

**Successful Legislative Internships:
The Intern Perspective**

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This paper evaluates the internship experience through the eyes of notably informed observers—the interns themselves. It includes a two-pronged approach to the topic. First, the paper assesses the affects of an “up-close and personal” experience with politics in the New York State Legislature by examining the interns’ overall perceptions of the political process *before* and *after* their internship experiences. And second, it isolates the aspects of the actual internships themselves that seemed *most important to student satisfaction* with the overall experience.

The paper is divided into several parts. Part one describes the *New York State Assembly Internship Program* which serves as the basis for the analysis. The paper’s authors both served as “professors-in-residence” with the Assembly program during the period 1986 through 2005. Part two describes the research process employed to collect data relevant to the paper’s two main emphases: how the interns’ experiences have impacted on their political perceptions; and the interns’ assessments of the overall internship experience itself. Part three analyzes the changes in the interns’ perceptions of politics after their experiences in the New York State Assembly. And part four explores which aspects of the internship were most closely tied to positive evaluations of the overall internship experience.

The New York State Assembly Intern Program

In every legislative session since 1972, the New York State Assembly has hosted between 100 and 150 college students who work full time in legislative offices from the beginning of the legislative session in early January to the end of the Spring Semester in mid May. Described on the Assembly’s website as “a comprehensive academic program which provides a practical educational experience,” the program operates under the aegis of the Assembly’s *Internship Committee*, with its day-to-day activities coordinated by a director and several full-time staff members. Each year, two faculty members from universities within New York State serve as professors-in-residence with the program, offering weekly classes that provide student interns with an academic perspective intended to complement the program’s experiential component (Pecorella, 2007).

Student interns work a minimum of 30 hours per week in a legislative office. The interns receive a stipend from the Assembly for their work (\$4,100 in 2007) and most receive college credit, up to 15 credit hours, from their home institutions for completing the program. In their roles as interns, they have a variety of responsibilities, some involving “typical” office-related tasks, such as filing and opening mail, others more directly related to the “substance” of the legislative process, such as, bill tracking, policy research, and interactions with lobbyists. Although, each intern’s specific role is determined within the legislative office to which he/she is assigned, the Assembly Internship Program staff and faculty continually monitor the process in an effort to maximize the amount of substantive legislative work to which each intern is exposed.

To place the internship experience with the New York State Assembly in context, it is helpful to describe the legislative process in Albany. The New York State Legislature is one of the most professionalized in the country, ranking at or near the top on each of the most commonly accepted measures of legislative professionalism (Hamm and Moncrief,

2004; King, 2000; Moncrief and Thompson, 1996; Mooney, 1994). The Legislature meets in annual sessions that usually last six months or longer and recesses rather than adjourns at the end of the formal session, subject to call back by the leadership; legislators in Albany have substantial professional and clerical support in the form of central, committee, and office staff available to assist them in their work; and legislative salaries in New York are comparatively high and are augmented by the allotment of per diem expenses and by a wide variety of leadership or committee stipends. Moreover, *the Legislative Office Building* in Albany, which houses most of the 212 members of the Assembly and the Senate and their staff, provides a well-maintained and technologically well equipped work environment.

It is also useful to note that New York has a highly partisan legislature with institutional decision rules defined by a notably strong leadership system. One of the more important leadership powers is that of appointing the chairs and majority party members of all standing committees. With this authority, legislative leaders are able to coordinate the policy process within each house by regulating the flow of legislation to the floor. The coupling of professionalism with strong leadership has helped make the legislature a potent political force in relation to the executive branch (Stonecash and Widstrom, 2006). It has also led to widespread criticism of the legislative process in New York. In 2004, a *Brennan Center for Social Justice Report* characterized the New York State legislature as “dysfunctional” (Creelan and Moulton, 2004). Whether in the form of newspaper editorials, the comments of insiders, or a major academic study, the conventional wisdom in New York stands as an indictment of legislative practice in Albany, with the main criticisms focused on the legislature’s internal operations.

