

CHAPTER 11

Funding for Interns

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Unpaid or underpaid internships can create serious practical and equity concerns for our students, especially first generation and low-income students. Internships in public service professions are often unpaid, and those who desire college credit often face a double financial barrier. This chapter discusses a scaffolded approach to internships and draws on survey data to suggest how faculty and institutions can address these needs through one of several innovative departmental models. The roles of both the federal government and APSA in elevating the discussion of internship funding are also explored.

INTRODUCTION

“I am looking for help finding an internship. I know it can help me in my career, but I can’t work unpaid. Do you know of good paid internships?” Probably anyone who has worked with political science students looking for internships has heard this conversation starter. Serving students who cannot afford to complete an unpaid internship tends to be the norm for the vast majority of faculty working in higher education. Given that unpaid internships are more prevalent in what some have called “glamorous fields” (Curiale 2009) such as politics, entertainment, communications, and journalism (Joyce et al. 2018), funding can be a major hurdle for political science students and supporting faculty. The intent of this chapter is to discuss how faculty, departments, and political science as a profession can help students secure paid internships or provide support for unpaid opportunities. It begins by discussing what advisors should know from the students’ point of view. Three models are discussed: unpaid for-credit, unpaid no credit, and paid internships. Next, the chapter presents a scaffolded approach that faculty can use to help students work their way up to high-profile, paid internships. Next, models of institutional efforts for supporting interns are discussed. Finally, the chapter addresses the roles of both the federal government and the American Political Science Association (APSA) in elevating paid internships in the public sector.

STUDENT INTERNSHIP MODELS

Before delving into internship funding models, it is first useful to consider the direct costs of geographically distant internships. High quality internships are often found in locations far from students' homes. This means that students must find and pay for housing in addition to their other basic living expenses (Edwards and Hertel-Fernandez 2010). Consider the highly desired internship location of Washington, DC. As of March 2021, the average rent in Washington, DC was \$2,000 per month for a one-bedroom apartment.¹ For a three-month summer internship, students could easily pay \$6,000 in rent alone in 2021. If a student chose to live outside of the District, they could pay lower rent, but would likely also pay more for the daily commute to their internship. Additionally, students must eat, which could amount to hundreds or even thousands of dollars (see Chapter 13 about DC internships by Chin for a more detailed breakdown of costs).

Finally, the student might seek course credit for their internship. In 2021, the average cost for a college credit in the United States was \$559.² The average in-state tuition for public universities was slightly lower (\$396 per credit) and the average cost for out-of-state students and those at private universities was much higher (\$1,101 and \$1,492, respectively). Thus, the total cost for tuition and living expenses for a summer internship could conceivably have reached \$10,000 in 2021. If a student were paid the average wage for a Washington, DC internship in 2021, \$15 per hour, they would gross only \$7,200 over the course of a 12-week experience, before taxes.³ Or, in the case of unpaid internships, as is most often the case in public sector internships (Edwards and Hertel-Fernandez 2010; NACE 2019), the students must fully absorb the expenses. While the DC internship experience and placements outside the US are among the most financially costly, especially compared to local and state government experiences, this quick calculation illustrates the financial reality for many students.

Further, the DC example does not consider other financial complications that students, especially those from less advantaged backgrounds, face. Consider the student who lives completely independently and must either sublet or absorb the cost of a year-round apartment during the summer months. Or consider the student who supports an extended family, or even immediate family (such as a child, spouse, or parent), financially. The barriers to completing internships, especially unpaid, mount quickly and can result in unequal access to these vital career development opportunities.

Before addressing the roles of faculty and departments in increasing internship equity, it is important to understand the three different models of internships from the perspective of students: unpaid and for credit; unpaid with no credit; and paid internships (whether for credit or no credit). Each has benefits and drawbacks.

Unpaid, For Credit

Unpaid internships with a paired academic component can serve both the internship-granting institution and the intern well. While unpaid internships correlate negatively with future salary and employment, they do help students with networking and either confirming or rejecting their career goals (Crain 2016). Further, partnerships between academic programs and employers are necessary for ensuring high-quality experiences (Joyce et al. 2018). And earning credit appears to make students feel more accountable and care more about their performance at the internship (Saltikoff et al. 2018).

