

**A L U M N I
S P O T L I G H T :
T R E V O R
K E H R E R**



Name: Trevor Kehrer

Hometown: La Cañada, CA

Law School: University of
Chicago '20

Seminar Year: Summer 2020

Kehrer, former research assistant to Professor Will Baude, finishes clerkship at the Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

The grandson of Iranian immigrants and the first lawyer in his family, Kehrer represents an example of what it means to realize the “American Dream.” After graduating *summa cum laude* from the University of Southern California at just 20 years old, Kehrer began studying law at the University of Chicago. His journey to the law started with a tragic personal loss, after which he saw firsthand the importance of quality legal representation. Kehrer explains:

“I learned early on that somebody who really knows the rules of the law can get a lot done quickly and help a lot of folks get what they need. On the other hand, somebody who doesn’t know those rules can do a lot of harm—to themselves, their clients, and the broader community. As a lawyer, the more you learn, the better you can navigate the legal world. And succeeding in that endeavor means that you can do more good for real people.”



While Kehrer initially entered law school with the intention of practicing tort law, he quickly discovered a variety of grand-scale issues that touched every corner of the country. At the University of Chicago, one of his favorite classes was Constitutional Law with Professor Will Baude, for whom he worked as a research assistant. Currently, Kehrer is finishing up a clerkship with Judge Jonathan A. Kobes of the Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

"Trevor is a vital member of my team. He is a brilliant lawyer—his love of history is contagious and his research and writing are top-notch. But more importantly, his judgment is impeccable and his integrity is beyond reproach. Those are less common gifts. Trevor is more than just my law clerk—he has become a trusted counselor and advisor. While I will miss him greatly when his term ends, I am looking forward to watching him excel in practice, the academy, or wherever else the future takes him."

~ Judge Kobes, United States Court of Appeals
for the Eighth Circuit



The following interview was conducted by Elana Quint for the Georgetown Center for the Constitution Alumni Association in January 2021.

Question: How did you hear about the Originalism Summer Seminar?

Answer: Professor Randy Barnett spoke to our group at the Federalist Society's James Kent Summer Academy—this was back in the time when the Summer Seminar was called the “boot camp.” I had not heard of the program before Professor Barnett mentioned it, so I looked it up and applied. Although I only began thinking of myself as an Originalist while in law school, it is a really common-sense theory that sets out something I was always thinking in the back of my mind. I was excited about the idea of attending a Seminar dedicated to exploring Originalist theory from the ground up and I loved every minute of it.

Q: What was one of your favorite academic components of the Seminar?

A: Professor Soames from the University of Southern California, my alma mater, led a fascinating discussion on the philosophy of language. He taught us about how the meaning of language is governed by context—and how it shouldn't surprise anybody that when you have most of the context, you can figure out most of the meaning of a given text. Professor Soames explained that when an interpreter is provided with context about how particular words are used, the set of possible meanings necessarily gets more limited and specific. If you don't know the context of the writing, though, there is a big risk that you will misinterpret it. Professor Soames showed us how all of those rules about everyday language hold true in legal language, and that was an eye-opening part of the Seminar that really brought out Originalism's common-sense appeal.

Q: How will you use what you learned in the Seminar in your future career?

A: I'm already using what I learned in the Seminar in my clerkship on the Eighth Circuit. Judge Kobes is a fantastic mentor and is absolutely dedicated to getting the law right. When Judge Kobes gathers us clerks together to work out tough questions of constitutional or statutory interpretation, he can count on me to build out how different theories of interpretation (public meaning, original methods, original law, etc.) would approach the case. The Seminar put a lot more tools in my academic toolbox, and because of that, I am able to provide Judge Kobes with the sound legal analysis he expects.

Q: Any advice for future applicants/attendees of the Seminar?

A: Every law student should seriously consider applying for the Seminar. Whether you are liberal, conservative, believe Originalism is bunk, or think Originalism is the best thing since sliced bread, at no point in your life will you ever again have so many towering giants of legal academia telling you exactly what they think and why. To put it frankly, you are getting inside baseball from the entire MLB—how could you say no to that? Originalist theory can only get stronger if more people are exposed to it, understand it, and thoughtfully critique it. I really think the Seminar is a must for every law student.

Q: Any advice for future clerks?

A: In general, I think it is always important to be kind and considerate to your fellows, to keep an open mind, and to be a good listener. The most practical advice I have for future clerks is: write, edit, rewrite, and then do it over again. The life of a law clerk is all about being a faithful agent of your judge and doing the best drafting, editing, and researching you can. An inside tip is that really good clerks will read their judge's recent opinions to learn the judge's writing style before starting the clerkship—if you can replicate your judge's voice when drafting opinions, you can save your judge tons of time and effort down the line. On the more fun side of things, I also highly recommend continuing to attend lunch talks if you can. In Judge Kobes's chambers, the clerks circulate interesting lunch talk notes just like drafts—and Judge Kobes is always eager to read them, too. In a nutshell, being thoughtful and polite and doing good work will take you very, very far.

Q: Finally, any reading suggestions?

A: Of course! Without a doubt, the book that impacted my life most is *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand, and I would be remiss not to mention it. For fun law-focused reading, I would suggest *The Essential Scalia: On the Constitution, the Courts, and the Rule of Law*. Finally, some friends of mine recently introduced me to C.S. Lewis's wonderful *Space Trilogy*, and my only regret is that I did not read the collection sooner. I also just picked up *The Name of the Wind* by Patrick Rothfuss, and I expect it will be a real page-turner, too.

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Applications for the 2022 Originalism Summer Seminar will open this Fall.