

URBS/PLSI 603/604: INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE AND SEMINAR
Spring 2011

Professor Jason A. McDaniel
mcdaniel@sfsu.edu

Department of Political Science
HSS 132, Office Hours T 2-3, W 3:30-4:30

This seminar typically meets every other Tuesday from 4:10-5:50. However, there are some weeks where we may need to meet consecutively so you must be prepared to attend sessions weekly at this time. Consistent attendance and active participation are mandatory for a good grade in this course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The internship experience provides students with an opportunity to gain work experience in their professional areas of interest. It is a required core course in the Department of Urban Studies & Planning and an elective course in Political Science.

The internship seminar provides students with an opportunity to strengthen their professional development by (a) reflecting upon their professional work experience, (b) enhancing professional skills, and (c) developing professional relationships and networks.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. High quality work performance. As an intern, you will be working with an organization. You are contributing your time and talent to organizations whose missions you support and you are contributing an important public service to the community. Make sure that you understand what you are expected to do and do it as well as possible. Be aware that you represent the university to the larger community and the impression you create will have long-lasting effects. Present yourself as a professional.

2. Enriched academic learning. The role of the internship in the academic curriculum is to supplement the theoretical and classroom based components of the curriculum with learning "in the field" and learning from practical experience. It is this learning which is the basis of the academic credit, which is awarded to the internship. This learning requires you to become a participant observer. Observe continually and closely as you are participating and reflect continually on what you are observing. Ask yourself, how does this internship relate to your broader academic and professional interests? Go beyond the basic job requirements and do such things as read material available in the office, attend meetings and seek out opportunities for discussion with your co-workers. Articulate your observations and analysis in the internship seminar and in your written assignments. The process of careful observation and description is the first step in developing further ideas and questions. Ask yourself repeatedly and discuss both in your journals and in the seminar questions such as:

- *What is actually happening here?*
- *What am I learning about in this situation?*
- *What is the significance of this event in relation to some broader perspective? What does it show us about, for instance, politics, economics, "bureaucracy," city planning, affordable housing, social inequality, sustainability, etc. It is up to you to develop the broader perspective.*
- *How does it relate to theories and ideas discussed in classes and readings? Does it reinforce or challenge them?*
- *What broader questions does it raise?*

3. Professional development. The internship allows you to develop knowledge, professional skills, interpersonal skills, and personal contacts which will contribute to your career development. It offers you the opportunity to see how you like working in the field/organization of your choice, to obtain some of that critical experience which so many jobs require, to learn about the employment picture in this field, to gain invaluable recommendations from people in the field, and to begin to develop your own network of contacts who will help you gain access to this field if you choose to pursue it further.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- (1) **Fieldwork:** 12-15 hours a week for 15 weeks (for a minimum total of 180 hours).
- (2) **Seminar:** 2 hours every other week and sometimes consecutive weeks.
- (3) **Work Agreement, Journal Entries and Log**
- (4) **Assignments** (due on their assigned due dates)

COURSE COMPONENTS:

- (1) **Work Agreement:** The work agreement is discussed, written up, and signed by the student and their supervisor working together. One copy is filed with your professor and you should also make a copy for yourself. The agreement must include five components: work objectives, educational objectives, provision for learning about the overall operation of the organization, provision for regular meetings with your supervisor, and your work schedule. Guidelines will be distributed in class.
- (2) **Seminar Attendance:** The seminar typically meets every other week for two hours. Consistent attendance is essential to a good course grade. The purpose of the class is to allow you to learn from the instructor and each other as you share your observations as participants, develop connections between these observations and the broader issues addressed in your academic curriculum. Helping each other develop strategies for dealing with problems and getting the most out of the experience is also important. The seminar also provides students with an opportunity to learn about different types of sectors, organizations, and career opportunities.
- (3) **Journal Entries** The journal offers you an opportunity to describe and reflect upon what you have been doing at your internship; it will be collected periodically by the professor. Spell check and proof read your work before you hand it in.