In general then, Assembly interns find themselves in a professional work environment characterized by sufficient resources to “get their jobs done.” They also realize early on that the Democratic majority in the Assembly, which in 2007 held 108 of the 150 seats in that house, runs the legislative operation in a centralized and partisan fashion. And, as will be pointed out in a succeeding section of the paper, most of them are not only aware of but indeed share critical views about the operation of the legislature in New York.

Data Collection and Respondents Backgrounds

Each year, interns in the program fill out two questionnaires focused on state politics in Albany—one as they arrive in January, the other as they depart in May. The initial questionnaire, administered on the first day of orientation in January, has several components: one, it seeks background information on each of the students, i.e., their college majors, previous work experience, previous political involvements, partisan loyalties, and general political worldviews; two, the questionnaire asks the students to answer a series of factual and attitudinal questions about politics in New York State in general and in the Legislature in particular; and three, it seeks information on their general attitudes toward work and expectations concerning the up-coming internship experience. The second questionnaire, administered during the final class week in May, is focused more on giving interns the opportunity to evaluate their experiences in the program while also seeking to measure any changes in their perceptions about politics in

general and in New York in particular. The responses on both of these surveys serve as the basis for the analysis that follows.

The data set for this paper includes 613 usable responses (on both the pre- and post-internship instruments) from session interns who completed the *New York State Assembly Internship Program* between 1999 and 2005. Forty-seven percent of the students who responded were political science majors; the remaining students majored in a wide variety of fields, usually from within the Liberal Arts, but a number were from other schools of education or business. Many planned to apply or had already applied to law school or graduate programs, a good number of these in public policy or public administration.

Fifty-seven percent of the students identified themselves as Democrats, with 56 percent of the Democrats describing their allegiance as “strong”; while 22 percent identified themselves as Republicans, with 47 percent of these students describing their party affiliation as “strong.” The remaining 21 percent were either self-described Independents or identified with one of New York’s minor parties. The preponderance of Democrats in our sample is not reflective of national data which indicate that more than 50 percent of college students identify as “Independents” while less than one-third characterize themselves as Democrats (Institute of Politics, 2004). The partisan imbalance in our sample may reflect the fact that the interns are disproportionately representative of liberal arts programs in general and of political science majors in particular. Such students are more likely than their counterparts in business or professional schools to be Democrats and, as such, are more likely to be interested in public-sector career paths than their Republican or less politically focused counterparts.

In terms of ideology, 39 percent of the interns were self-described “liberals”; while only 12 percent characterized themselves as “conservatives.” The remaining 49 percent described themselves as “moderates.” The plurality of “moderates” reflects the data on national student attitudes but our sample included fewer conservatives and more liberals than national surveys (Institute of Politics, 2004). For reasons similar to those concerning the higher levels of Democratic Party identification in our sample, we attribute greater preponderance of “liberals” to the nature of the program and the students it attracts.

Intern Attitudes toward Politics in the New York State Legislature

The first set of findings reported in the paper concerns the impact of the five-month internship on interns’ perceptions of and opinions about legislative politics. Interns are an *unusually knowledgeable* group of respondents. As full-time employees of the state Assembly, the interns see at least part of the legislative process unfold literally in front of their eyes; as students, they have a “distance” from the process that affords them a degree of perspective in evaluating what it is they witness. Indeed, in addition to the many benefits that political internships offer to both the student interns and the offices to which they are assigned, such programs also provide a direct way to test conventional views about political institutions (Cammarano, 2002).

