

Office of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger: Newsroom Summer 08

I interned in Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's scheduling and news offices. A little over 20 hours a week, I would work in the scheduling department. On a typical day, I would go through the day's invitations, entering them into a database, calling organizations to RSVP for various meeting and events requests, writing letters on the governor's behalf, and fielding calls from constituents regarding invitations they sent. Sometimes, I would have the chance to attend meetings where his staff would go over the governor's minute by minute schedule for the next day.

In the news room, I would help put together the news briefings for the governor and his senior staff. I would have to go to the Capitol early in order to go through the major state newspapers and the morning television news to compile news articles about the Governor, analyzing what the media was reporting on him and how they reported it. Also, I would help go through various political blogs and put those in the briefings as well. Throughout the day, the news office would keep an eye on the eyes and blogs to alert the governor in case a major story breaks on the Internet.

My experience in Sacramento is making me seriously consider working in politics. I do not enjoy the details of coming up with legislation and working on policy, but I love politics. I love how it is dirty and fascinating. Although I would never run for office, I am thrilled to be working so closely with people who have power and who have the authority to influence the lives of ordinary Californians. I also love having the feeling of exclusivity, that I have access to information most people would never know about.

One skill I developed was learning to answer the phones. It seems easy at first since we call people on a daily basis, but answering it in a professional manner was a challenge, especially knowing that when talking to constituents, I was representing the governor and the person on the other line expects me to be helpful. It was easy for me to get flustered though, especially when they were rude and demanding. Another thing I had to learn was how to answer questions diplomatically.

When it came to interacting with my co-workers, I was not good at introducing myself and talking to those I didn't know very well because it was intimidating very me -- these were people who worked directly with the governor! In my evaluation, my supervisor seemed to pick up on this and told me that at times, I was uncomfortable taking direction from anyone else besides her. Also, in the scheduling office, my three co-workers are close, longtime friend. They would often talk about people and subjects that I was not a part of it, which made it difficult for me to fit in even though they treated me with kindness and generosity.

I would highly recommend an internship in the governor's office for any future scholar intern. Anyone with an interest in media would enjoy working in the news room. Sometimes, when the deadline is approaching for us to submit the briefing, there is that same pressure and adrenaline pumping atmosphere as there is in an actual news room. Being in the news room can mean being able to work quickly under pressure with a deadline.

What is even more exciting about the scheduling office though is its close proximity to the governor and the people who interact with him on a daily basis. I would caution though that working in the scheduling department is a lot of clerical work -- answering phones, filing, archiving, and entering information into databases. However, the intern is doing all those tasks in a political context. In that sense, I think the scheduling office was a perfect fit for me because I do not enjoy policy (an experience I would get in a different internship), but politics. There is the opportunity to learn why the governor goes to certain events and why a member of his staff will attend instead. I loved writing letters on the governor's behalf and it made me excited to call someone and say "Hello, I'm calling from Governor Schwarzenegger's office."

Finding a policy topic related to my internship was a challenge because there are no public policy issues that are dealt with in the news and scheduling departments. Also, being away for an entire quarter from my friends at UC San Diego and my family in Los Angeles was the biggest challenge. It was like freshman year all over again, living with new people and meeting new friends. At the same time, I was hesitant to build real relationships with them because I knew I was only here for ten weeks and I did not want to get too attached.

My time up in Sacramento has clarified my future career goals a little more. At first, being in the governor's scheduling office was not my first choice for internship placement. But it ended being a lot more fun than I expected. My supervisors and co-workers were so nice and easy to work with. It was exciting being privileged to information the public would never get access to. I think being a scheduler is fun because it goes with my strength -- primarily organization and detail oriented. However, working for such a powerful political official can also be very stressful. Everyone in the office is always stuck to their Blackberry.

My career goal going into the internship was to be a journalist, although I was painfully aware of the terrible pay, the newspaper job cuts, and the decreasing readership. However, although that it is still an interest I have, I learned that there are other political media and communications fields to go into, such as one in the governor's office. The job stability and the pay is much better.

While there were challenges this quarter, those challenges also made my experience rewarding and helped me learn a lot about myself, politics, and the professional world. Plus, I was doing it in Sacramento, the center of state politics, while I was working in the governor's office -- how many other people can say they have had that opportunity?