
- Unreliable Internet hinders access to documents and communication with USTC personnel in D.C. during a trial session
- Only one person can be in a case at a time; if Judge is in a case, she can't create an order or upload minutes; read-only status is not useful when she has to make an update
- Current system not designed for Trial Clerks to use, so they have a workaround log in, but have to take extra steps to do everything in the system
- Paper files get lost and they have to hunt them down

Environment

USTC office, trial session locations (74 nationwide)

System Usage

- Accesses and checks case information and documents
- Drafts and proofreads orders
- Manages and processes trial documents
- Views trial information on the calendar
- Prints case documents and ships to trial location

Close Collaborators

- Docket
- Calendar
- Chambers
- Law Clerk
- Records

Wish List

- Way to track where paper files are throughout the process to help prevent them from getting lost
- Ability to save documents as a draft before completing them and sending to docket
- Have Minutes Sheets auto populate with basic case information and add notes to them before sending to Docket
- Can sign orders for the Judges on the trial sessions she's assigned to
- Print all case files at once instead of individually
- Notifications of when there's new activity on a case that's scheduled for trial
- Have key trial information available offline, such as petitioner's phone numbers, courtroom address, and calendar
- Indicate what motions are pending on which cases so she easily knows to take care of them at trial
- Dashboard with updated calendar with session assignments, view session details, notifications of new filings on cases

Calendar Section Supervisor

Dorothy

"I love checking documents for mistakes."

- Detail-oriented
- Takes pride in her work
- Comfortable with established process
- 6 years in role, 12 years at the Court

Dorothy manages two Calendar Clerks as their supervisor. Dorothy and her team schedule and provide trial communications on more than 100 cases at once, and work is distributed evenly between the two clerks.

Dorothy and her team's primary duties are driven by the trial session calendars. After receiving the session calendar, she runs two reports to check case eligibility for trial: eligible report by trial location and the exception report by trial location that includes cases with outstanding issues. She'll review both reports and assign eligible cases to their appropriate trial session. For cases on the exception report with outstanding issues, she'll research what the issue is and generate orders for missing documents. She may also need to coordinate with an Assistant Deputy Counsel (ADC) or the Court Administrator to handle more complex issues. After orders are generated, she's no longer responsible for tracking them until they appear in her report again.

Dorothy and her team also generate the trial communications (Notice of Trial; Standing Pre-Trial Order/Notice; etc.) to the parties. She checks reports and generates notices to petitioners to provide them with details about their court date and any outstanding fees. If changes are made to a trial session, she must update all cases and regenerate notices individually and mail the updated communications to the parties. Sometimes a trial notice will be returned, and she'll have to make several attempts to obtain a new address and issue an order to correct the information or notify the Judge that there's an issue with the case.

Goals

- Run reports and identifies which cases can be set for trial
- Set eligible cases for trial based on location and trial session calendar
- Generate orders to resolve issues preventing cases from being set for trial
- Ensure that petitioners are informed of trial information and any updates through notices
- Ensure that returned mail is properly handled and cases are updated appropriately
- Issue orders to correct or update case information

Frustrations

- She can't apply bulk changes to trial session information and it must be individually updated on each case
- Templated forms are not available for all corrections, such as street address

Environment

USTC office

System Usage

- Assigns and manages cases on trial session calendar
- Runs eligible and exception reports for each trial location
- Reviews case details for missing documents and outstanding information
- Generates trial and fee payment notices
- Issues orders to correct or update inaccurate information

Close Collaborators

- Clerk of the Court
- Judges

Wish List

- Ability to apply bulk changes to a trial session that will automatically update the cases in that session and print the appropriate notices
- Efficient way to identify cases that are ready for trial and those that have outstanding issues
- Address verification for sending hearing notices and notices for fee payment

Records Clerk / Supervisor

Jermaine

"From the creation of the physical file, I maintain and store all physical documents for the Court."

- Trustworthy
- Detail-oriented
- Takes responsibilities seriously
- 9 years in role, 9 years at the Court

Jermaine leads a team of seven Records Clerks as the Records Clerk Supervisor. He acts as the inventory management specialist, maintaining all physical property of the Court in addition to court records. His days are filled overseeing the management of physical files from case initiation to record destruction. His team creates physical docket and correspondence files for all cases, maintains and stores those files, and tracks their movement around the Court.

