CHAPTER 16

Interning in a State Legislature

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Students have been interning in state legislatures since at least the mid-1950s, yet few studies of state legislative internship programs have been conducted. To help bridge the gap, this chapter provides a brief history of these programs and reviews the limited research on best teaching practices related to them. Analysis of a 2021 survey of 74 state legislative intern coordinators is presented, and the survey data, which include responses to open- and closed-ended questions, provide insight into how these programs are taught as well as informed perspectives about what the coordinators believe are key components of successful state legislative internships.

INTRODUCTION

When the Oregon Legislative Assembly moved to crack down on the predatory practices of the state's payday lending industry, it would have come up short if it had not been for an alert university intern.

The 1990s and early 2000s were boom years for payday lenders in Oregon. A change in state law in the 1980s removed the caps on interest rates for consumer loans, which led to a proliferation of businesses offering loans to customers needing immediate financial assistance. The payday lending industry in Oregon quickly became one of the fastest growing in the nation. The attraction for lenders was understandable: they could charge interest rates of more than 500% a year (Callahan and Mierzwinski 2005; Nelson 2007).

Payday lending had emerged as one of the top issues in Oregon politics by the year in which Galen, the university student, interned in the legislature for a freshman lawmaker from north Portland. Four bills introduced at the start of the session were designed to curtail predatory lending practices and limit annual interest rates to 36%. Among them was one focused specifically on abuses in car title loans.

As the car title bill progressed through the legislature, Galen conducted research on similar laws across the nation as part of her classroom work for her internship. Galen found that car title loan companies in other states were able to circumvent these laws by using an alternative lending practice, one in which customers would use their cars as collateral to receive funds. The customers would then sign a statement saying they had not received a loan and were leasing the automobile, yet the rates these customers paid could be as steep as the worst payday loans, reaching 500% a year. The proposed bill before the Oregon's legislature did not address this type of loan (Oregon Senate Committee on Commerce 2007).

Galen brought what she had learned from other states to the attention of her supervisor in the representative's office. He had never heard of the practice. Galen and her supervisor then met with the representative and the authors of the bill. None of them were familiar with the practice either.

After hearing from Galen, there were two things the representative and these others agreed on: the bill needed to be amended to close this loophole and Galen should be responsible for making it happen. Galen was asked to write an amendment and to testify in committee about why it was needed. The Galen Amendment, as it was called by others in the legislature, was added to the bill and eventually adopted as law.

Galen's experience was unusual for a legislative intern. Most do not play a major role in shaping one of the top bills during a session. Yet the work she did, both in the legislature and in the classroom, fit into what are frequently considered among the best practices for state legislative interns.

College students in every state have the opportunity to intern in the state capitol. There are considerable differences, however, in how these internship programs are structured and what they seek to accomplish. No singular model exists, yet there are some practices that are routinely identified as being essential for creating a successful capitol internship.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of state legislative internship programs, reviewing relevant history and presenting different perspectives on best practices. Few studies have been conducted on state legislative internships or offer empirically-based insights about how they should work. To help fill this vacuum, I present findings from a survey I conducted of legislative internship coordinators, which asked for details about their programs and their insider knowledge about what makes for a successful internship.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF STATE LEGISLATIVE INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

The creation of the first state legislative internship programs primarily grew out of efforts to replicate at the state level the American Political Science Association's (APSA) Congressional Fellowship Program, with a focus on providing opportunities to recent graduates, graduate students, and new faculty. Over time, however, universities, colleges, and state legislatures began to expand the reach of these programs, opening them to other types of students or creating new ones designed specifically for undergraduates.

The APSA's Congressional Fellowship Program was created in 1953 to provide an opportunity for young college teachers, journalists, and PhD candidates to intern alongside personal and committee staff, giving them an inside perspective on congressional politics. Originally called the APSA Congressional Intern Program, the course of study provided for two months of intensive learning in the Library of Congress, followed by eight months of full-time work in a congressional office. The fellows were paid a stipend to underwrite the costs of living in Washington, DC (Biggs 2003; Lee 1958).

The first state-level program followed just a few years later. California is often cited as having created the first state legislative internship program in the nation in 1957, but the University of Washington's (UW) legislative internship program was launched at least a year earlier. Hugh Bone, a UW political science professor, created the Washington State Legislative Internship Program (WSLIP) for undergraduates in the mid-1950s. Most articles about the Washington program report that it started in 1956, the year Bone received a grant from the Ford Foundation to help underwrite the program, but the National Conference of State Legislatures has found photos of Bone's interns dating to 1955 (Kurtz 2007). Unfortunately, there is little published information available about the early years of the program.

Considerably more has been written about California's program and its ripple effects across the US. Unlike Washington's program, however, the one in California was designed for training graduate students or recent college graduates. The first formal discussion about creating the California program occurred at a conference on Streamlining State Legislatures, which was held at the University of California, Berkeley in 1955. The conference brought together faculty, legislators, lobbyists, and journalists to consider how to improve the functioning of state legislatures. The conference participants agreed to develop an internship program explicitly modeled after the APSA Congressional Intern Program as a way to provide an educational experience for graduate students and greater staff support to legislators (Lee 1958).