With that in mind, we analyzed two aspects of the interns' reactions to politics in the New York State Legislature. One, we asked them to assess the influence of a number of relevant internal and external political actors involved in the legislative process in Albany. Two, we analyzed the affect of the internship experience on their attitudes toward legislative politics in Albany, by assessing intern perceptions of the overall political process before and after their internship experiences. The first part of the research focused on three sets of *internal* and four sets of *external* actors who are involved in the legislative process. The internal components include the political parties, the legislative leadership, and staff assistance, each of which helps organize the legislature's efforts to deal with the myriad policy proposals introduced each session. The second part focused on four sets of external actors seeking influence within the process, including the governor, representatives of executive agencies, lobbyists, and the media.

Perceptions of and opinions about internal influences on Assembly Politics

The findings presented in Table 1 affirm the conventional view about the highly partisan nature of legislative politics in New York. Following exposure to a legislative session, there were increases in the number of interns who characterized the *political parties* and the *leadership* as having "very strong" influence on the legislative process. Moreover, there was consistency among those interns who expected in January that the influence of party and the legislative leadership would be "very strong" with nearly two-thirds of the former and almost three-quarters of the latter maintaining their initial opinion in the posttest; and more than 95 percent of all the interns characterized the impact of both the parties and leadership as *at least* "strong" by May.

[Table 1 Here]

The findings are less reflective of the import of professionalization on legislative politics in New York. Just over 16 percent of the incoming interns expected that legislative staff would have "very strong" influence and less than 12 percent ended their internships with that view. In fact, in contrast to the nearly unanimous characterizations of the parties and leaders as having at least "strong" influence, barely a majority assessed staff influence as at least "strong" on the posttest. Three factors might explain the findings concerning staff. One, in a highly partisan legislature, staff assistance might take a back seat to partisan considerations. Two, the Assembly employs a Program and Counsel Staff that operates out of the Speaker's offices and it is possible that interns in members' offices might not fully appreciate the impact of this central staff. Three, in a partisan, leadership-driven legislature, staff allocation is decidedly unequal and such inequity might color intern perceptions of overall staff effectiveness.

Table 2 indicates that there were strong opinions concerning internal influence on the process. A large majority of interns became convinced that the influence of political parties was "too great" while a smaller majority felt the same way about the impact of leadership. In fact, more than one-half of interns who arrived in Albany believing that the influence of parties and leaders on the process was "about right" changed their views to "too great" in the posttest. That these assessments held across party and ideological

lines indicates that intern opinion on these matters reflected views in the larger body politic that the degree of partisanship and centralization in Albany is troubling. As expected, opinions concerning the influence of staff reflected the lack of impact that interns subscribed to staff input in the first place, i.e., little influence, little threat.

[Table 2 Here]

We note several comments on intern opinions about partisanship. Legislative politics in the New York is not only highly partisan, in recent years it became the domain of one-party, at least in the Assembly. Between 1999 and 2005, the Republicans never had more than 53 of 150 seats, falling to 46 seats by 2005. Interns see minority bills blocked or “borrowed” by the majority; they see minority offices provided with fewer resources than their majority counterparts; and they see “petty aspects” of partisanship played out on a fairly regular basis. That they assess the situation negatively is not surprising.

Perceptions of and opinions about external influences on Assembly Politics

State legislatures are creatures of external influence, defined as places where “outsiders” select “insiders” to represent their interests. Although there is disagreement over how much actual influence “outsiders” *should* exercise, there is no doubt that “outsiders” mobilize to influence legislative decision making. Moreover, it is quite clear that, in a separation of powers system, the governor and representatives of the executive branch have a need to encourage legislative support for the items on their various agendas.

The data in Table 3 are mixed concerning the impact of external actors. The findings indicate that there was a substantial increase in the proportion of interns who considered *the governor* to be a “very strong” influence over the course of the session but large decreases in those who considered *agency representatives* and *lobbyists* to be “very strong” influences. In fact, just over 20 percent of interns who entered the Assembly expecting lobbyists to be very influential actors left with that view.