In addition, Jermaine and his team are responsible for fulfilling, tracking, and ensuring any applicable payments have been received for all file requests including requests for trial session, ad hoc internal requests, and public requests. As the Records Clerk Supervisor, he has the added authority to view sealed documents and cases, which his team cannot view. He and the Records Clerks work closely with all internal court members and are public-facing representatives of the Court.

Goals

- Efficiently receive and manage all file requests in a single place
- Fulfill file requests efficiently, with proper approvals, and according to priority
- Track the location, history, and ownership of physical files to prevent loss
- Adhere to records retention policies by efficiently tracking record age and status for file destruction

Frustrations

- Tracking the location of physical files is a manual and inconsistent process causing files to be frequently lost
- Received file requests through email, in person, or by phone, and they aren't easily tracked or prioritized
- Must access several disparate systems to complete one file request
- Calculating copy costs and tracking payments is a cumbersome and time-consuming process
- Copy requests can't currently be sent electronically, exhausting additional time and resources to print and mail paper copies
- Search results are not consistent and it takes additional time to locate the correct case by search

Environment

USTC office

System Usage

- Searches for cases related to incoming file requests
- Checks case status for public file requests to see if it requires Judge approval before fulfilling a copy request
- Views cases on trial session calendar
- Views electronic docket record and compares against the physical file
- Prints case documents

Close Collaborators

- Petitions Clerks
- Docket Clerks
- Trial Clerks
- Judges

Wish List

- Way for users to request public copies through an electronic form and send them via electronic delivery
- Electronic and integrated queue for tracking and prioritizing all file requests
- Notifications when file and copy requests come in
- Ability to track the location and who's in possession of physical files
- Ability to send public file requests to Judges for approval within the system
- Notifications or reports telling him which records are eligible for destruction

Petitions Clerk
Ken

"I help my department run smoothly every day and ensure my work is accurate and timely."

- Knowledgeable
- Detail-oriented
- Proud of his work
- 8 years in role, 8 years at the Court

Ken is one of six Petitions Clerks who work under the guidance of the Petitions Clerk Supervisor and Assistant Petitions Clerk Supervisor. As a member of the Petitions team, Ken receives and transcribes new Petitions from Court-approved practitioners and the public. Sometimes Ken handles the intake process, retrieving incoming mail and verifying which department each piece of mail should go to. Ken also processes checks that have been received and checks for payments made through Pay.gov.

Incoming Petitions must be checked for duplicates in the system before the supervisor assigns them to a Petitions Clerk. Like the other Petitions Clerks, Ken receives a batch of 30 Petitions to handle each day. He checks his batch for high priority items to work on first and monitors his caseload for new high priority items as the day goes on. He's usually able to complete his batch of 30 Petitions every day, unless he discovers a problem with a Petition. Sometimes he picks up more work if he has time. If he's on vacation or sick, his work will be distributed to his teammates because such time-sensitive work can't wait.

Petitions often come in with a lot of extra information, sometimes thousands of pages and even books. Petitions themselves frequently come on napkins, notecards, or other irregular formats. Ken scans everything, piece-by-piece, into the system from his desktop scanner. When Ken finds missing, illegible, or inaccurate information, he creates an order to correct it. Throughout the day, he takes calls from Petitioners to answer questions. The phone rings constantly. Ken juggles his Petitions and phone calls at the same time, which sometimes causes him to enter data incorrectly. Although calls can be distracting and time consuming, especially from repeat or angry callers, Ken enjoys the opportunity to help people.

Since Ken has a lot of varied tasks to manage, he's very conscientious and carefully checks his work because incorrect information can cause delays and/or additional work. When Ken is done transcribing a Petition, he submits it to the IRS holding queue and prepares the paper documents for the Records department. His supervisor reviews all submissions for accuracy.