Over the next year, representatives from several California universities and the state legislature collaborated to develop the program. A formal proposal was submitted to the Ford Foundation to help underwrite costs. The Foundation agreed to provide $40,000 a year over a five-year period to pay intern stipends and incidental university expenses. The state Assembly agreed to contribute another $30,000 per year. When the program was inaugurated on September 3, 1957, five universities and colleges participated: UC Berkeley, Stanford University, Claremont College, University of Southern California, and University of California, Los Angeles. Similar to APSA's program, the participants worked full-time for 10 months and did not include undergraduates (Lee 1958).

After successful launches in Washington and California, other states began to create their own legislative internship programs. Many of the early ones were modeled after California's program, with a focus on training graduate students. The Ford Foundation played an important role in advancing them across the US, providing funds for programs in Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, and Texas (Hennessey 1970, 13).

Some states also began to provide internship opportunities for undergraduate students. Although this history has not been studied systematically, Thomas Murphy conducted surveys in both 1971 and 1977 to learn about the growth and features of state legislative internship programs across the county. He found that the number of states with legislative internship programs grew from 14 in 1965 to 34 in 1971. By 1977, legislative interns had worked in all states, although only 44 states had functioning programs that year (Murphy 1979).

One of the most striking aspects of these programs, Murphy emphasized, was their "extreme variability" (1979, 178). Among the ways in which the programs varied were how they were structured (formal or informal), who oversaw them (a university or the legislature), who was allowed to participate (high school, undergraduate, graduate, or law school students), the types of assignments given to interns (with individual legislators or leadership; in research offices, party caucuses, or committees), and whether students were able to receive academic credit for their work.

The National Conference on State Legislatures (NCSL) conducted a similar survey in 2005, which gathered responses from the program coordinators for 69 legislative internship programs across 39 states. As with Murphy's surveys, one of the central findings from the NCSL study was that there was "immense variety" in the structure and workings of these programs. The differences were so great that the authors of the NCSL study characterized the state legislatures as not just providing "laboratories of democracy," but also "laboratories of service and learning" (NCSL 2005, 1).

Structural diversity remains a defining characteristic of state legislative internship programs, reflecting their differing purposes and desired learning outcomes. Yet there is some agreement among the legislative intern coordinators about the pedagogical steps that can be taken to create a better program.

PAST STUDIES ON LEGISLATIVE INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

Research on state legislative internships has been minimal, especially with respect to best practices. The literature that is available can be grouped into four general categories: histories, surveys of program types, thought pieces, and program assessments. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but they do capture the main topics generally covered by scholars.

Histories

The histories of state legislative internship programs focus primarily on telling the origin stories of these programs, such as Lee's (1958) first-hand essay on of the launching of California's legislative program, Profughi and Thompson's (1972) report on Rhode Island's program, and Hennesey's (1970) overview of political internships generally, including those in state legislatures.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of these works is that they provide historical perspective on the varied purposes of the programs. California's, for example, was started with two main intentions. One was to provide a training program on legislative politics, public policy, and state government for advanced graduate students and young professionals, and it was designed for individuals on the cusp of their professional careers. The other purpose was to provide additional staff—or labor—for the legis-

lature. To enhance the educational experience, the interns underwent a one-week orientation program similar to the one arranged for new legislative personnel. They also met in a weekly seminar to hold discussions and hear guest lectures about subjects revolving around their work and the legislature's politics (Lee 1958, 462).

Washington state's redesigned program, which commenced in the mid-1990s and continues to this day, differs slightly in its intent; it is meant to improve students' job prospects after graduation by giving them "solid job experience and an educational program that will enhance their work skills" (Best 2001). The competitive program is open to high-achieving college juniors and seniors, most of whom go on to graduate studies. The academic side of the program is multifaceted, including a three-day orientation, regular training sessions, and various educational activities, described in more detail below.

Rhode Island's program was originally proposed in the late 1960s as a way to improve public confidence in state government by involving students in the policymaking process. In an early report, Profughi and Thompson (1972) noted that the program was open to a wider range of students than in many states, including participants from high school through graduate school. The students did not have to be entering the job force or even be upper division undergraduates; neither did they have to be academic standouts, as most tended to have a B average. As in California, the program was created as a way to provide the legislature with much-needed help. The Rhode Island General Assembly lacked personal staff into the 1990s, so the program was of considerable value in providing legislators with research support and other activities. On the educational side, the internship had a much more academic focus than the California program, although it was less rigorous than the one in Washington state. The students met weekly with various faculty members, legislators, bureaucrats, and others to learn about state politics. They were also assigned weekly readings and were required to write an analytical paper on state politics.

Rhode Island's program has evolved since Profughi and Thompson's report was issued. The program has been expanded to provide internship opportunities in state agencies, the courts, and non-profit organizations. The centralized weekly meetings were discontinued, the participating universities took over the academic side, and high school students were dropped from the program. More recently, the program began offering remote internships during the coronavirus pandemic. These internships have proven so successful that the legislative office which runs the internship program intends to offer them after the pandemic subsides. One aspect of the program that has not changed is that it has retained its inclusive character, accepting students with a minimum GPA of 2.5 rather than just top academic achievers (Lynch 2021).

