

March 11, 2020

## **FAQ about the new Judicial College Magistrate Certification Program**

### **What is this? And why are we doing it?**

The NC Judicial College at the School of Government is pleased to announce the creation of a certification program for magistrates across the state. The purpose of this program is to acknowledge and document the commitment and accomplishments of magistrates who strive toward excellence by pursuing a focused course of study in a specific content area. To be certified, magistrates must complete a five-component educational requirement in one of two tracks: 1) small claims and 2) criminal law.

There are many experienced magistrates who have already completed most of the coursework required for certification. In addition to recognizing their work, we hope this program will encourage less experienced and new magistrates to actively seek out additional training courses. We also hope that the identification of a specific course of study will help chief district court judges, clerks of court, and chief magistrates in deciding how to best support magistrates in their quest for training. Finally, we hope supervising authorities will find it useful to have this ready means of identifying magistrates who have sought out and completed more advanced training.

### **How do magistrates start this certification process?**

Magistrates may begin the journey at any point in their careers, and they may take as long as they choose to conclude that journey. Participation in the certification program is entirely optional, and no application or declaration of interest is required.

### **What happens after magistrates complete their required courses?**

In September each year, magistrates may file an online request with the Judicial College for certification accompanied by written documentation from the AOC Learning Management Center verifying their completion of the required training events. In October, the Judicial College will publish a list of the newly certified magistrates. In addition, the AOC will publicize the names of these newly certified magistrates. Each magistrate will receive a certificate attesting to that magistrate's successful completion of an advanced course of study in either (or both!) small claims or criminal law.

### **What are the required courses/programs for the criminal law certification?**

- \_\_\_ *Decision-Making* (new Judicial College seminar, offered annually in August)
- \_\_\_ *Advanced Criminal Procedure* (offered bi-annually)
- \_\_\_ *DWI and Related Offenses* (offered bi-annually)
- \_\_\_ *What Magistrates Need to Know about Domestic Violence* (offered bi-annually)
- \_\_\_ *One Regional One-Day Criminal Law School or six hours of criminal law sessions at the Magistrates' Fall and/or Spring Conferences*

**What are the required courses/programs for the small claims certification?**

- *Decision-Making* (new Judicial College seminar, offered annually in August)
- *Introduction to Small Claims I*
- *Introduction to Small Claims II* (new Judicial College seminar; see below for more information)
- *One Regional One-Day Small Claims School or six hours of small claims sessions at the Magistrates' Fall and/or Spring Conferences*
- *A Special Topic Seminar in Small Claims or two One-Day Regional Small Claims Schools*

**What are the rules for magistrates who have already completed some of the required courses?**

Magistrates who attended past training events required for certification may request and will receive credit for that attendance, provided that specific documentation of that attendance is available from the AOC.

*Note:* AOC transcripts have not previously provided detail about specific sessions attended at conferences. For this reason, conference sessions previously attended are not eligible for credit. Beginning with the Fall 2020 conference, transcripts will provide this information, making qualifying conference sessions eligible for credit.

**Why have you added an additional Intro to Small Claims course?**

We have offered the Judicial College seminar *Introduction to Small Claims* for more than 10 years, with each offering prompting students to request that this course be lengthened. We have taken that feedback to heart. Beginning in May, we will offer two seminars, both 2 ½ days, titled *Intro to Small Claims I* and *Intro to Small Claims II*.

We recognize that attending a five-day seminar is difficult for some magistrates, but preferable for others. For the convenience of students who prefer to attend a five-day seminar, these courses will run back-to-back. For example, in 2020, *Intro I* will begin on the morning of Monday, May 11, and end at noon on Wednesday, May 13. *Intro II* will begin at 1:00 on Wednesday, May 13, and end at 5:00 on Friday, May 15.

Students new to the course have the option of attending only *Intro I* or both courses. Students who attend only the first 2 ½ days may return in a subsequent year to complete the second (*Intro II*) session.

**What if I attended the old Introduction to Small Claims seminar?**

Students who have completed the old Introduction to Small Claims course will receive credit for *Intro I* but must attend *Intro 2*.

Alumni magistrates who have previously completed a Special Topic/Advanced Small Claims seminar have another option: they may substitute that course for the Intro II requirement.

**What's up with the new Decision-Making seminar?**

Making decisions is the crux of the responsibilities performed by all judicial officials. There are two intertwined aspects of this critical skill: those related to legal analysis of a case, and those related to barriers to good decision-making. This three-day seminar focuses on both aspects. Like other Judicial College courses, the seminar will have a strong experiential component, focused on the development and demonstration of practical skills related to making better decisions.