Goals

- Monitor the workload for high-priority items so they can be processed first
- Complete assigned Petitions in a timely manner
- Keep the backlog of work from piling up
- Stay up-to-date on processing rules
- Review Petitions for accuracy and completeness before sending to the IRS
- Manage paper Petitions and associated documents (e.g. scanning documents into the system, sending documents to Records)
- Help petitioners with their questions

Frustrations

- "Junk" sent with Petitions (such as small stacks of paper, lottery tickets, books, odd shaped items, and boxes of paper) are challenging and time consuming to scan
- Limited search and no filters, making searching by common names challenging when looking for duplicate Petitions or finding a case without a docket number
- Incomplete, inconsistent, and illegible addresses can be hard to verify
- Checking the service batch for errors is time consuming and labor intensive
- Figuring out who was working a Petition so it can be unlocked from their computer if they aren't available to finish it (went home sick, went on vacation, etc.)
- Can only have one application open across two monitors at a time

Environment

USTC office, sometimes from home, uses two side-by-side monitors

System Usage

- Scans, transcribes, submits Petitions
- Searches for cases
- Searches for and enters payments
- Issues orders

Close Collaborators

- Docket
- Asst. Deputy Counsel
- Admissions
- Records
- Chambers

Wish List

- Single system so he doesn't have so many logins and systems to manage
- Electronic notices for rule changes and searchable rule book that stays current so he can answer Petitioner questions
- A way to search for and identify duplicate / similar cases, locate case without a number
- Reports to help him and his supervisor visualize work performance, balance work across the team, and verify that all cases have been filed appropriately
- Ability to enter and track certified mail, compare to the daily post office receipt
- A way to store / note correspondence in the system but not on the docket record
- Ability to electronically send practitioner-submitted Petitions to
- Admissions and know when the Petition is ready to be processed; a way to check practitioner's status
- Ability to collaborate with other departments on digital documents and ask questions
- An Auto-checklist to validate Petitions are complete, accurate, have all necessary orders

  Easy and accurate method for researching and annotating payments
- More informative Petition form that asks if petitioners have sent in a Petition before and helps them send in the correct items
- Built-in address standardization / validation to check accuracy and completeness
- Dashboard with quick case and docket number search, indicator that payment has been associated with a case, and prioritization of work items by date

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Law Clerk
Tim

"My work is intellectually stimulating, and I work with good people."

- Loves the research aspect of his job
- Task and process driven
- Very thorough in his approach
- 3 years in role, 3 years at the Court

Tim is one of two Law Clerks assigned to one Judge, and they split up the cases between them. Most of his work involves researching his cases and writing drafts of opinions for his Judge. He may work on four or five cases at a time, but tries to limit it to one larger, long-term case. He spends the majority of his time researching cases, including reading through all case documents, including Petitions, motions, files, trial transcripts, exhibits, stipulations, and briefs. He searches the internal system for similar cases, but prefers tools like Westlaw or Lexis/Nexis for their advanced search capabilities.

Throughout the case, he needs to communicate his status and findings to the Judge. After thorough research and discussions with the Judge, he'll draft an opinion and send it to the Judge for review and revisions. The opinion may go back and forth between them (and possibly the Chief Judge) before being considered final. Cases are always in flux, so he works on several cases simultaneously, because he may be waiting for a document to come in for one case and work on another case to keep things moving.

Goals

- Easily research cases and relevant case law
- Review all case materials thoroughly and easily navigate between documents
- Write and collaborate on opinions
- Have a holistic view of all cases assigned to the Judge and be able to easily track the cases he's working on

Frustrations

- Document versioning is managed outside of the system and can't be tracked easily (e.g., opinions)
- Document collaboration is managed outside of the system (WordPerfect, paper printouts, lack of ability to add inline comments)
- Poor keyword search capabilities; no way to search cases by issues within Court system
- Viewing and navigating through documents in the docket record can be cumbersome
- Tracking assigned cases and "to-dos" is all done offline and cannot be easily communicated to others within the Court

Environment

USTC office

System Usage

- Searches for related cases
- Views all documents associated with a case (transcripts, pending, motions, briefs, etc.)
- Drafts opinions
- Researches tax law information
- Communicates via Chambers (internal Court message program)

Close Collaborators

- Chambers Administrator
- Judge

Wish List

- Efficient case search with filtering by case topic, case year, court, Judge, and area of law, " a Lexis/Nexis, Westlaw type of search" for researching related case opinions
- A way to track the cases he's working on and receive notifications about where the case is within the process
- A way for users to collaborate on opinion documents and preserve versioning in a single system
- More control over how he can view and manage documents in the docket record (all at once, click "next", etc.)
- Ability to tag documents for his own use (e.g., "not relevant" or "important")