[Table 3 Here]

The perception of strong gubernatorial influence on the legislature has a solid basis in the literature. By most commonly accepted measures, New York State has one of the more institutionally powerful governors in the country (Beyle, 2004). The governor of New York has appointment power over most executive agencies; exercises a veto that can only be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the legislature; and, in a role that is perhaps most relevant to the interns, has recently judicially reinforced executive budget authority (Pecorella and Stonecash, 2006; Pataki v Silver, 2004). Each January, interns watch as the governor initiates the new legislative session with a state-of-the-state address; see the executive budget delivered to the legislature several weeks later accompanied by a good deal of fanfare; and, given the partisan division between the governor and the Assembly over the past decade, observe the Assembly leadership and the governor battle quite publicly over policy priorities.

The perception that agencies lack influence may reflect the fact that the strong leadership system in Albany supersedes meaningful mid-level interactions between legislators and agencies. For example, one of the ways that agencies try to impact the process is by providing testimony to legislative committees. The legislature's centralized committee system, however, serves more to transmit leadership decisions downward than to evaluate policy options, a reality not lost on interns attending committee hearings (Creelan and Moulton, 2004). In fact, New York is one of a minority of states that does not provide for committee review of agency proposals (Woods, 2004; Zimmerman, 1981: 165).

At first glance, it seems counter-intuitive that lobbyists, who are present in Albany in larger numbers for the legislative session, are not considered more influential. In fact, the 2003 figures on lobbyists' spending in state capitals indicate that, "New York featured the nation's third-highest state spending total...just under \$120 million to affect Albany policymaking..." (Kersh, 2006: 94). Moreover, lobbying is a perennial issue among those focused on reform in Albany. Evaluating the state government reforms enacted in 2005, a New York Times editorial characterized changes in the state lobbying law as "the most important reform last year—in many years, in fact" (January 15, 2006).

There are aspects of lobbying in Albany, however, that may clarify the findings. One, it is clear that not all lobbyists are created equal (Thomas and Hrebenar, 2004). Many of the professional lobbyists, i.e., "contract" or "in-house" lobbyists, have access to the leadership because of prior service in elected offices or because they represent successful private concerns or because they are recognized experts in their areas. The unpaid citizen lobbyist, on the other hand, seeks access by attending one or more of Albany's myriad lobbying days, often arriving unannounced at members' offices. The perceptions about lobbyists' influence may be a function of the fact that interns encounter this latter group of lobbyists as they compete for time and attention in the hyper-pluralist world of direct citizen action. It is not that citizen lobbyists do not have impact on policy; it is that the somewhat chaotic venue for their political activity can make them appear peripheral to the process.

A related aspect of lobbying that may help explain the findings is the fact that interest-group influence in New York has been characterized as "complementary" to that of the state's strong party system (Thomas and Hrebenar, 2004). Indeed, New York is one of a minority of states where interest groups are not perceived as dominant to the party structure in terms of impacting public policy (Kersh, 2006). Given the legislature's strong leadership system, it may well be that professional lobbyists work *less visibly* and more effectively than citizen lobbyists in their efforts to impact public policy. As a consequence, based on their observations, interns come to understand that the political "noise" created by citizen lobbyists does not necessarily represent policy influence. However, not being exposed directly to the more "quiet" process of professional lobbying may well mean that the interns tend to undervalue the influence of lobbying in general.

In terms of their opinions about external influence on the legislative process, Table 4 indicates that, over the course of a legislative session, there was a 133 percent increase in the number of interns who believed that the governor's influence was "too great." The

reasons for this view can be found both in the governor's institutional powers as well as in recent partisan divisions in Albany. The governor's agenda-setting role, particularly as exemplified by the annual budget, means that it is *the executive's program* that is being considered in the Assembly. Moreover, between 1999 and 2005, the partisan divide between a Republican governor and the one house controlled by the Democrats has heightened the intensity and increased the visibility of resistance to the budget. The partisan political rhetoric about the governor or some aspect of the governor's budget means that the state's executive remains the focus of political debate as the legislature spends much of the session in reaction to the governor, a fact not lost on interested observers. All of these reasons for an increase in the perception of gubernatorial influence notwithstanding, however, a majority of interns do *not* believe that the governor's influence is "too great" which reaffirms the notion of an independent legislature.