Students in most cases, however, pay tuition for this support. This is sensible given that faculty are supervising and assessing students, meaning that university resources are expended in the students' completion of a credited internship. From the students' perspective, however, this is a double financial blow: not only do they receive no compensation for their work, but they must also pay tuition. For those students who are responsible for paying their own way through college or receive limited support from others, the double financial burden creates a hurdle both to perceiving that an internship is possible and completing one for academic credit (Shade and Jacobson 2015). One way to avoid the pitfall of paying for credits, particularly in the summer when financial aid does not apply, is to complete the requirements for zero credits. This allows the internship to appear on the transcript without extra tuition charges.

Unpaid, No Credit

Unpaid internships without an accompanying academic component can free students from the financial burden of tuition. However, these also retain a strong potential for exploitation and undermining the core educational purpose of an internship. This is not to argue that all unpaid internships are necessarily exploitative, but such an outcome is possible because unpaid laborers and “volunteers” at both for- and non-profit organizations, including governments, often lack legal and institutional protections (Allan 2019; Baines, Cunningham, and Shields 2017; also see Yamada this volume). Without the faculty supervision that accompanies a for-credit internship, students are essentially on their own to navigate issues such as discrimination or exploitive practices, should they arise (Sosland and Lowenthal 2017).

Paid (Credit or No Credit)

Paid internships have many advantages; aside from providing an income stream that is usually indispensable, there is evidence that they lead to better career outcomes in the long run. Students who have had paid internships tend to be more employable (Hunt and Scott 2017), eventually receiving more job offers and higher starting salaries than those who either completed an unpaid internship or no internship (NACE 2019). The major downsides of paid internships are that some institutions do not award credit for paid internships, and across the board they are highly competitive, attracting strong candidates with experience and developed skill sets. This is where strategic thinking on the part of the advisor and the student can be advantageous. Faculty can be strategic partners in scaffolding internships in ways that increase equity and students’ competitiveness. Scaffolding involves building toward complex tasks, and because faculty regularly employ such techniques in their courses, they can easily transfer them to internship advising.

More specifically, scaffolding occurs when “a teacher ... offers explicit support and guidance to help a learner to perform a difficult task beyond [their] own capacity” (Kazak, Wegerif, and Fujita 2015, 1269). Faculty are used to helping students structure the learning of complex tasks including research methods (Fisher and Justwan 2018) and civic skills (Saks McManaway and Lorentz 2020). Career skills, including those necessary for obtaining competitive paid internships, can be integrated directly into a discipline’s curriculum, i.e., to create a scaffold (Mertz and Neiles 2020): networking, searching for opportunities, keeping track of early application deadlines, identifying transferable skills gained from coursework and service to student organizations, résumé preparation, informational interviews, and more. Scaffolding can also provide a useful structure for faculty working directly with students. For this approach to be effective, it is useful for advisors to think of a student’s time in a program holistically and proactively rather than simply to provide semester-to-semester course advising (Varney 2007).

Unpaid internships, whether for credit or not, can also be viewed as ladders that students can climb to paid internships. These experiences help build skills that render students more competitive for paid, and possibly more prestigious, opportunities later in their academic careers. Faculty should be cognizant of making strategic decisions regarding funding, however, when helping a student build an internship plan. Student employment increased markedly from the 1970s to 2000s (Scott-Clayton 2012), and the double financial burden of a for-credit unpaid internship is most acutely felt during the summer months, when students are less likely to be living on campus or have scholarship support. With advance planning, some students can complete an internship during a semester when they are completing less-intensive coursework, a strategy that can help students balance demands on their time and also maintain a solid GPA.

Planning should also acknowledge the advance deadlines that are often established by paid internship programs. For example, the Finnegan Foundation Fellowship in Pennsylvania state government is awarded through a competitive essay contest, with a typical deadline that occurs in the February prior to a summer internship. The Pennsylvania House Fellowship, awarded by the General Assembly on a rolling basis, has a March 1 deadline for summer, May 1 deadline for fall, and October 1 deadline for spring semester. The federal government’s Pathways program for undergraduates, graduate students, and recent graduates sets various deadlines depending on the agency that is hiring. Students must gain experience navigating job applications through USAJobs for these positions and must apply during an (often short) application window. The White House and the US State Department’s unpaid internship programs require students to apply at least a full eight months before their summer experience owing

to an intensive interview process and a federal background check. Fortunately, students can sign up for alerts from these programs to help them stay aware of application windows and deadlines. The Virtual Student Federal Service, which provides eight-month (also unpaid) virtual internships in a variety of federal departments, only accepts applications during the month of July, after which applicants are screened and matched with agencies. Faculty can encourage students to be proactive in building their experiences, being organized, and preparing early for desired opportunities.