JOURNAL ENTRIES SHOULD CONTAIN:

- **Log:** a brief list of the days/hours you worked and the major tasks you worked on.
- **Description:** a brief but clear description of some of the more interesting or noteworthy things you did during this time.
- **Reflections:** thoughts about what you've done, learned, thought about, had trouble with, etc. The focus of your discussion is up to you, but you should try to address some of the broader kinds of questions posed throughout this syllabus, and explore some connections between what you're learning in your internship and what you're learning in your academic classes and from other sources (e.g. the news media).
- **Samples of your work:** it also sometimes helps to include samples of work you're doing and describing in your journals (e.g. a survey form, a newsletter, etc).

Suggested questions for journal and seminar discussions include:

- *What was the most interesting thing that you did this week? Why was it interesting?*
- *What was the most difficult thing that you did this week? Why was it so difficult, how did you deal with it, do any problems remain?*

- *What was the most important thing that you learned this week? Important relative to your academic interests (e.g. your coursework) or more general social concerns (e.g. current issues, political developments, policy problems)?*
- *What are you learning about the effectiveness of your organization in addressing the issues you are concerned about? For example, if you are interested in affordable housing, working at a planning department, and are interested in the effectiveness of city planning as a way of helping to increase affordable housing, does city planning seem to offer an effective tool for this purpose? Why or why not?*
- *What are you learning about those issues and how to effectively address these issues?*
- *Would this organization provide you with opportunities for professional growth?*

(4) Reflection Assignments. These are required to get you to think critically about your professional work and/or conduct some background research. There are five required assignments.

1. Description of your professional objectives and expectations.
2. Description of the agency, firm, etc. in which you are interning.
3. Three informational interviews with professionals in your field of interest.
4. Developing a professional resume and cover letter.
5. Final assessment of your internship experience.

GRADES: Grades reflect the quality of your work in class and in your internship. Your grade will be based on both faculty assessment and your supervisor's evaluation.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS AND THEMATIC DISCUSSION TOPICS

1/25

Course Overview: Course overview; clarification of placement process, discussion of placements. Review of work agreement, journal entries, log, and assignments.

Class Discussion: Placement selection and development, advice and experience; objectives and expectations.

2/8 Placement Assessment.

Work Agreements due

Reflection Assignment #1 due: Objectives and Expectations

In order to be able to pursue your professional goals effectively through your internship, you must be able to articulate them. Having clarity about your goals is an important part of ensuring that you are successful in accomplishing what you hope to accomplish in the internship. Internship supervisors are impressed by interns who demonstrate curiosity, interest, and initiative, ask questions, and seek out additional information and opportunities for additional learning through meetings, conversations, etc..

To this end, this reflection assignment requires that you address the following questions:

- What are your overall educational objectives, and how does the internship contribute to these objectives?
- What do you hope to gain from the internship -- what kinds of knowledge, skills, work experience, contacts, career and personal development?
- What broader issues do you hope to explore? What courses have you had or are you taking that will be particularly relevant to your internship experience? What questions about the

relationship of theory to practice do you hope to explore? Give some specific examples of courses you have taken that may be relevant to your internship and of general issues and/or questions that you would like to be able to explore during the internship.

- Finally, why did you choose this particular placement? Describe briefly the job you expect to be doing and how it will contribute to your overall objectives.

Discuss the work agreement with your supervisor, then write a draft version of your work agreement and submit it to your supervisor for comments, then incorporate those comments into a final version that will be typed, signed and submitted to the instructor with copies for yourself and your supervisor.

