

New Judge Orientation

Friendly Video Advice From Colleagues

To give new judges the nitty-gritty information they need to make the transition from bar to bench in an efficient and cost-effective way, the presiding judge of the [Superior Court of Los Angeles County](#) (the country's largest court) asked the court's Planning and Research Unit to create a new approach to judicial orientation videos. The result was *New Judge Orientation*, a personalized CD-ROM (also available on an Intranet/Internet Web site), containing friendly, dynamic learning modules that users view at their own pace and convenience. The CD features experienced judges in informal "one-on-one" video discussions, sharing their insights, practical information, and anecdotal advice, and inviting new colleagues to call with further questions.

The three modules—"Assuming the Bench," "Running the Courtroom," and "Policy Considerations"—comprise 12 lessons, most featuring video presentations by judicial officers and court staff. The speakers share their expertise on subjects such as treatment of jurors, access and fairness issues, media relations, public policy issues, the court's organizational structure, and the institution's values. The videos are integrated with text explanations, documents, administrative resources and phone numbers, Internet links, maps, photographs, and even a historical presentation with music.

The modules keep related materials together for the new judges to absorb. Judges can choose a topic to view and can easily return to it later as needed. Maintaining and updating the modules is also easy, and changes are immediately posted on the Web site and copied onto CDs.

Judicial officers generously gave their time and expertise during the creation of the video segments. No additional funding was required for the project.

New Appointees Are Delighted

"I found the CD for the new judges to be fantastic. It was nice to have a video format that could be paused or repeated. It also made me feel as if I had actually met the judges in the video, and was therefore far more personal."

"Immediately after my appointment, I received mountains of written orientation materials, toured . . . different kinds of courts, and met innumerable court officers and personnel. In the tumult of those first few weeks, I used the CD at home to clarify and organize the information that I was getting from so many different sources in such a short period of time."

"The quality of the CD in terms of using modern technology was outstanding."

"I especially liked the convenience of not lugging around yet another binder and being able to return to topics or skip them as needed."

Impacts

- All new judicial officers in the county—more than 200 since the project began—are given the *New Judge Orientation* CD, and any judge can view the program on the court's Intranet. This ensures a consistent, uniform, and up-to-date orientation for all.
- The 15 judge-to-judge video segments of practical advice and insights enable new judicial officers to hit the ground running and help give them a sense of community.
- The program saves the court many hours of training time, freeing judges and staff for other court duties.
- Materials can be updated or modified to meet changing needs more easily and at lower cost than printed materials can.
- New judges often spend several days reviewing the materials at their own pace before they take the bench, benefiting both themselves and the court.
- The program is available to judicial officers throughout the county and the state on the home page of the court's digital library. It has proved an excellent reference tool for all judicial officers, not just new ones.

Designed for Easy Use

The Web site design combines simplicity and sophistication to present complex information in an easy-to-use navigation system, so that judges don't get lost in the many pages of information. The program also checks that the user's computer has the necessary software before installing itself. This lets judges focus on learning, rather than computer skills.



Judge Martha Bellinger, a newly appointed officer of the court, tests out Los Angeles's New Judge Orientation Web site.

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