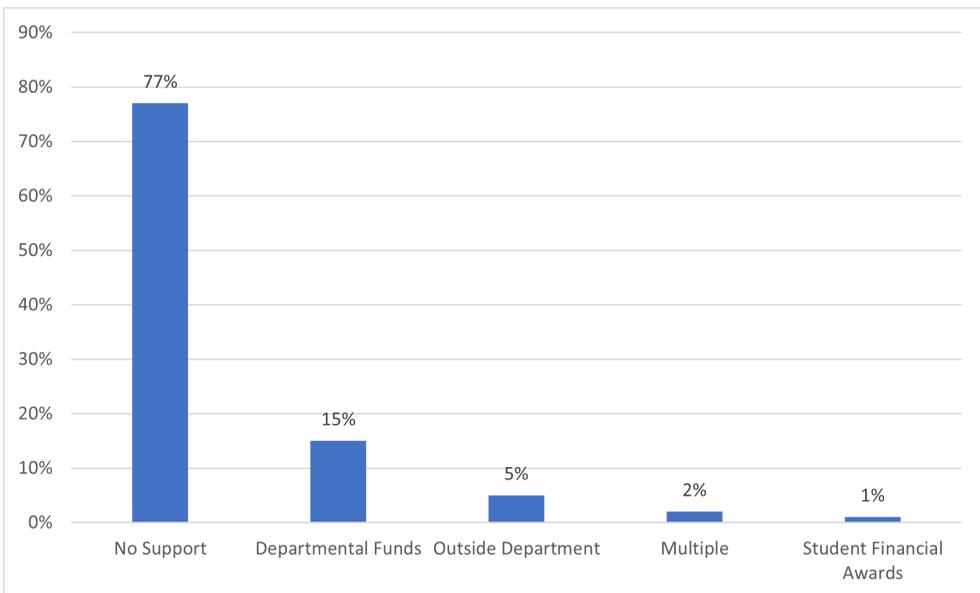
Career services staff represent another strategic partner in this scaffolding approach. Institutions of higher education have been expanding their career services, although students have not necessarily been increasing their use of such resources (Fadulu 2018; McGrath 2002). The best approach to career services support, however, is not simply passive referral by faculty, but active collaboration between faculty and career counselors (Ledwith 2014; Mallinson and Burns 2019). Whereas such collaboration often requires largely uncredited service time on the part of faculty, political science programs benefit from collaborative career courses, seminars, and positive, personal working relationships between career counseling staff and faculty (Mallinson and Burns 2019; McDow and Zabrocky 2015).

Moon and Schokman (2000) offer another possible model that faculty can directly integrate into their courses: a political science research assistantship embedded within a class on policy process and analysis (see also Chapter 7 by Auerbach in this book). The course they designed at the University of Western Australia includes five weeks of coursework on the policy process, followed by an eight-week internship wherein students provide policy research for a political organization. The internship portion is unpaid, but students build foundational skills and add to a portfolio of coursework that can help them secure external internship opportunities later in their career.

INSTITUTIONAL MODELS

Even with such scaffolding, however, equity concerns remain. Institutional support for disadvantaged students can help even the playing field (Hindmoor 2010), but results from a national survey of political science departments make evident that there is wide variation in financial support for interns across political science departments (Van Vechten, Gelbman, and Gentry 2015; Van Vechten and Gentry 2017).⁴ Only 23% of responding departments provide interns with financial support, yet even that percentage masks a lower level of direct support from departments. Figure 1 shows the types of support reported. Of the 39 programs that provided specific details regarding their funding support, two indicated that

Figure 1. Types of Internship Support Reported by Departments



there is no additional support beyond normal student financial awards, and nine reported that the source of additional support was outside of the department; most often this was in the form of college- or university-wide grants. Other sources included academic centers, the career center, and service-learning.

Three departments reported a multi-pronged approach to financial support across the institution. The most comprehensive included the application of student financial aid to Washington, DC internships, competitive university-wide summer internship grants, and departmental scholarships for summer internships with the Washington Internship program. Two others reported a mixture of small department scholarships (one described as “pocket money”) and university financial aid.

Direct departmental financial support of student interns fell into three categories: small grants, scholarships, and endowments. Small grants ranged from \$500 to \$1,500 to help defray costs. Some departments tie the funding to having an unpaid internship and others specifically provide travel support if travel to the internship is required. In terms of scholarships, seven departments reported either considering internships in their criteria for departmental scholarships or providing a limited set of scholarships or single scholarship explicitly for internships. Three of those departments designate the scholarships specifically for Washington, DC experiences. Finally, seven departments indicated that they had endowed or private funds that provide funding support in the form of small grants or scholarships, but the presence of an endowment suggests that these funds are protected/designated specifically for internships. As these survey responses show, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to providing financial help for students, but they suggest three basic approaches. The following three institutional funding models will expand on these findings to suggest best practices for supporting interns financially.