Surveys of Program Types

The second category of studies employs surveys to understand the different types of legislative internship programs across the country, such as the work by Murphy (1979) and the NCSL (2005). The publications based on these surveys are primarily descriptive, providing an overview of how internship programs are structured across the nation.

The NCSL's 2005 national survey is perhaps the most comprehensive study of state legislative internship programs to date. The 47-page report based on the results provides information about who is eligible to participate, who oversees the interns, where interns are placed in the legislature, and the type of duties typically assigned. The report also explains how the educational components of the internship programs are structured.

As mentioned above, the survey recognizes profound diversity among programs. For example, participants could include any number of high school, college, graduate, or law school students. Some programs are overseen by university faculty, some by legislative staff, and some have entirely different oversight structures. Opportunities also differ, as some place students in all types of legislative settings, from individual legislators' offices to staff agencies, whereas others limit interns to specific types of offices. As for assigned duties, undergraduate interns handle constituent services and legislative research in almost all programs, and in some institutions they are given the opportunity to conduct policy analysis, committee support, and media relations. Overall, the report provides a valuable overview of the assorted ways these programs work.

Thought Pieces

A third category of published work consists of thought pieces written by program coordinators or faculty supervisors about what they believe has been most important in ensuring a successful internship. These scholars offer "insiders' perspectives" based on personal experiences and knowledge. Some of these works are targeted to faculty who oversee interns, but others are written for interns or their supervisors.

A good example is the chapter by Christensen and Davis (2002) in Reeher and Mariani's *The Insider's Guide to Political Internships*. They provide advice to students on the best ways to approach interning in state legislatures, covering everything from how to select a legislative position to saying goodbye when the internship ends. The chapter is primarily concerned with explaining how to act professionally in a legislative environment—basic information that all legislative interns need to know. Among their recommendations are that interns need to accept the grunt work that comes along with more glamourous duties, abide by professional ethics, and make an effort to build relationships with the regular staff in the office to which they are assigned.

Pecorella (2007) provides the most well-developed thought piece on best practices in state legislative internship programs. The essay is based on Pecorella's 20 years of experience as the professor-in-residence for the New York State Assembly intern program, but he also brings empirical studies to bear on his perspective. Pecorella makes the case that for an internship "to be truly effective, it must embrace a traditional academic complement that is built around" the intern experience (79). The academic component is essential, he writes, because it provides the "theoretical 'forests' for the empirical 'trees' of the actual experience" (80). Without this theoretical background, he argues persuasively, the educational value of the internship is severely limited. Pecorella then recommends the theoretical material that should be covered. Whether or not one agrees with Pecorella's specific reading recommendations, he makes a strong case for providing a rigorous academic component and for active monitoring by faculty sponsors.

Another short but valuable piece by Rosenthal (2006) draws on a guidebook for state legislative interns that he field tested and developed with three other political scientists in 2000 (Rosenthal et al. 2001). His essay distills 16 recommendations for legislators who are charged with providing student interns an educational experience, chief among them: spend personal time with the interns; introduce interns to relevant staff; give them substantive assignments; and provide some supervision. While legislators and legislative staff are the intended audience, faculty supervisors will also find it valuable.

Program Assessments

Moving beyond the personal observations of individual authors, the final category of published work consists of empirical studies assessing the outcomes of interns' legislative experiences. These studies tend to focus on the overall impact of internship programs, examining how interning for a state legislature influences students' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. But a few do try to determine what factors lead to more successful internship experiences.

Many of these studies focus on the New York State Assembly. Since at least the mid-1970s, Assembly interns have been given questionnaires at the beginning and ending of the legislative session to determine how they were influenced by their experiences. In the first study drawing on these survey instruments, Balutis (1977) examined "the effects of the internship experience on students' knowledge and perceptions of politics in general and the New York State Legislature in particular" (1977, 321). His findings were not encouraging; he found only minor gains in knowledge about the state's political institutions and the legislative process, but the differences were not statistically significant. He identified no significant changes in students' political opinions, interest in politics, attitudes toward government, or sense of efficacy.

Eyler and Halteman (1981) followed in Balutis's footsteps but employed broader questions and a more sophisticated research design, including using control groups. Like Balutis, Eyler and Halteman noted no gains in political efficacy and knowledge, but they did find increases in political sophistication and skills among legislative interns that were not identified among the control groups. Eyler and Halteman's study provides evidence that legislative internship programs can produce desirable outcomes, but as with Balutis's work, their study does not try to identify the best practices in creating a successful program.

The primary survey work that has attempted to address this deeper concern has been produced

by Pecorella and Stonecash, who conducted two studies on New York Assembly interns, one which included Winegar as a coauthor. In both studies, interns were asked to answer a series of questions at the start and conclusion of the internship program. These questions probed the interns' political attitudes, knowledge, and personal backgrounds, along with their experiences in the legislature. The first study analyzed survey responses from 106 undergraduates in the 1988 legislative session (Stonecash, Pecorella, and Winegar 1988). The second examined survey responses from more than 600 undergraduate interns from 1999 and 2005 (Pecorella and Stonecash 2007).