[Table 4 Here]

Apropos of the perception concerning the relative lack of lobbyists' influence in Albany expressed in Table 3, there was a nearly 25 percent drop in respondents who categorized that power as "too great" in the May surveys. Moreover, although the number of interns who believed that executive agencies exercised too much influence increased, it started from a very low base in January and still hovered at around 12 percent following five months of up-close observation of the legislature.

Perceptions of the Legislative Process

Table 5 indicates that the interns drew sharp distinctions between the legislature's representative and policymaking functions. After five months working within the legislature, there was a greater than 60 percent increase in the number of interns who believed that "legislators do a good job in representing constituent." In fact, there was greater agreement among the interns on the quality of representation notion than on any other item addressed in the survey. On the other hand, Table 5 also indicates that over the course of a session there was a greater than 10 percent decrease in the number of interns who believed that "politicians can handle complex issues" and a more than 25 percent decrease in interns who thought that the "political process responds well."

[Table 5 Here]

In part, the different assessments of constituent representation and overall policy impact may well reflect the familiar polling-data pattern where constituents tend to approve of their particular representatives while expressing disapproval of the legislature as an institution. However, in the case of the interns in this study, the different assessments may also be a function of the differential impact of institutional decision rules on legislator-constituent interactions as well as on the legislative policymaking process.

The concept of constituent representation within legislative bodies has multiple meanings incorporating both policy and casework emphases (Rosenthal, 1998: 11-22). "On symbolic matters on the one hand and material concerns on the other, the mandate is clear: heed and express constituency concerns, bring home the bacon, and help the folks

back home who have run afoul of government” (Rosenthal, 1998:19). Legislators in a number of states report that increased constituent demands for services in recent years have led to a substantial increase in the amount of time that they and their staffs devote to “casework” relative to their other responsibilities (Hamm and Moncrief, 2004; Moncrief, Thompson, and Kurtz, 1996; Uslander and Weber, 1979).

There are reasons why this general increase in the emphasis on legislative casework would be particularly notable in New York. Although the legislative policy process in Albany is highly centralized, the representation process is notably decentralized. New York State Legislators have a number of resources available which help them maintain their constituency connections including: district offices where they are able to maintain virtually daily contact with local constituents; staff allotments and access to central staff assistance that enable them to address directly many of the constituency concerns that arise within their districts; and a share of “member items” money that is included as a lump-sum expenditure in the state budget but is parceled out quite specifically by legislators within their respective districts. Research indicates that, as a general rule, “where legislators have district offices and staff, such as in California, Florida, New York, and New Jersey, casework becomes a normal part of legislative routine (Rosenthal, 1998: 16). Given the extent of the available representational resources, it is not surprising that New York legislators are quite active in “representing their constituents” and are perceived that way by informed observers of the process.

Alternatively, the policy process in New York is highly centralized. Bills are channeled to the leadership early on in the process and the flow of legislation is controlled from the top. Policy debates, particularly those reflecting intra-party ideological divisions, occur within party conferences or other less than public venues. As a consequence, even if debates are intense and even if members wage the “good fight” for their constituencies, the battles are not public but the accommodations reached within party conferences are. As a result, legislators, who impress interns as consistently active in fulfilling their representative function through intense casework efforts, might well appear much less active in dealing with the public policy matters surrounding state governance.

The conclusions concerning the differences between the views of representation and policymaking are supported by the perceptions concerning “average citizens” reported in Table 6. There is very little change in intern perceptions of whether citizens have either knowledge about or influence over public policy. However, there is a nearly 34 percent decrease in intern perceptions that “public officials do not care about average citizens.” Indeed, nearly 80 percent of interns responded that they disagreed with that assertion in their post-internship surveys. Given the responses in Table 5, it is safe to conclude that interns see this “care” reflected in casework performed, but it is harder for them to see that concern reflected in the legislative decision-making process.