Model 1: Philanthropy-Based Subsidies

Regardless of whether departments wish to provide small grants or full scholarships for unpaid interns, developing philanthropic sources of funding can offer stable support via an endowment. Relying on departmental funds or periodic giving that fluctuates with the financial circumstances of the institution and the economy means that funding may fall through for interns in a given fiscal year. One way that political science departments have approached raising scholarship funds, including those directed at internships, is to name the funds for popular, impactful, and long-standing members of the faculty. Examples include the McClellan Fund at Elizabethtown College (<https://www.etc.edu/depts/ppls/index.aspx>), Wendell “Roy” Gruenewald Intern Scholarship at Ball State (https://www.bsu.edu/academics/collegesanddepartments/political-science/admissions-financial-aid/scholarships#accordion_gruenewaldintern), and the Jerome Mileur Internship Fund/Scholarship at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (<https://polisci.umass.edu/undergraduate-programs/internships>).

The University of South Dakota’s Farber Fund (<https://www.usd.edu/arts-and-sciences/farber-fund>) is also a notable example of a faculty-named fund that combines flexibility with purpose. It is named after a long-standing member of the political science department, Dr. William Farber, who retired in 1976. Although current students have no personal connection to the namesake, the fund now provides over \$170,000 annually for internship stipends, study abroad, and research. The fund’s growth benefits from its flexibility, in that its broad range of potential uses means that many students are supported by the fund during their studies. This is not to say that grateful alumni would not donate to an internship-only fund, but as this example shows, a broader designation can help develop a critical mass, as not all students in a program will complete an internship and their personal connection to an earmarked fund would be more limited. Essentially, the more students potentially helped by a fund, the more a program could anticipate future contributions from them. Additionally, endowed funds give departments spending flexibility, enabling them to vary the proportion of funds used for internships, depending on demand. Thus, political science departments could consider establishing a fund that features both flexibility and purpose, including the support of unpaid interns.

Alumni may also wish to self-name funds for internships, like the Gordon and Norma Guyer Public Policy Internship Award at Michigan State University (<https://polisci.msu.edu/undergraduate/scholarships.html>). A notable example of an alumna-named fund that directly addresses gender equity concerns in internships is the Barbara Lee Fellowship (<https://www.simmons.edu/undergraduate/academics/undergraduate-research-and-fellowships/opportunities-simmons/barbara-lee>) at Simmons University (Doherty 2011). Drawing on its location in Boston, Massachusetts, the fellowship pairs

women interns with women state legislators. As of 2011, the program provided a stipend of \$1,750 and students could earn internship credits. Doherty (2011) reported that the program was effective in increasing women students' view of their viability in politics and the program had great success in seeing alumni pursue careers in public service. This is a good example of how pay, credit, and faculty support can be combined to address gender disparities in internships as well as public service.

Finally, some departments also have funds that memorialize the legacy of students, such as the Adam Gregory Thomas Legislative Internship Scholarship at the University of Nevada, Reno (<https://www.unr.edu/political-science>) and the Sara Katherine Ullman Memorial Internship Award at Ohio University (<https://www.ohio.edu/cas/political-science/financial-aid>). Other funds honor local public officials, like the Grand Valley State University's Paul B. Henry Congressional Internship (<https://www.gvsu.edu/polisci/scholarships-33.htm>). Political science departments can work with their development offices to cultivate philanthropy and should keep internship support in mind as a possible use of funds donated by alumni or in honor of individual (or multiple) faculty or students.

Model 2: Center-Based Subsidies

While not available at all institutions, academic centers or institutes, which are typically organized around a common subject (e.g., The McCourtney Institute for Democracy) and not housed within an academic department, have long been increasing in number across higher education. They became ubiquitous at research institutes in the 1980s (Stahler and Tash 1994) and can be viewed as having more of an impact on an institution's research enterprise than its educational mission (Bunton and Mallon 2007). Still, some institutes and centers offer funding for internships and, as purported funding magnets for institutions, they could be leveraged as another means beyond departments for cultivating internship support. The William J. Hughes Center at Stockton University (<https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/>), for example, provides \$1,000 of funding to one student per semester who attends the Washington Center Internship program (<https://twc.edu/>). The Hughes Center is highlighted because it is at a smaller public regional comprehensive university, not an R1. While the Center has limited funds compared to a large research institution, it still provides support for internships. Likewise, the Institute of Public Affairs and Civic Engagement at San José State University offers the \$2,000 IPACE scholarship (<https://www.sjsu.edu/polisci/scholarships/ipace.php>) to one political science intern who is concurrently enrolled in an internship course for credit.