Both studies revealed that three factors were particularly important to a satisfactory experience: the students who reported the greatest satisfaction were ones who said they were treated well in the office, interacted more frequently with their legislator, and were assigned more "interesting work" (2007) or had "broader engagement in legislative activities" (1988). These findings led the authors to conclude that it is particularly important that faculty sponsors closely monitor how student interns are being treated to ensure they are being respected and being given appropriate work. While neither study examines the academic side of the internship, Pecorella and Stonecash argue that the experience should have an academic component.

What We Know From The Literature

The existing literature may be limited but it does provide some valuable perspective on state legislative internships. One precept that can be derived from these works is that the overall experience provided legislative interns should be meaningful, even if interns must execute mundane tasks. Another is that the academic side of the internship should be deliberately planned. As Profughi and Thompson (1972) write, regular class meetings, with appropriate readings, are "key integrating" experiences, allowing the internship to become "an extension of the classroom" (7). A third insight is that interns and legislative office staff, including the legislators themselves, need to develop a good relationship. To accomplish this, Christensen and Davis (2002) write that interns need to communicate regularly to their supervisors about how they are progressing, remaining open to feedback. As for legislators and their staffs, Rosenthal (2006) says they need to spend time getting to know their interns, be generous with praise when work is done well, and recognize their role as teachers. Finally, as Pecorella argues, the only way to ensure that students are given substantive work and that the office environment is conducive to learning is for the faculty supervisor to monitor the student interns (Pecorella 2007; Pecorella and Stonecash 2007).

A SURVEY OF CURRENT PRACTICES

To get a better understanding of best practices for legislative internships, I conducted a survey of legislative internship coordinators to find out about their programs and glean their recommendations. While this approach lacks the rigor of a "high-n" empirical study and takes the spotlight off student learning, it does rely on knowledgeable insiders who have honed their observations through years of experience.[1]

I used two approaches to identify potential survey respondents. First, I sent emails to all the legislative internship coordinators listed on the NCSL's website. Second, because many of these coordinators are legislative staff members, I made a systematic effort also to identify instructional faculty and university staff who work directly supervising legislative interns. I conducted online searches to find at least two universities and colleges in all fifty states that advertise legislative internship programs, and I then reached out to the coordinators of these programs. The discussion that follows includes responses from 74 individuals representing 40 states.[2] The information presented below was supplemented with material from program websites.

Laboratories of Service and Learning

The first lesson from this research is the same as that of Murphy (1979) and NCSL (2005): there is wide variation in the character of state legislative internship programs.

Some programs are centralized statewide operations overseen by the legislature, which provide a structured course of study, full-time work, academic credit, and a stipend. The New York State Assembly, for example, offers opportunities to approximately 150 students each session. Interested students apply through the Assembly's intern committee, which then places them into individual member offices and

with research staff. As of the 2021 session, interns are paid a $6,600 stipend, work a minimum of 30 hours a week, and typically earn a full semester of course credit. The program includes an orientation, a structured academic course, and a concluding mock session. The state senate has a similar program that is open to some 30 students a session.

Similarly, Washington state's program provides opportunities for 70 undergraduate students to work with individual legislators or as caucus staff through the entire annual session.[3] Students apply to the house and senate civic education directors, who then oversee placement. Students are paid $1,350 per month and work 40 hours per week. The students are required to attend a three-day orientation, regular training sessions, and educational presentations on topics related to legislative politics, state government, and professional development. As in New York, the students participate in a mock legislature, though they are also given the opportunity to shadow a leading state official and participate in a variety of optional activities, including a field trip to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly. Unlike New York, however, where the students attend a regular academic course taught by the assembly's professors-in-residence, the students' main academic work is determined by their home institutions.

At the other end of the spectrum are programs administered by individual universities, which are part-time and tailored to satisfy the interests of individual students. In these programs, the students seek a placement on their own and then work with a faculty sponsor, who monitors their internship and provides academic direction. Among the many universities that offer such programs are the University of Alaska Southeast, Willamette University (Oregon), Northern Arizona University, University of North Dakota, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Northeastern.

Broad diversity lies between these two extremes. Some legislatures house a centralized program but are not as highly structured as New York's or Washington's. The Wyoming legislature, for example, accepts around 10 interns per year who work part-time during the session. The students apply through their individual universities but the placement is made by the legislative service office. The academic side is handled by each participating institution, although students must supply their course syllabus to the legislative service office with their application.

Some programs that involve multiple universities are either led by one institution or through a consortium of schools, such as The Harrisburg Internship Semester (THIS), which is overseen by the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, or the Maddy Institute's Legislative Intern Scholar Program, a joint program in which four public universities in California's San Joaquin Valley participate.[4] Even among programs run by individual universities, the program structures differ widely. Some are overseen by teaching faculty, others by a staff person. Some require students to intern only a few hours a week and do not have regular class meetings; others set much more demanding requirements.

