

Deans and Directors Summit

October 14, 2009

Issue Brief: Federal Internship Reform (H.R. 3264, Rep. Connolly [D-VA])

Current Status: The bill is in the beginning stages. Introduced and referred to the Committee on House Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Post Office, and the District of Columbia. There is currently no equivalent Senate bill.

Student internships are the best vehicle for meeting the Federal Government's hiring challenge, but the government is failing to capitalize on this opportunity. Student internships offer a low-cost, low-risk way of filling job openings, yet *the Federal Government converts only 6.6% of Federal paid internships into full-time competitive employment*. More than 500,000 government positions will likely become vacant in the next five years, and student interest is surging¹. If the government does not refocus internships on creating targeted pipelines for professional development, it risks losing the future generation of public servants.

The current system of hiring/internships is decentralized, poorly advertised, and confusing. Agencies post internship opportunities individually, and students oftentimes must find internships on an ad hoc basis because there is not a requirement for agencies to publicly register internships in one place. Programs are also being used by agencies as special hiring authorities to hire non-students instead of being used as a pipeline for student talent. Since agencies often abuse intern programs or fail to develop interns, many highly qualified candidates fail to gain entry.

NASPAA supports the "Federal Internship Improvement Act" because it lays the groundwork for a more sharply defined, targeted internship process. The bill is designed to improve the fractured nature of internship programs by creating an internship coordinator within each agency, a centralized intern database, and agency reports designed to comprehensively evaluate the use and effectiveness of internship programs.

Key Points

- 1) *Graduate students are currently at a disproportionate disadvantage in gaining Federal employment.* Internships are not being used as a long-term recruitment vehicle: internship programs most often fail to convert to full-time employment, and students are not competitive through pathways such as USAJOBS. This lack of long-term and short-term strategic planning hurts both students and the Government.
- 2) *The bill needs to be refined to emphasize student internships, using a narrow definition of "student."* Internship programs were designed as a necessary pathway to getting future talent into the Federal workforce, but agencies oftentimes use intern programs like the FCIP as a way to circumvent normal hiring procedures for non-students. The "definitions" need to be refined to delineate internship programs as targeted recruitment pipelines aimed at currently enrolled students.
- 3) *The coordination and evaluation of internship programs improves strategic workforce planning by eliminating disjointed internship processes.* Candidates are often turned away because they are unable to navigate the system or convert their positions into full-time employment. These reforms will help convert student interest into long-term hiring results: coordinated programs allow for centralized, broad strategic workforce-planning schemes while providing internship effectiveness feedback.
- 4) *The uncoordinated nature of the internship process works to the advantage of insiders.* The lack of a coordinated schedule and candidate matching process leaves students to find internships on an ad hoc basis, oftentimes through connections or word of mouth. A centralized system (like studentjobs.gov) is needed to encourage fair competition, a clear intern schedule and hiring process, and intergovernmental cooperation for effectively matching potential talent to agency job openings.

ASK: Ask Representatives to cosponsor the bill and Senators to consider authoring companion legislation.

¹ "Leaving Talent on the Table," Partnership for Public Service, 4/09

Background Reading:

- ["Leaving Talent on the Table," Partnership for Public Service, 4/09](#)
- Graduate Student Pathways to Federal Service, NASPAA, 8/09
- ["Federal Government Needs Massive Hiring Binge, Study Finds," *Washington Post*, 9/3/09](#)
- ["Uncle Sam Failing to Capitalize on Motivated Student Interns," *Washington Post*, 4/8/09](#)