

Program Goals

The Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) Program's short-term objective is to provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to actively participate in policy research; the program is also intended to achieve the longer-term objective of attracting qualified, interested students, especially minority and women students, to quality Ph.D. programs in economics, public policy, and other social science disciplines. The target population of the project is rising seniors at colleges and universities throughout the United States. Students work closely with a faculty mentor on a research project. Interns receive formal and systematic training in a weekly seminar that provides basic research skills and culminates in a presentation and a paper related to the research experience.

Important Dates

The application deadline was March 13th, 2009. After telephone interviews, offers were made by April 7st. The first day of the program was May 27st, 2009. The last day was July 14th, 2009.

Recruitment

We sent an e-mail with information about the internship program to a list of about 250 chairs and undergraduate advisors at economics and other social science departments in the U.S. Many of those were targeted to smaller colleges and universities where students do not have access to research resources. The e-mails contained a link to our website, which provides detailed information about the internship program, contact information, and application materials. The website also makes clear that we encourage applications by minority and female students. About two weeks later, the e-mails were followed by a hard-copy letter and a brochure sent to the mailing addresses of the same individuals.

We are also listed in most major internship search engines. We receive many applications through our listing on the NSF website. Most importantly, the program has gained significant recognition and is being advertised by word-of-mouth among students and faculty. The GSU internship program is the first link that appears in Google when one searches for "summer internship in economics", "summer policy internship", and the like.

This is important because many academic and non-academic institutions offer summer internships in policy studies and economics. The site of our program is visible and visited often.

In addition, we compiled a list of department chairs, social science deans, and undergraduate advisors from about 30 historically black colleges and universities (all institutions that have identifiable economics or related departments), 11 institutions with a predominantly Native American student body, and 13 institutions with a predominantly Hispanic student population. The director of the program sent personal e-mails to the contact list, followed by a personal letter with brochures. Then, we sent a second personal e-mail to the institutions that are in the Atlanta area.

We received more than 100 applications. We interviewed about 20 of the applicants over the phone and made 10 offers. Six of the ten interns that participated in the program were female. Two of the interns were African American, two were Hispanic, and three were Asian (two of Indian descent and one of Chinese descent). Below is a list of the interns and their mentors:

<u>Intern</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Mentor</u>
Alvine Sangang	Stephen F. Austin State University	Dr. Eunice Heredia
Kyle Borders	Centre College	Dr. Jim Alm
Courtney Reaford	Syracuse University	Dr. Cynthia Searcy
Laura Dorick	Georgia College & State University	Dr. Susan Laury/Dr. Todd Swarhout
Siyao Zhu	Bard College	Dr. Erdal Tekin
Matthew Zuzic	University of Akron	Dr. Andrey Timofeev
Omar Farooque	University of Arizona	Dr. Spencer Banzhaf
Diego Rivera	Georgia State University	Dr. Paul Kagundu
Jennifer Ghandhi	University of Alabama at Birmingham	Dr. Jim Marton
Samantha Latty	Simmons College	Dr. Angie Snyder

Mentors and research projects

Each student was matched with a faculty mentor at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies (AYSPS) to work on a research project during the seven-week period. The match was based on the policy interest expressed by an applicant and the specialization of a

mentor. Invitations to the program were made only after a suitable mentor was identified and a potential project was discussed with the mentor and the intern. Research topics were finalized in conversations between the mentors and the interns in advance of the starting date of the program so that interns engaged in research as soon as they arrived. In addition, many of the interns were introduced to and did work with the Graduate Research assistants of their faculty mentors. In this way, the interns gained from one-on-one contact with both the faculty and the graduate students for the duration of the program.

The internship program requires recruitment on two sides: recruiting interns and recruiting mentors. This program cannot run well unless the faculty are willing to step up year after year to mentor students. While the benefits of the program for the students are clear and, given a good track record, one would expect a growing number of applicants, the benefits for the faculty who are asked to mentor students every summer are less clear. The faculty donate their time and expertise without compensation for their participation. Nonetheless, we have always had more faculty volunteer to mentor interns than are required.