Goals and Learning Outcomes

More relevant to our purposes are the educational goals and pedagogical approaches of these programs. One of the most notable findings is that the survey respondents identified a wide range of learning outcomes. None of the respondents listed just one or two desired learning outcomes; rather, they identified a variety of potential benefits that they hope students gain from interning in the legislature. Moreover, there is broad agreement among coordinators on these desired outcomes, regardless of program structure.

Respondents were asked in a closed-ended question to identify learning goals and outcomes, and almost all (98.6%) said that they hoped the program would improve students' knowledge about government and politics (see table 1). In a follow-up question, one respondent commented on the importance of legislative internships for giving students a concrete understanding of how the government functions, writing: "Legislative politics and state policies are abstract to students. When they intern in the capitol, it all comes to life. They observe how legislators interact with each other, with their staffs, and with lobbyists. They observe how policy is made and how proceedings are used to shape or kill legislation. Most students have more faith in the system after their internships, and they gain a greater appreciation for state politics and policies."

But the respondents view a legislative internship as valuable for reasons beyond improving student knowledge about government; most also regard it as a path to developing a professional career. The next three most common learning outcomes centered on career development: the experience can help

Table 1: Desired Learning Outcomes

	Improved Knowledge	Understand Career Options	Build Professional Network	Improve Professional Skills	Compare Academic to Experience	Build Self-Confidence	Job Training	Line on Resume
Faculty Supervisor (49)	100%	93.9%	89.8%	87.8%	89.8%	81.6%	83.7%	61.2%
University Coordinator (17)	94.1%	100%	94.1%	94.1%	82.4%	76.5%	76.5%	47.1%
Legislative Staff (7)	100%	71.4%	85.7%	85.7%	85.7%	100%	85.7%	57.1%
All Respondents (74)	98.6%	93.2%	90.5%	89.2%	87.8%	82.4%	82.4%	58.1%

Note: Number of respondents in parentheses. The All Respondents category in this and other tables includes a director of a large multi-university internship program who does not fit into the three categories.

students better understand potential career options (93.2%), build a professional network (90.5%), and improve their analytical, research, communications, and other professional skills (89.2%).

Many of the respondents strongly emphasized how beneficial legislative internships are for providing students with experience in a professional setting. One respondent wrote succinctly that the interactions with others in the legislature "help model appropriate professional behavior." Another wrote that students "learn a lot about the conventions, mentalities, and habits of professionals in policy-relevant jobs." Others emphasized how valuable students' work can be for advancing their careers. One respondent wrote that the writing and research tasks students are often asked to do "are especially valuable because these are translatable skills."

Finally, the respondents broadly agreed on a variety of other learning outcomes that they hope students gain through a legislative internship, including providing students with an opportunity to compare what is taught in academic studies with first-hand experiences (87.8%), to build their self-confidence (82.4%), and to get the training necessary for a career, specifically in government and public service (82.4%).

In analyzing the survey results, I considered aggregate responses and also broke them down by the type of position respondents held (faculty supervisor, university internship coordinator, or legislative staff member). My particular research aim was to discover whether respondents who directly work with students in a faculty role have distinct perspectives from university and legislative staff with respect to legislative internships.[5]

In general, there is considerable agreement on learning outcomes regardless of the position held by the respondent, but slight variations are worthy of note. University internship coordinators were especially likely to view legislative internships in terms of career development. All 17 university coordinators (100%) identified legislative internships as a particularly good opportunity for students to better understand different career options. Moreover, two other outcomes at the top of their lists are related to general career development: development of a professional network (94.1%) and improved analytical, research, communications, and other professional skills (94.1%). Conversely, legislative staff are more likely than others to view internships as a means to build student confidence (100%).

More notable, however, is respondents' consistent agreement on learning outcomes. The respondents perceive legislative internships as a broadening experience, with multiple potential benefits. Speaking to these, one respondent wrote: "Not all students come out of the internship wishing to stay in the legislature as a career, so I try to show them the value of 'skill stacking' that can extend into whatever path they take…. Hearing about the different backgrounds of our legislative staff helps them to overcome obstacles of imposter syndrome. Finally, the network of professionals and mentors is what can help them turn internships into careers."

Table 2: Most Valuable Duties to Perform

	Policy or Issue Research	Interact with Elected Officials	Write Policy Briefs, etc.	Observe Committee Meetings	Constituent Service	Bill Tracking	Observe Floor Proceedings	Participate in Staff Meeting	Interact with Lobbyists	General Office Duties
Faculty Supervisor (49)	83.7%	79.6%	77.6%	69.4%	69.4%	63.3%	53.1%	53.1%	38.8%	30.6%
University Coordinator (17)	88.2%	76.5%	70.6%	70.6%	76.5%	47.1%	41.2%	35.3%	29.4%	5.9%
Legislative Staff (7)	85.7%	85.7%	71.4%	100%	57.1%	42.9%	85.7%	42.9%	42.9%	42.9%
All Respondents (74)	85.1%	79.7%	75.7%	71.6%	70.3%	56.8%	52.7%	48.6%	36.5%	25.7%

Note: Number of respondents in parentheses.