2/22: Agency Mission, Accomplishments and Problems

Reflection Assignment #2 due: Agency description

This reflection assignment is designed to make sure that you are getting "the big picture" with regard to your work and internship site. It requires that you do research using agency documents and, that you conduct interviews with your supervisor and others in your division and organization. You must indicate the sources of your information you are using (e.g. annual reports, interviews), using appropriate references and citations. It should include the following components:

- Origins, brief history of the agency;
- Overall goals, organizational mission;
- Main types of activities and how they contribute to the overall goals and mission;
- Major accomplishments; contribution to the larger community;
- Resources: budget & sources; staff & qualifications; etc;
- Organization chart; your position within it;
- Political factors with which the organization must deal; how it does so.
- Challenges faced by the organization in meeting its objectives.

3/8 The Work World

Class discussion: In-class discussion of internship experiences. Now that interns have been working at their internship sites for more than a month, it is appropriate to review the internship experience to make sure that it is working well for each intern. If problems are identified, this is the time to figure out how to address them. Be prepared to discuss the following issues related to your internship experience:

- *Clarity of work expectations*: do you have a clear job description? Do you and your supervisor share a clear understanding of what you are supposed to do?
- *Resources and qualifications necessary to do the job*: access to needed resources; feasibility of the job given your qualifications and time.
- *Importance of your work to the organization*: are you really needed?
- *Relationship with supervisor and others*: do you have adequate access to your supervisor; can you get enough guidance to do your work?
- *Opportunity to pursue your own educational/career objectives*: to learn about subjects you are interested in; to develop skills, gain experience, make contacts, etc. (Refer back to JS #1, goals and expectations)

3/22 Session will be held if needed. We will decide the session previous to this one.

4/5: From Internship to Professional position

Reflection Assignment #3 due: Informational interviews

Each intern must conduct 3 informational interviews with people working in the fields they are interested in pursuing professionally. Be prepared to discuss what you learned from these informational interviews in class during this session.

4/19 Preparing for a Job Interview - For this session prepare a resume and a cover letter that you would prepare for a professional position.

Reflection Assignment #4 due: Resume and Cover Letter

Each intern is required to bring in three copies of their resume and a cover letter that would accompany it. You can develop the cover letter as an application for a position in your internship site or at another agency. Students will work in teams of two to critique and improve each other's resumes and cover letters.

Class discussion: How is the internship contributing to your career development; briefing on career opportunities in your field of interest. It would be helpful to make this the subject of your journal discussion this week. Address the following questions in your journal and be prepared to discuss them in class.

- What is your agency/organization like as a place to work?
- What do you like most/least about it?
- Is there a good fit between the organization's mission statement and what it is able to accomplish?
- How has your experience affected your job aspirations?
- Identify your own criteria for satisfying work?
- What have you learned about career opportunities and qualifications in your area of interest?
- What have you learned about finding and getting a job in this field?
- It would be very useful to talk with your supervisor and co-workers both about their feelings about the job and about career opportunities in this field.
- Be prepared to brief your classmates about what you have learned about employment opportunities in this field.

5/3 SUPERVISORS EVALUATIONS ARE DUE TO PROFESSOR PINDERHUGHES THIS WEEK

Reflection Assignment #5 due: Final Assessment and Evaluation of Your Internship Experience

The final reflection assignment is an evaluation of your internship experience. It has three separate parts. They must be typed on three separate pieces of paper because they are used and filed in three different places.

- (1) **Overall placement assessment.** What is your final assessment of this organization as a place for an internship? Please include a brief but specific description of the kind of work you did (or that interns can do), the kind of learning that was possible, the kind of qualifications an intern should have, the kinds of difficulties an intern might anticipate at this placement, and the major benefits of this internship. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other students considering an internship here? Make sure that you include your name, the name of the organization, and the date, so that I can file this information for future students in our internship book.

(2) Overall curriculum assessment. Identify which courses have been most helpful to you in this Internship. Identify what changes you would suggest in the courses you have taken and/or in the overall curriculum of your major in order to strengthen the internship experience?

(3) Self-assessment and debriefing. How would you evaluate your own effort as an intern? What criteria would you use, and how well do you think you measure up to those criteria? What would you do differently next time?

5/10 Session will be held if needed. We will decide the session previous to this one.