The Institute for Public Administration (<https://www.bidenschool.udel.edu/ipa>) at the Biden School of Public Policy & Administration at the University of Delaware is an example of what an institute at a larger school, with a big name attached, can do. The Institute provides fellowships for legislative, judicial, and local government internships.⁵ Not only do students receive a stipend, but they also receive carpool travel assistance to Dover and internship course credit. Granted, not all schools can do this, but political science programs on campuses with large policy-, democracy-, and governance-oriented centers should push them to provide opportunities like these, especially if they are named for prominent public servants.

Model 3: Tuition Waivers

Whereas the first two models focus on providing stipends to students, a third form of support involves lessening the cost of obtaining credit for either unpaid or paid internships. To achieve this, universities and colleges could waive the tuition costs for qualifying experiences or enable students to add a course to a transcript with variable credits attached. The state of Massachusetts offers students at its public universities a need-based waiver of tuition and housing subsidy for the Washington Center Internship experience (<https://www.mass.edu/osfa/programs/washingtoncenter.asp>). Chapman University waives tuition for credited international internships, which typically require significant additional costs for relocation and living (<https://www.chapman.edu/international-studies/center-for-global-education/travel-courses/tuition-waiver.aspx>). Vanderbilt University has a program to waive tuition for a one-credit summer internship (<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/career/career-exploration/internships/>). Alternatively, students could fulfill all the academic requirements to have their internships transcribed with fewer units attached. The transcript would show zero or more units on a student's transcript, up to the maximum allowed before a tuition charge is triggered. An institution could go further by awarding fractional

credits to faculty based on the time they spend with students, rather than the number of units that students accumulate. Doing so reduces tuition costs for the students while also protecting and providing compensation for faculty time. Tuition reductions come at a direct cost to the institution, of course, but some institutions are willing to bear this as an investment in their students.

FEDERAL SUPPORT

Proposals for changing how the federal government supports public sector internships are of particular importance to political science programs. Only 6% of House interns were paid in 2017 (members of Congress can choose to pay them through their own budgets), although 46% of US Senators reported paying their interns either an hourly wage or fixed stipend (Vera and Jenab 2017). The House Paid Internship program was created in 2019, and in 2020 the Committee on House Administration issued new regulations for paid internships (Committee on House Administration 2021). House members receive a yearly allowance of \$25,000 to pay interns (Senators receive \$50,000 via their program), and these funds can be used to pay both DC and district office interns. These dedicated funds should increase the number of paid internships on the Hill, which may, in turn, make them even more competitive. The rules do not set specific wages for all offices, as the House Intern Pay Act would, and the allowance can be spent on equipment (such as laptops that connect directly to the US House network) and stipends in any amount (minimum of \$100 per intern). Further, interns cannot work for a member for more than 120 calendar days and must be able to demonstrate that they are part of a formal education program.

In 2010, a report by the Economic Policy Institute proposed a new federal Student Opportunity Program that would “serve as a pipeline to college completion and employment for high-achieving, low-income students, helping them to acquire the skills, contacts, and experience that will improve their future labor market potential and encourage them to pursue careers in public service” (Edwards and Hertel-Fernandez 2010, 2). The program is based on the model of Federal Work Study (FWS), with schools receiving funds based on the number of enrolled students that qualify using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The program would have income-based eligibility limits, but schools would determine which unpaid internships could count as quality employment, set award amounts, enroll students, and dispense monies. The authors argue that many institutions could do this through their existing FWS infrastructure, but some may need to develop additional staff support. Indeed, many colleges do this already, with the important caveat that using FWS money requires both the student to qualify based on income and the internship itself to qualify, which precludes internships with political campaigns.