Structuring the Internship Experience

Respondents also reviewed a list of 10 activities frequently assigned to legislative interns and were asked to identify ones they think are the most valuable for interns to perform. Table 2 shows that there was a relatively high level of agreement across groups, though less strong than with learning outcomes.

Overall, 85.1% of the respondents identified policy or issue research as among the most valuable tasks. In a follow-up open-ended question, many respondents explained that they value research because it is transferable to other jobs, and a few others noted that research allows interns to develop a deeper understanding of how and why public policy is made. Interacting with legislators and other elected officials was also identified by most of the respondents (79.7%) as among the most valuable activities. One respondent acknowledged its importance simply as something "you cannot do…in class or from the library." Another wrote that personal contact, along with working on constituent matters, are "invaluable for understanding how the legislative process actually works and how citizens interact with elected officials." Finally, three out of four respondents (75.7%) selected "writing policy briefs, bill summaries, memos, or committee testimony" as among the most valuable activities. As one respondent wrote, the writing assignments "are essential in learning how to communicate clearly and concisely," and others noted that, as with conducting research, these tasks help build transferable skills. In general, then, faculty supervisors, university intern coordinators, and legislative staff expressed similar preferences about the importance of these three types of assignments, but beyond these, greater differences in opinion begin to emerge.

Most respondents (71.6%) regarded observing committee meetings as one of the most valuable intern activities, a sentiment that was especially strong among legislative staff members, all of whom identified it as among the most valuable. Committee meetings in which the public and policy experts testify and where the fine details of legislation are worked out are considered the heart of legislative work; observing these proceedings puts students right in the center of legislative politics, so it is not surprising this is valued highly. In making the case for this activity, one respondent wrote bluntly that "committees are the most important stage of the policy making process, where they [student interns] see the interaction among committee members and engagement with the public and organized interests."

A large number of respondents also recognize the importance of having students work on constituent matters (70.3%); university intern coordinators were particularly likely to mention it. Since the groundbreaking work of Richard Fenno (1978) and David Mayhew (1974), legislative scholars have emphasized the importance of constituencies in shaping how legislators behave; assigning interns to work on constituent matters provides them with the opportunity to observe the relationship between legislators and constituents directly, which can help them to understand the arguments of these scholars and how representation works. A few respondents pointed out that it should not be the only duty that students are assigned, however, with one cautioning that if students' "whole experience is policy research or responding to constituents' emails, they miss out on so much of what they might learn and observe by being in the office seeing the capitol and its people interact."

Whereas the remaining five activities are clearly considered less valuable overall, a few respondents emphasized that students should be exposed to the entire gamut of activities, not just to the top two or three. Conversely, a few respondents argued strongly that what constitutes the most valuable activity is not universal, but depends on the students' goals. One wrote, "they all matter, though in different ways to different students."

Providing an Academic Component

Two survey questions probed the academic aspects of internship programs: one about general requirements, asking whether there are regular class meetings, a research assignment, and other required activities; and the other about assigned readings. Most respondents identified an academic component attached to the internship program (although 15.7% reported that they include none of these), and here again there is considerable variation in what is required. The most common academic assignment is some type of research-related paper (see table 3). Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (74.3%) require students to write some type of paper with a research component, including a traditional research paper (45.7%), a policy analysis (27.1%), or a reflection paper evaluating their experience through the lens of scholarly readings (37.1%). Some programs require students to complete more than one of these activities.

Table 3: Academic Requirements

	Research Paper (any type)	Academic Paper	Policy Analysis	Scholarly Reflection	Log of Experiences	Regular Class Meetings	Individual Meetings	Experiential Reflection Essay	Classroom Presentation	Exams or Quizzes
Faculty Supervisor (49)	85.7%	49%	32.7%	46.9%	65.3%	42.9%	18.4%	22.4%	12.2%	8.2%
University Coordinator (17)	47.1%	35.3%	17.6%	11.8%	58.5%	58.5%	35.3%	23.5%	17.6%	11.8%
Legislative Staff (3)	66.7%	66.7%	0%	33.3%	33.3%	66.7%	33.3%	0%	33.3%	0%
All Respondents (70)	74.3%	45.7%	27.1%	37.1%	61.4%	47.1%	22.9%	22.9%	14.3%	8.6%

Note: Number of respondents in parentheses.

The next two prevailing requirements were keeping a regular log of activities and attending some type of meeting with the instructor. In total, 61.4% of the respondents indicated they require students to keep a log, while 60% (not shown) include some type of meeting, consisting of regular class sessions (47.1%), individual meetings with the instructor (22.9%), or both. Other types of work are required infrequently, including: a reflection paper based entirely on experiences without a scholarly component (22.9% of programs); classroom presentations (14.3%); and exams (8.6%).

Breaking down the responses by the respondent's position, the most salient finding is that the faculty supervisors are far more likely than university internship coordinators and legislative staff to include an academic, research-based paper, whereas university internship coordinators are the most likely to require some type of meeting (76.5%; not shown). Legislative staff seem accustomed to leaving the academic side of the internship in the hands of the academics, as more than half of the respondents working in the legislature did not answer this question.[6]

Table 4 shows that almost half of the respondents (47.9%) assign some type of academic reading, with the two most common types relating to the state's political system (35.2%) or those by state legislative politics scholars (31%). Some require material on Congress or comparative state politics (22.5%), or public policy analyses (21.1%). Some programs, however, tailor the reading assignments to individual students (21.1%).

