

Distribution Cases Chicago Courts

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ICM Phase III Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After complaints were received from judges about inequities in caseloads, a study was undertaken to determine whether the problem was real or merely perceived. What was found was a system of case assignment which required careful oversight and frequent adjustment to ensure an equitable distribution of the work of the court. Inequities in workload can lead to resentment and resentment can result in a drop in productivity. This study looked at the case assignment procedure in a single Immigration Court to determine whether there is a better way to assign cases than the present system. The conclusion reached by this paper is that there is a way to bring equity in the workload to the judges and fairness in judge assignments to all parties. Implementation of a case assignment wheel requires rewriting the current computer program. However, the benefits should be apparent within six months to a year, as caseloads even out and judges realize everyone is pulling the same weight at work. The study's conclusion emerges from interviews, statistical data and research of other courts' case assignment plans.

In Chicago, one judge received far more new cases than the other six judges and one judge received far fewer new cases than the others. The goals of this project were to determine why the unequal assignment of cases occurred and to develop a plan to correct the problem. Statistical information came from ANSIR (Automated Nationwide System for Immigration Review), the data base for all cases filed with the Immigration Courts. Statistical data includes case receipts, case completions and pending caseloads for the Chicago Immigration Court. The case receipts data show judges did not receive roughly an equal number of cases during Fiscal Year 1999. Explanations of variations are given when applicable.

The system currently in use in Immigration Courts assigns cases in lots of twenty five and in a set order. If there are not enough cases filed to fill all the hearing slots for a given time period, judges at the end of the line receive few if any cases and judges at the head of the line always have their hearing calendars filled to the maximum. If changes are made to the case assignment system as proposed herein, future quarterly and annual reports should reflect greater parity in the distribution of cases.

This researcher interviewed court administrators in various cities, several judges scattered around the country and headquarters personnel, including the Deputy Assistant Director for Information Resources Management.

The bulk of the research for this project comes from a review of case assignment plans from United States District Courts. The Internet web site for United States Courts makes all published plans available to the public. Fifty eight U. S. Districts Courts have web sites and most all of these sites have the courts' local rules and general orders on-line. Case assignment plans are usually found in the local

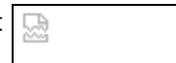
rules or in general orders.

All published case assignment plans referred to equitable, random, and blind distribution of cases. The current case assignment for the Immigration courts is neither random nor blind and can be inequitable. Drawing from the more detailed case assignment plans of the U. S. District Court, this paper proposes a case assignment plan which deals cases from an assignment wheel.

The proposed plan requires the Court Administrator create and maintain a log of case credits and debits for each judge and to report on the numbers and types of cases distributed to each judge. It includes provisions for assignment from three categories of cases, i.e., matters requiring expedited treatment, matters involving criminal aliens and matters which are handled in the normal course of business. It also provides for assignment of related cases to a single judge with credits being given to the receiving judge for future case assignments and debits being given to the sending judge. The plan addresses the issue of travel to detail cities. Cases arising in detail cities are not included in the wheel; however, if more than one judge is assigned to any particular detail city, then cases are to be equitably distributed between the judges assigned to that city. In effect, a detail city has its own wheel if there is more than one judge assigned to cover the cases there. The plan also provides for reallocation when a judge is unavailable due to resignation, death or extended illness.

A good case assignment plan for the Immigration Court will result in a blind, random and equitable distribution of cases from various categories. It will permit the Chief Judge to make necessary adjustments for exceptional circumstances, such as the extended absence of a judge. A case assignment plan with these features will improve the confidence of hard working Immigration Judges that they are carrying their fair share of the load and so are their colleagues.

This [research paper](#) is available in its entirety in portable document format. To access, you must first obtain and install the Adobe Acrobat Reader.



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