

Office of Assembly Member Jean Fuller Spring 2009

I worked for Assemblymember Jean Fuller's office as a UCCS Scholar Intern. As an intern in the legislature most of your duties will seem unimportant at first, but the smallest tasks in an office that allow staff to have free time are valuable. Staff very much appreciate when they do not have to answer the phone, sort mail, send faxes, and handle copying. This is because the Legislature is severely understaffed, and they do not have extra time in their day to complete these seemingly minute tasks. The Member that I worked for was on the leadership team for former Republican Leader Michael Villines, and had added duties. As a result this was one more responsibility for staff to deal with. Since my member is a Republican, she only has 3 staff members that work in her Capitol office and 4 who work in her District office. This makes each staff member very vital. I feel that since I did not have a structured internship where each day was the same, that I gained a greater experience. I feel that since I had the opportunity to work closely with the Assemblymember, I felt like my presence was actually important.

On the very first day of my internship my Member told me that I would essentially be under her wing, and as a result of this I would be given duties that she has not given other interns. I enjoyed this honor, privilege, and challenge. The glory of being an intern is that no one expects you to get something the first time around, so when you do they praise you, and when you do not, they allow you to try again. The most important thing is to realize that the entire experience is for learning. I feel that I learned about certain personalities. As an intern, I learned very quickly what a high stress environment the Legislature is. As a result, I knew that there were certain days when staff might appear mad at you, because they seem short with you, but in actuality they are just busy.

This experience made me realize that I might not want a career in the legislature full time. This in no way has anything to do with my experience, because it was great, it has more to do with job security. While I was interning for the legislature, Assembly Office budgets were cut, \$29,000. This is an entire salary that offices are forced with trying to figure out without cutting staff. I have realized that this environment would be a great profession for the first few years, but as a long-term career, it would no longer be rewarding. I want a career where I will wake up everyday and be happy to go to work.

The skills that I learned at my internship are very transferable. I am so grateful for having given the opportunity to understand how an office works and to be in charge of most of the administrative work. I have been realizing that I can apply for many more jobs than I actually thought. I had the privilege of sitting in on staff meetings, answering phones, attending press conferences, holding meetings, getting to know the building by running errands, seeing the Governor speak to a joint session of the legislature, and many more. If I made a list of everything I learned to do, the list would be unending. I learned more about the real world in one quarter of undergraduate education.

The office I worked for was small so I was able to establish a very broad network, not only through the office, but by connecting with people in my sorority's alumni chapter who work in Sacramento. I have learned through this experience that sometimes it is not what you know, but who you know. It is true that the building is like high school, because everyone spends so much time together and they are essentially all really good friends. There are only 120 members of the Senate and Assembly combined, and the majority of the staff is under 30.

I would recommend this internship for another Scholar Intern. However, I would warn that, unless you ideologically agree with the member you work for, you may have problems. It is true that passion for something will make you happy. When you are passionate about a particular topic, and your boss disagrees, it is often difficult to defend their position and still be happy. I would recommend researching who you work for before taking a position. In addition, if there is an interview before you are hired, I would recommend knowing what legislation that they are working on, and understand the District that the Member represents. It is the top priority of the Assemblymember to serve the constituency, so as an intern knowing what the top priorities are of the District would be extremely beneficial to your experience.

There were many exciting and challenging experiences to my intern experience. The most challenging was when the Assemblymember would dictate an assignment to me. Then explain what she told me, and then I had to either draft a letter, or write a memo for her. This posed a challenge when I did not understand what she was talking about. I would have to go back to my desk, reread my notes and try to figure out what she was talking about. She was always pleased with the work I did for her, and was very good at providing feedback. I feel that she is a great legislator, and she is constantly working hard for her constituency. The most exciting experiences were when I got to attend a Press Conference with all the members of the Republican Caucus, write an Op-Ed piece for a local paper in the District, and attend a Joint Session of the Legislature and see Governor Schwarzenegger speak. There were few boring days, because each day brought a new challenge and a new experience. It was a quarter well spent, understanding how the Golden State works!