Combined, this means that more than two-thirds of the programs include an academic reading component. In addition, some programs require students to read media coverage of the legislature

Table 4: Assigned Readings

	Academic Readings (any type)	State's Political System	Legislative Studies	Comparative State Politics or Congress	Public Policy	Varies by Student	Media Coverage	Training Manual	No Readings
Faculty Supervisor (49)	53.1%	40.8%	36.7%	28.6%	24.5%	14.3%	18.4%	14.3%	28.6%
University Coordinator (14)	42.9%	28.6%	21.4%	14.3%	14.3%	42.9%	21.4%	21.4%	14.3%
Legislative Staff (7)	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	0%	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%	71.4%	0%
All Respondents (71)	47.9%	35.2%	31%	22.5%	21.1%	21.1%	18.3%	21.1%	23.9%

Note: Number of respondents in parentheses.

(18.3%) or a training manual (21.1%).

In sum, considering learning goals and structure, the great majority of legislative internship programs generally follow Pecorella's (2007) advice, embedding scholarship in the internship experience.

Ensuring a Successful Program

Even if all the components for a successful internship are in place, what steps can be taken to ensure that students meet their learning goals? Respondents were asked to identify all the different factors they believe to be most important to success, and then to explain their selection of those they considered most important.

Respondents (81.1%) wrote that success above all depends on a supportive legislative office staff who work to ensure a successful internship (see table 5). Legislative staff are the ones who oversee the duties assigned, provide opportunities to meet elected officials, and open all the other doors within the legislature; they are positioned to provide the on-site guidance that can ensure interns get the most out of their experience in the statehouse. One respondent wrote that being mentored by legislative staff "is absolutely the most important part of the internship. This means having a staff person in their host site who takes the time to train, support, and include the student(s)." Another said that "if the legislative office staff and the intern's direct supervisor are not invested in the student's growth and learning, and instead simply see them as cheap/free labor, the internship will not be a success." Two activities handled by legislative staff were isolated as particularly important to successful internships: providing the intern

Table 5: Important Factors for Ensuring a Successful Internship

	Supportive Staff	Meaningful Work	Clear Expectations	Training Program	Student Commitment	Good Match	Coordinator Supervision	Academic Component	Broad Exposure to Process
Faculty Supervisor (49)	85.7%	69.4%	61.2%	38.8%	73.5%	63.3%	28.6%	44.9%	44.9%
University Coordinator (17)	76.5%	88.2%	76.5%	47.1%	70.6%	47.1%	35.3%	23.5%	58.8%
Legislative Staff (7)	57.1%	57.1%	71.4%	57.1%	85.7%	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	57.1%
All Respondents (74)	81.1%	73%	66.2%	41.9%	74.3%	59.5%	28.4%	36.5%	48.6%

Note: Number of respondents in parentheses.

with meaningful work (73%) and clear expectations about their responsibilities (66.2%). To a lesser extent, some respondents also believe it is important to have a good training program for incoming interns (41.9%).

Conversely, almost as many respondents (74.3%) pointed to the behavior of interns as being key. These respondents wrote that success depends on such factors as whether the interns are committed, take the initiative, are willing to learn, and work hard. One wrote: "It does not matter (as much) how much effort I put into providing interns with resources. Good interns will take the initiative to get things done and poor interns won't use what they're given."

Ultimately, many respondents recognized that success depends on not just the staff or the student, but on the actions of both (63.5%; not shown). Thus, some internship coordinators consider it essential to find a good match between the student and the legislative office (59.5%). Wrote one respondent: "I think the match is probably most important; the rest of the internships portion sort of goes from there. I try to avoid placing a student in an unsupportive office…. They are also likely to have meaningful work and broad exposure as a consequence." Another wrote simply: "The personalities have to work, and the interests of the students should be engaged in the internship."

Far fewer respondents attributed success to the actions of the internship coordinator,[7] or the academic side of the internship (36.5%), although the faculty supervisors were far more likely (44.9%) to emphasize the importance of the academic component for ensuring a successful internship than were the university coordinators (23.5%) or legislative staff (14.3%).[8] Finally, approximately half the respondents (48.6%) emphasized the need to give students broad exposure to different parts of the legislative process.

What are the takeaways from these responses? Clearly, success depends on the legislative staff and the interns themselves. Legislative staff need to take steps proactively and students need to apply themselves to their positions. Yet there is another takeaway hiding underneath the surface: whereas most legislative internships provide a successful experience, problems do arise, and the results make a case for why internship coordinators need to play an active role in monitoring internships. Coordinators may not be perceived as central to success (only 30% of respondents saw it that way), but as Pecorella (2007) argues, coordinators are there to intervene if necessary, and they can play a critical role in salvaging internships that are not working out.

