

- Keep the highly recognized and enduring **Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF)**, but modify the following key features of the program:
 - More clearly *define the PMF by limiting size and implementing better matching components* to bring the most skilled candidates into the PMF and Senior PMF
 - *Devise a direct recruitment strategy* that seeks qualified students at their university. Use current and past U.S. Presidents in public service announcements that elevate the call to service and place the President back in the Presidential Management Fellowship
 - *Replace the current assessment process* with the use of local testing facilities and automation
 - *Connect the PMF application process to other pieces of Federal recruitment* and improve competitiveness by granting other federal student internship programs access to the PMF applicant “vault”

B) INTRODUCE SYSTEM ENHANCEMENTS THAT CREATE DEFINED PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS

- Directly address the need for fair competition by creating a central information clearinghouse for all federal internships. This can be coordinated through the existing shell of studentjobs.gov
- Develop a clear internship schedule that initiates the application process while students are still in school and have access to academic guidance. Structure the internship opportunities in such a way that students can seamlessly transition from school into a full-time, post-collegiate internship that provides training and gives students a sustained impression of the opportunities that exist within a career in the Federal government
- Develop an assessment mechanism based on competencies that can be universally utilized across all Federal internships
- Create a tiered schedule for all internships that allows students to qualify for each successive opportunity if they were not properly matched for their original consideration

The Need for Internship Reforms

Currently, among the three primary internship programs, only the Presidential Management Fellowship features any form of inter-governmental coordination. Within the current system, the lack of easily found information on FCIP and SEEP positions often leaves those who were not selected as PMF finalists to assume the only route into Federal employment is through usajobs.gov. If the range of FCIP and SEEP positions remains relatively unknown to students and academic institutions, with knowledge of these programs is primarily limited to those who have family and friends already in the government, then the best candidates are neither being sought nor found. Because of this lack of advertisement, *the current group of programs fails to operate as a system, and agencies are failing to attain those individuals who possess the skills that best match their needs.*

Federal Internship Specifics

Issues with the *Presidential Management Fellowship*:

- The recruitment process increasingly disaffects top-level graduates and even those who have been deemed PMF finalists – turning some away from Federal employment
- The program currently does not include a mechanism to ensure an appropriate match between finalists and agencies – leaving many finalists unplaced and often left out of Federal employment
- Once hired, some PMFs find themselves in non-management track positions or filling general vacancies
- The PMF process can be used to capture both the top-tier candidates and serve as a filter for other internships, but this is not being accomplished, and exemplifies the non-existent system of current Federal internships

The PMF assessment was once able to obtain the best candidates and promote fair competition by placing students through a series of group activities and interviews. This process warranted travelling around the country for the interview process, but with the assessment having now become a single multiple-choice test focusing on critical thinking skills, writing fundamentals and life experience, it can be taken anywhere.

While the current PMF examination may identify qualities that exist within effective managers, there is no measure of the critical skills and knowledge that students possess. Without an identification of a student's skills, a situation has been created in which hundreds of applicants are becoming finalists without enough positions to match their skills, while simultaneously not providing enough candidates with particular skills for positions that agencies desperately need to fill. This imbalance is serving to undermine the prestige of the program, and is creating negative feedback for students who go all the way to becoming finalists, only to discover that there is not a position for them.

PMF Reforms:

- 1. Utilizing a series of successive hurdles, the assessment process will begin by evaluating skills and knowledge before students are tested for management potential. By identifying students' areas of strength, skill-matching can occur which would improve the overall quality of the PMF finalist pool*
- 2. Offer examinations for the PMF in locations that are convenient for students. The current test can be easily proctored by each university or contracted to private test sites that exist locally throughout the country*
- 3. By utilizing more automation throughout the process, the PMF schedule can be condensed, completed over the summer, and place PMF finalists before the end of students' first semester*

Current PMF Schedule:

*October 1 - 15 - Student Application Period
October 1 - 31 - Academic Nominations
January or February - Assessment Test
January to March - Agencies Post PMF Positions
March - OPM Announces Finalists
Mid-March to Mid-April - PMF Job Fair*

Proposed PMF Schedule:

*May 1 - 15 - Student Application Period
May 1 - 24 - Academic Nominations
June 1 - Initial Assessment Test (Skills)
June 21 - 2nd Assessment Test (Current PMF Test)
June to August - Agencies Post PMF Positions
August 1 - OPM Announces Finalists
August 15 - PMF Job Fair
End of November - All PMF Offers Made*