The willingness of the faculty to participate as mentors can be explained partly by the outreach culture of the AYSPS where the faculty are encouraged to get involved in activities beyond teaching and academic research. In addition, however, the director of the internship program has made sure that:

- Faculty mentors are relieved of all administrative, logistics, and other duties related to the program so that they can focus exclusively on research.
- The match between interns and faculty in terms of interests is as close as possible.
- The input of the mentors is actively sought when evaluating the performance of the interns.
- The expectations of mentors are clearly communicated in advance of the program.
- Mentors receive timely feedback on the program after it ends.
- Mentors clearly understand that their involvement is the essential piece of the program and that it is highly appreciated.

Below is a brief description of the research undertaken by the interns. Please note that the work of many of the interns has the potential of affecting policy in a very direct way. The results of these projects will reach the relevant policymakers because they are part of the outreach activities of the policy centers at the AYSPS. In some cases, the policymakers commissioned these studies. If a project did not have an immediate policy impact, we made sure that it extended the academic literature in important ways. In short, we made a point of having very high expectations, and we engaged the interns in research that is in line with the highest academic and policy standards. The interns rose to the occasion and gained confidence in their abilities.

Intern	Project title and description
Alvine Sanganag	“Education Decentralization and Gender Disparities in School Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa”
Kyle Borders	“Estimations and Implications of the Georgia Personal Income Tax Gap”
Courtney Reaford	“Do School Physical Activity Policies and Practices in Distressed Urban Areas Differ from Schools Across the United States?”
Laura Dorick	“Experience vs. Description: Insurance Decisions for Catastrophic Events”
Siyao Zhu	“The Effect of Beauty on the Criminal Market and the Criminal Justice System”
Matthew Zuzic	“Equalization of Education Revenues after Reform: Does Legislation Exceed in its Goal?”
Omar Farooque	“Evaluating the Efficiency of Survey and Transactional Data in Creating Housing Price Indices”
Diego Rivera	“Poverty and Institutional Quality in a Cross-Section of Countries”
Jennifer Gandhi	“Effect of SCHIP Premiums on Disenrollment: Focus on Demographics”
Samantha Latty	“Chronic Homelessness and Supportive Housing: Research Proposal for Future Evaluation of River Edge Behavioral Health Center Supportive Housing”

All students turned in a final paper and delivered a 30 minute presentation before their peers and faculty mentors on the last two days of the program. All papers are published on the Internship website.

Activities

Orientation Day

On the first day of the program students were introduced to the key personnel (e.g. mentors, Department staff), as well as to some features of the Department of Economics, the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, and Georgia State University. The parameters of the program and intern responsibilities were also discussed, and students had ample time to ask questions. They were introduced to their office space, assigned computer access codes, and taken to the library for orientation. All logistics were completed by the middle of the day and students could meet individually with their mentors and start their research on that day. This summer we also invited an intern from the 2008 program to speak to the new interns and give her perspective on the program and how it has benefited her.

Regular Meetings with the Mentor

Interns met regularly with their individual mentors. Although the specific practice varied with the mentor, these meetings were typically daily in the initial stages of the program, and then generally occurred on a 2-3 times per week basis as the research projects progressed.

Weekly Discussion Meetings

Students met with their peers and the program director each Monday for the duration of the program to discuss current progress on their projects. At those meetings, each student had about 10 minutes to deliver an update on her/his project, to answer questions, and to receive comments and suggestions from the other interns and from the program director.

Seminar Series

The interns participated in weekly seminars. The seminars began in the first week of the program and were generally held on Thursdays. The seminars provided students with methodological knowledge and introduced them to a wide variety of research topics. Presenters were also asked to briefly discuss their background, such as where they went

to graduate school and why they decided to become academics. The seminar series included the following presentations:

- Gardner Neely and Casey Long on research tools; on Internet resources for numerical databases and electronic journals; and on search engines and searching techniques. The University System of Georgia offers excellent electronic resources through its award-winning GALILEO database system.
- Professor Todd Swarthout on experimental economics. GSU has the largest experimental lab for economics in the South East and supports research in a variety of fields including mechanism design, public choice, and discrimination. Professor Swarthout talked about a co-authored paper on the use of experimental methods to study consumer insurance choices regarding low probability losses.
- Professor Klara Peter presented her research on the impact of tax reform in Russia on tax evasion. She discussed dataset construction and introduced a number of econometrics topics including instrumental variables estimation and selection bias.
- Professor Jim Marton gave an overview of the field of health economics and presented his research on the impact of premium changes on public health insurance program participation. The students were exposed to econometric techniques used to evaluate “duration” data that measures the time until an event occurs.
- Professor Paula Stephan discussed the funding of basic science research in the United States. Professor Stephan is a widely recognized expert on this issue in the U.S. and abroad. She discussed the ways research is funded in the U.S. and offered unique insights into the current debate regarding policy alternatives in that area.
- Professor Rachana Bhatt gave an overview of the field of labor economics. She was specifically asked to talk to the interns since she is a junior faculty member and could also talk about the transition from being a graduate student to being a member of the faculty.

Other Activities

Visit to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. The interns learned about the operations of the Federal Reserve Bank and visited the museum of the bank. Students had the opportunity to sit around the table in the impressive boardroom of the Bank and ask questions about career opportunities from economists with graduate education and an AYSPS Economics PhD student that currently interns at the Fed.

Visit to the Carter Center. The interns met with the director of education programs and three current interns. They learned about the global activities of the Carter center and about internship opportunities.

Visit to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Site. The interns visited the museum, watched a documentary and toured Martin Luther King Jr.'s birth house.

Mixer with Graduate Students in the Department of Economics. Interns had the opportunity to ask questions about graduate school. Topics included the prerequisites for successful start of graduate studies, how to choose a graduate program, what is the schedule of comprehensive exams and other requirements, and how to work with faculty members.

Faculty Mixer. Students were invited to have lunch with faculty and staff from the Department of Economics. The lunch was attended by the Director of the Graduate Program, the Associate Dean, and a number of faculty. The interns used this opportunity to ask questions about graduate school.

Wrap Up Lunch. Students were invited to a wrap up lunch attended by several mentors as well as the director of graduate studies (DGS) from the Economics PhD program at the AYSPS. Given all that they had learned about graduate school over the course of the internship, they had several specific questions about the graduate school application process for our DGS.

Other Activities. Interns also engaged in a variety of social activities in and around Atlanta such as a bowling night with some former interns from past summers that are still in the area, a visit to Six Flags, the Georgia Aquarium, Six Flags / White Water amusement parks, and a Braves baseball game.

Evaluations

Upon completion of the program students were asked to fill out anonymous evaluation questionnaires. The evaluations included questions on all aspects of the program, and were very positive. Here are a few examples:

Question	Percent agree and strongly agree
“I would be willing to recommend the program to my peers.”	90
“As a result of the program, your understanding of what it means to be a graduate student has improved substantially.”	100
“As a result of the program you have a much better understanding of what policy research work involves.”	90
“From an administrative point of view the program ran smoothly”	100
“The program director was readily available to assist you with any issues or problems”	100

Below are several quotes from the evaluations:

- “My mentor did not see my time here as simply an extra research assistant for his use. Instead he was interested in helping however possible to arrive at, what is hopefully, a publishable paper. Overall, his concern for my progress as a student made the experience a very good one.”
- “Prof. Jim Marton and Mary Kenyatta were excellent and always there to answer questions that I had.”
- “I really enjoyed the exposure to the diverse fields of economics that this program provides.”
- “I really liked working with my mentor and meeting the other interns. I also enjoyed learning about all the research that has been done by the faculty at the AYSPS.”

- “My mentor was very open and always willing to help me. He was always there for me and open to answering any and all questions that I had for him, including questions about graduate school and actually working with a PhD.”
- “I loved living in Atlanta and getting to know all the people in the program. Dr. Marton’s help was invaluable, he’s just so approachable.”
- “I appreciated my mentor’s willingness to teach me things I did not know, telling me and talking with me about graduate schools and other advice besides that having to do with my project.”

We are committed to maintaining and even raising the standards of the program. Furthermore, we will continue our efforts to hire minority and female interns and interns from minority and smaller schools.