The report also offers two alternative (or additional) implementation strategies. First, colleges and universities could compete for funds from the US Department of Education for the purpose of developing their own “internship support programs for low-income students” (7). Second, the federal government could directly incentivize and support internships in federal executive agencies. Edwards and Hertel-Fernandez (2010) suggest that this be administered by the Office of Personnel Management. In addition to directly funding students who are completing unpaid public sector internships, the authors suggest that Congress should make money available for federal, state, and local governments to improve their internship experiences for students. A major benefit of federal funding for such an initiative would be to expand opportunities for high-quality internships beyond Washington, DC and other major metropolitan areas. Supporting both students and internship providers in state and local governments would allow students to complete high-quality internships closer to home, which could, in turn, reduce their living expenses. The combination of reduced costs to complete an internship and a stipend for their labor would make internships more accessible to low-income students.

THE PROFESSION AND INTERNSHIPS

What is the American Political Science Association’s (APSA’s) role in the internship landscape? This handbook is an important marker of the Association’s, and particularly the Political Science Education section’s, commitment to internships. APSA has also been working to make equity and inclusion an important emphasis, but the profession, and the public service professions that it serves, will not diversify quickly or adequately if the pipeline of talent faces structural barriers for some (women, BIPOC,

first generation students) and advantages for others (White, male, multi-generation students and those wealthy financially and/or well-connected). Because internship funding lies at the heart of equity concerns for the public service career pipeline (Doherty 2011; Hindmoor 2010), APSA should consider taking the following three steps.

First, APSA should expand on the effort of this book in making internships, particularly cultivating paid internships, a priority. APSA could look to the model internship guidelines developed conjointly by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) Urban Management Education Committee and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Advisory Board on Graduate Education for Master's in Public Administration students. In regard to compensation, the guidelines state as follows:

Internships are in many cases one of the methods for the student to finance his/her education. While it is not always feasible, every effort should be made to create "funded" internships. The old adage "you get what you pay for" is true for many internships. Local governments that contribute financially to the support of the internship are more likely, over time, to make meaningful use of the intern, to provide the intern with good supervision, and to demand more from the intern in terms of professional productivity. The more the intern is treated as a temporary or part-time employee, the more valuable the internship will be to the student and the local government. Providing financial support to the internship is also likely to increase the pool of potential interns from which the local government can choose. (Benavides, Dicke, and Holt 2013, 352)

This type of collaborative statement between an academic organization (NASPAA) and one representing potential internship providers (ICMA) establishes an expectation that departments can leverage when establishing collaborations with internship providers (Benavides, Dicke, and Holt 2013).

Second, encouraging more research on political science internships, particularly around pay, would be valuable. There is a broader literature on career and equity disadvantages of unpaid internships, but much of that work is done outside of political science and has substantial limitations (Rothschild and Rothschild 2020). This is not to say there is no literature on political science internships, but much of it focuses on learning outcomes (e.g., Lucas 2020; Mariani and Klinkner 2009). Even articles offering guidance on how to better institutionalize internships do not discuss pay (Foster Schoaf 2020). In fact, a recently published article on internship supervisors points to knowledge gaps on internship pay through its future research questions: "Do unpaid internships get more substantive responsibility and thus learn more than paid interns? Do internship supervisors treat paid interns differently from unpaid interns?" (Sosland and Lowenthal 2017). The survey included in this volume provides insight into how some departments handle internship support, but additional institutional research would be helpful for departments that want to follow best practices. Specifically, several models are outlined above, but there is need for systematic knowledge about how to develop these kinds of programs. Best practices for university fundraising and development can provide guidelines for cultivating resources for supporting interns, but understanding the details of how political science departments have established and maintained their support could have value across the discipline.

Third, APSA, perhaps through the Political Science Education member section, is positioned to champion federal initiatives like the Student Opportunity Program and expand programs like the House Paid Internship Program to executive agencies. As a professional organization, APSA represents members who are often reliant on unpaid internships to help their students progress professionally. Given the possibility for abuses of interns and the equity concerns of relying so heavily on unpaid opportunities, APSA could add its voice to calls for better intern pay within the public sector.

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ENDNOTES

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3. Indeed.com, "How much does an intern make in Washington, DC?" Accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.indeed.com/career/intern/salaries/Washington--DC>.
4. This national survey was conducted in two waves, with the first surveying four-year institutions ranging from R1's to liberal arts colleges in summer 2015. The second wave in summer 2016 included community colleges. A total of 172 departments responded. This chapter draws from two of the 48 questions about department internship practices.
5. For legislative internships, see: <https://www.bidenschool.udel.edu/ipa/student-opportunities/legislative-fellows>; for judicial internships visit: <https://www.bidenschool.udel.edu/ipa/student-opportunities/judicial-fellows>; and for local government go to: <https://www.bidenschool.udel.edu/ipa/student-opportunities/management-fellows>.