[Table 6 Here].

Satisfaction with the Internship Experience

The second focus of this paper involves the interns themselves. We were interested in whether there were “controllable” aspects of the overall internship experience which, if handled correctly, would help promote positive feelings among the students about that experience. The literature clearly indicates that if they are planned and monitored with care, internships can be valuable experiential additions to a student’s academic learning and personal growth (Pecorella, 2007; Diambra, Cole-Zakrewski, and Booher, 2004; Baker, 2003; Alexander, 1986). Conversely, if they are undertaken in a cursory fashion, internships can be negative experiences for all the parties involved. By analyzing the perspectives of interns as to which elements of the internship experience they considered the most positive, this part of the paper addresses the question of how to structure internships to produce the greatest possibility that successful experiential education will take place.

In order to measure intern perceptions of their overall experience in the Assembly Program, we included the following question on the May instrument: “How satisfied were you with your overall experience as an intern?” Response options, arranged on a five-point *Likert Scale*, ranged from “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied” and served as the “dependent variable” in the analysis below. A large majority (66 percent) of students in our study who completed the Assembly Program between 1999 and 2005, reported that they were “very satisfied” with their internship experiences. Indeed, with just over 7 percent of students expressed dissatisfaction with the program, the ensuing analysis will focus as much on the fine-tuning of successful internship experiences as on avoiding the major problems that plague failed efforts.

The Office Situation and Satisfaction with the Internship Experience

Interns in the New York State Assembly Program spend the overwhelming majority of their time working within the Assembly office to which they have been assigned. Over the years, we have found that their familiarity with college environments and with academic work usually means that for the first several weeks of the Program, interns find their “comfort levels” in interactions with faculty-in-residence and in dealing with their academic work. By mid to late January, however, most of them have established routines within their offices and the focus of their emphasis shifts to their office work and to the experiential component of their internships. From this point until the end of the Program, interns define their experiences in relation to office work and the people with whom they interact on a daily basis, particularly, their Assembly member and his/her office staff.

Based on our experience with the Assembly Program as well as on the conclusions of previous research, we anticipated that how interns felt about how they had been treated within their offices and by the member of the assembly for whom they interned would have major impact on their perceptions of the experience as a whole (Pecorella and Stonecash, 2007; Stonecash, Pecorella, and Winegar, 1988; Balutis, 1976). In conceptual terms, we focused on a number of interpersonal office-related matters including: whether an intern felt that s/he had been treated reasonably well by office personnel, a sign of respect; whether s/he had been assigned interesting and substantive work by the immediate supervisor, a sign of trust in an intern’s capabilities; and whether s/he had

been given the opportunity to interact with the member of the Assembly on a reasonably consistent *and* positive basis, a sign of “status” within the institution. In the May post internship questionnaire, we measured these interpersonal concepts through the use of five-point Likert scale responses to the following items: (1) As a general rule, I was assigned interesting work; (2) I was treated well in the office; (3) I had frequent interactions with my Assembly member; (4) I was treated well by my Assembly member.

The data in Table 7 indicate the existence of clear relationships between each of these measures of interpersonal interactions and satisfaction with the internship experience. The most important aspect of intern satisfaction with their experience was the perception that they had been assigned “interesting work” by their offices. In fact, more than 94 percent of the 234 interns who indicated that they were “always” assigned interesting tasks were “very satisfied” with their internships with none of them were “less than satisfied” with their experiences. Of course, the concept of *interesting work* is highly subjective. In our experience, interns distinguish routine office tasks, such as, filing and opening the mail from those assignments which get them actively involved in the legislative process, such as, preparing bill memos, researching legislative history, and meeting with lobbyists. It is important for faculty sponsors to remember that the benefits of being “assigned interesting work,” are usually secured by an intern’s willingness to also help out with the office *grunt work* (Christiansen and Davis, 2002).