BEST PRACTICES IN PERSPECTIVE

Survey responses provide an opportunity to learn from those working on the front lines with interns, and the results reveal considerable differences in program structure yet considerable agreement on learning outcomes and pedagogy, which suggests that many coordinators see eye-to-eye on what constitutes best practices in state legislative internship programs. As importantly, much of what these survey respondents had to say is consistent with what has been written in the small body of literature on legislative internship programs.

Drawing from this survey and the existing literature, several best practices can be identified:

Constructive work environment. First, the interns need to be placed in a constructive workplace environment, one in which a good relationship can be created between the intern and the legislative staff, and the interns are able to gain from their experiences. Within that environment, the interns need to be given adequate support, clear directions, appropriate training, and a chance to interact with the legislator.

Meaningful work. Second, interns need to be given meaningful work that improves their understanding of legislative politics and builds professional skills. Assignments should include: policy or issue research; interaction with legislators and other elected officials; writing tasks such as policy briefs and committee testimony; helping with constituency matters; and observation of committee activities. These assignments will foster understanding about legislative politics and skills that are transferable to other professions. While interns may be expected to handle some general office duties, their internships must also involve more satisfying work that has greater educational value.

Academic component. Third, there needs to be an academic component to the program to ensure students do more than just intern in the legislature; they need to gain a broader understanding of what they observe. It is fine to ask students to maintain a log of their experience and write a reflection essay;

both are popular assignments that prompt students to reflect on their internship. But to cement a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of legislative politics through scholarship and practical experience, they should be assigned readings and classroom projects that at least introduce them to related scholarly literature. One way to tie scholarship and experience together is to have the students write traditional term papers on a topic related to what they did or observed within the legislature. Similarly, if a reflection paper is assigned, the students should be asked to compare what they observed with concepts drawn from readings and academic lectures.

Close monitoring. Fourth, internship coordinators (faculty or campus coordinators) need to be engaged in the internships they oversee to make sure the work environment is healthy, that legislative staff are helping interns thrive, and the students are experiencing no serious issues or problems. The coordinators may not need to intervene frequently, but they need to be ready to help.

Galen, the intern in the Oregon legislature, was given a classroom assignment to write a research paper, which had to include scholarly sources. She worked in an office environment in which the legislative assistant was willing to stop and listen to what Galen had found on the payday loan industry. The legislative assistant then opened doors to enable Galen to play a meaningful role in the legislative process. She was given the opportunity to work directly with her legislator, to write an amendment to a major bill, and then to testify in a hearing. The experience also allowed Galen to build a valuable professional network. It also has not hurt her career that the legislator for whom she interned went on to become the Oregon House Speaker. Galen herself went on to work in the majority party office, for the co-chair of the legislature's Ways and Means Committee, and for the governor.

What Galen experienced is the ideal type of outcome that faculty supervisors should try to ensure that each legislative intern enjoys, even if such outcomes are rare. It included a constructive workplace environment, an opportunity to be involved in meaningful work, close monitoring, and a classroom assignment that improved the student's understanding beyond the internship itself.[9]

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ENDNOTES

1. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Portland State University, HRPP# 217208-18 and 217209-18 amendment.

2. The survey was conducted in March 2021. A link to the survey was sent to 185 individuals. In a few cases, the recipients forwarded the link to someone they thought was more appropriate to respond. In total, 76 respondents filled out the survey questionnaire. Since my concern is undergraduate education, I excluded the responses from two individuals who oversee programs for graduate students and do not work with undergraduates.

3. Sessions start in early January and run for 60 days in even-numbered years and 105 days in odd-numbered years. Students who attend universities and colleges on the quarter system are allowed to leave the program in odd-numbered years after the end of their winter quarter rather than serve the entire 105 days.

4. Since August 2019 (and as of June 2021), these include the University of California, Merced, and three California State University campuses: Fresno, Bakersfield, and Stanislaus.

5. Some respondents serve both as a faculty supervisor and a university internship coordinator. Two reported serving in all three roles. Since these individuals include the role of faculty supervisor among their multiple responsibilities, I included them with in the faculty category. Along with faculty, the other two categories were respondents who identified themselves as working solely as either a university internship coordinator or a coordinator within the legislature.

6. Most staff members explained that they did not handle the academic requirements. Of the three that did answer, two of them are from the nation's largest and most highly structured programs run by legislatures.

7. However, several wrote that it was important for the faculty supervisor or program coordinator to closely monitor the student interns to ensure the students are being giving meaningful work and are having a worthwhile experience (28.4%).

8. In a quote that echoed Pecorella's (2007) comments, one wrote about the value of class meetings: "In those meetings they hear about the experiences of the other interns, meet guest presenters involved in the legislative process, and learn more about the 'forest' of the legislative process rather than just being familiar with the 'trees' in their individual legislator's office."

9. Author's note: I want to thank the internship coordinators who helped with this study, especially those who wrote notes and called to talk in more detail about their programs. Thank you also goes to Logan Gilles for providing the cover photo of Darren Harold-Golden with Senator James Manning. I would like to dedicate the chapter to Joel Fischer, the legislative aide who helped Galen and many other legislative interns. It is legislative staff like Joel who are central to making legislative internship successful. He will be missed.