

# A Summer as a Federal Summer Intern:

## SOME NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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The Federal Summer Intern Program, in which I participated during the summer of 1971, grew out of an idea to involve "knowledgeable and talented college students in the operations of Federal agencies." Basically, the intern program is designed to expand the students knowledge of the workings of the Federal Government, particularly in those areas related to his educational background. The program was begun by the Nixon administration in 1969 when seventy-five undergraduate and graduate students were selected for positions in an "Executive Intern Program" in Washington, D. C. During the summer of 1970, 262 students were selected for internships. In 1971, the name of the program was changed to the Federal Summer Intern Program and approximately 300 Interns were selected for positions in the Washington metropolitan area with numerous additional positions being filled in the field. The positions held by Interns are primarily mission oriented and related to the administrative, professional, or technical fields. Reception of the program by those students participating in it has generally been good and hopes were expressed to the 1971 Interns that the program could be expanded for 1972.

As the program is relatively new and expanding, it has undergone many changes and this is particularly true of the method for selection of the Interns. For the 1971 Interns, selection began when the various departments and agencies notified the Civil Service Commission of the positions suitable for an Intern that each agency would have available during the summer. The Civil Service Commission then notified various educational institutions of the positions available and asked them to nominate

students for the position. Five schools were notified for each position and each institution was permitted to nominate two students for the job.

In my case, the Placement Office at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro was notified of a position as cataloger and indexer which was available in the Bureau of Reclamation of the Department of the Interior in Washington. The Placement Office then forwarded the information to the School of Education and asked them to nominate two students for the position. It was my good fortune to be nominated along with another student.

I was interested in the position because it was directly connected with my career ambitions and I felt that the job would provide valuable experience. At the time I was nominated, I was a first-semester senior at UNC-G with a major in history. I had become interested in library science at UNC-G and had taken the courses available for credit to undergraduates in that field with the intention of pursuing graduate study in library science upon graduation.

With these objectives in mind, I was therefore excited when I was contacted by the Bureau of Reclamation a few weeks after my nomination had been submitted. By telephone I had a helpful and enlightening conversation with Mr. Aldon Nielsen who was to be my immediate superior during the summer. Mr. Nielsen explained that my task would be to design and establish an information retrieval system for the Economics and Statistics Branch of the Bureau of Reclamation. Mr. Nielsen was chief of the Economics and Statistics Branch and my conversation with him allowed me to ask questions and in general become much more familiar with what my

job would entail.

When the spring semester was over, I proceeded to Washington where I started to work early in June. There were eleven Summer Interns in the Interior Department in Washington. The group consisted of both undergraduates and graduates and represented a wide cross section both in terms of geographical origins and educational backgrounds. The interns also worked in many different agencies within the Interior Department such as the Bureau of Mines, Geological Survey, Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Their duties, like mine, were generally related to their career objectives whether in accounting, law, economics, math, computer science or other fields.

In addition to the work experiences, both the Interior Department and the Civil Service Commission had various activities and seminars planned. Through our coordinator in the Department of the Interior, we were able to meet with all the Assistant Secretaries of the Interior and with the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Rogers C. B. Morton. In each case we were able to have interesting and informative discussions with these men on a person to person basis. The Department's program also included field trips to various departmental projects in the Washington area and a series of luncheon engagements in which we met with less well-known but nonetheless interesting people both in and out of government. Among the people we met in the luncheons were representatives from Ralph Nader's consumer advocate group and representatives from the United States Civil Rights Commission.

The Civil Service Commission also sponsored an Interagency Seminar Series to supplement the Interns' work experience. The seminar areas chosen for each Intern were related as closely as possible to his job and career interests and covered such topics as managerial decision making, automatic data processing, urban programming, diplomacy, modern health and nutrition, the environment, science and technology, and many others. My seminar group was concerned with the environment and I feel

it was one of the most interesting. In the course of the seminars we were able to meet with such well known people as Senator Barry Goldwater; William Ruckelshaus, head of the Environmental Protection Agency; Donald Rumsfeld, White House assistant; and Dan Rather, CBS News White House correspondent. In addition to the seminar meetings there were purely social activities such as parties and picnics which permitted one to meet other interns from other agencies and departments in Washington.

On the whole, I found the Federal Summer Intern Program to be an educational and enjoyable experience and I feel that most of the other students in the program would agree. I am sure there was disappointment and dissatisfaction with the program in some cases, but generally it was a valuable experience. Personally, I was given a great deal of independence in my job assignment and was in fact told that its success or failure would depend mostly on my own originality. My superior and the other people in my office were friendly and helpful and appeared to be well satisfied with the filing system and card catalog I devised to help them retrieve reference information more efficiently. Even if the work experience had not been a success, I believe that the opportunity to spend a summer in Washington was of great value considering that city's great cultural, social, and historical resources.

Perhaps my greatest criticism of the Summer Intern Program is that most people have never heard of it. No doubt this fact is due to the relatively few students who have been fortunate enough to participate in the program up to the present. I hope very much that the program can be expanded, for regardless of a student's previous opinions concerning the operation of the federal government, I feel that the Intern program fulfills one of its major goals by expanding the student's knowledge of the problems and workings of government at the national level. Perhaps this essay will serve to inform others of what at least one student participant considers to be a valuable Federal program.