4. *Limit the number of Presidential Management Fellows hired each year to 300. This will help return prestige to the program, ensure that PMFs are being placed in appropriate positions, create greater competition to hire finalists, and will elevate the overall quality of those holding the title of a Fellow*

5. *With a focus on management positions, the Office of Personnel Management will set a clear definition of the positions and tasks that are suited for PMFs*

6. *The Senior PMF track that exists in both Executive Order 13318 and in Federal Regulations (Part 362 of Title 5) will be utilized to bring in recent students of graduate and executive programs. These individuals will be required to hold a minimum of 10 years of full-time employment, be in the process of earning a masters degree, and will have successfully completed the assessment process. With program specifications already existing in Federal regulations, the Senior Fellowship should focus on the annual placement of 50 executive graduates*

7. *The Office of the PMF will track and provide data on Fellows as they move through government to provide information on the achievement, progress and retention of PMFs*

Issues with the Federal Career Intern Program:

Uncoordinated and decentralized, these openings are not required to be posted on usajobs.gov, and interested candidates must search through individual agency websites to find any information regarding the existence of the program itself. With the relatively undefined Federal Career Intern Program authority that agencies hold, instances of misuse have become prevalent, and existing lawsuits have brought the legality of the program into question.² The most often cited example of FCIP misuse is by Customs and Border Protections Officers (CBPO), which used this hiring authority to attract all its new employees since 2002. The use of the FCIP to circumvent the merit-based hiring process was not the intention of the program, and the misuse of this special hiring authority is coming at the detriment of students who need this type of provision and subsequent training to serve as Federal employees directly out of school.

FCIP Reform:

Because of the existing legal challenges to the program and its loss of focus on students, without redefining the current program specifically as a pathway for graduates, the current FCIP should be removed from the system of student internships. A new component within the Student Educational Employment Program should be created, with a defined training component, to capture the full range of students interested in Federal employment

² Stephen W. Gingery v. U.S. Department of Defense - U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit case no. 2007-3292

Issues with the *Student Education Employment Program*:

- Positions are not centrally posted and the process of attaining a position remains ambiguous
- Direct student recruitment does not currently exist
- Few students who participate in these programs are being internally converted into Federal employment,³ and the investment that Federal agencies are making in both identifying and training these student-employees is often being lost

Consisting of the Student Temporary Employment Program and the Student Career Experience Program, these internships seek to coordinate students' educational aspirations with work experience in Federal agencies. With regard to fair and open competition, the Student Educational Employment Program is failing on all accounts. These programs are neither advertised nor promoted, and the existence of the criterion that these programs focus on attaining the best candidates through fair competition is not currently being met. There is no oversight for these SEEP positions; so while agencies may be thoroughly matching skills with their needs, without a reporting mechanism, there is no clear way to know if this is the case.

SEEP Reforms:

1. Post all SEEP openings on StudentJobs.gov, with a clear job description and explanation of the application process

2. Create the "Graduate Career Transition Program," which is reserved for undergraduate and graduate students immediately following completion of a college degree. The "Graduate Career Transition Program" would be a one-year internship with the opportunity to extend the student's placement for an additional year or non-competitively convert them to a career employee. A student's area of study would remain important, but placements would be based upon a more complete assessment of a student's skills. This assessment would mirror the suggested addition to the PMF evaluation process, and would focus on skills and knowledge. Positions in the "Graduate Career Transition Program" would be GS-7 to -11 based on agency discretion

3. Define formal training components for each internship existing under the SEEP authority

4. Follow the reporting provisions detailed in the Federal Internship Improvement Act,⁴ which specify that annual reports will be submitted to OPM regarding the status of each agency's intern program

Summation

With the implementation of these recommended changes, based upon the criteria of attracting the best applicants, fair competition, and efficient matching of student skills with agency needs that was spelled out by Director Berry, an effective system of Federal internships can emerge. This new system will offer clear signposts to students, allow for multiple entry points, and build a pipeline for the future leadership of the Federal government.

³ *Leaving Talent on the Table* - Partnership for Public Service

⁴ H.R. 3264 - *Federal Internship Improvement Act*: Section 2(e)