[Table 7 Here]

The second most important correlation with intern satisfaction was the perception of being “treated well in the office.” Although in all likelihood this view is connected with having been assigned “interesting work,” the perception of being “treated well” goes beyond the nature of the work required. It also incorporates more meaning than simply having had office supervisors and staff who treat them with courtesy. In our experience, interns feel well treated in offices where they are free to ask questions that go beyond the immediate tasks at hand; where they are accepted as part of the office staff and are not expected to perform excessive amounts of “gofer” work; and where their dual role as workers *and* students is understood and addressed.

The third and fourth most relevant indicators of intern satisfaction concerned their relationships with the Assembly member to whom they were assigned. Members who make an effort to interact in a positive and encouraging way with their interns can make a big difference in an intern’s perceptions of their experience. Again, in our experience interns react quite positively to Assembly members who take the time to speak with them about how the office’s policy initiatives “fit into” the larger political process; who take them to floor sessions to observe debates and votes and, in some rare cases, to party conferences to observe the “inner workings” of the Assembly; and who ask them to accompany them to committee meetings and to “meet and greets” with lobbyists and visiting constituents.

Discussion and Analysis

It is clear from the information contained in Table 7, that intern perceptions about their treatment in the office are a crucial component of internship success. Given that the primary responsibility for ensuring internship quality lies with the faculty sponsor who is charged with monitoring the intern-supervisor relationship, we end this paper with some suggestions concerning effective monitoring procedures.

Monitoring internship quality should be an on-going process incorporating *regular communication* designed to maintain realistic expectations while keeping the academic purpose of the internship in the forefront by clarifying, again and again if necessary, each of the participants' roles in the process. Interns, who are gaining meaningful work experience, receiving academic credit, and developing potentially valuable networking sources, need to be reminded to stay focused on the hands-on tasks required to complete the experiential component of the program while also being encouraged to consider the analytical connections between those tasks and the larger political environment within which they occur. Supervisors, who are benefiting from the services of bright and often enthusiastic interns, should be reminded that they have assumed responsibility for ensuring that most of the assigned tasks are "intern worthy." In that light, it is helpful for an office supervisor to be made aware early on of the findings included in table 7.

The faculty monitoring process should include both formal and informal components. The use of *formal assessment instruments* in the monitoring process, such as work-learning contracts and mid-internship evaluations, standardizes the process, provides an opportunity to make early and/or mid-course corrections, and helps maintain the mutuality of understanding among the relevant actors (Pecorella, 2007). A *work-learning contract* should be designed to shape an upcoming internship by specifying the intern's weekly work schedule, the various tasks expected of the intern, the responsibilities assumed by the office supervisor, and the work product anticipated by the parties to the contract. A *mid-internship evaluation report* should be designed to allow both the intern and the supervisor to assess their individual experiences with the internship to that point by directly referencing the work learning contract and assessing that agreement in light of the experience thus far.

A properly constructed work-learning contract coupled with faculty sponsor-student intern meetings prior to and immediately following the completion of the contract can help shape the expectations and clarify the roles both of the intern and the office supervisor. To be effective, experiential learning needs to be, well experiential. Part of the experience is learning to be interactive, i.e., considering how one's individual "self interest" can be "fit into" the collective needs of an office and that requires conversation between the principles and not simply direction from a supervisor. In that light, faculty sponsors need to *prepare* interns for their initial meetings with supervisors. While negotiation is too strong a term, given the obvious inequities of the intern-supervisor situation, in our experience, most interns need encouragement and assistance in learning to assert "their interests" as part of the initial contract process; while a few require a little discouragement in this area.

After the contract is completed, the faculty sponsor-intern conversation should focus on the intern's views about the contract and the way it was "negotiated." Questions should focus on both the process of interaction with the supervisor as well as the final product. Concerning the former, sponsors might pose questions like: Did the supervisor allow sufficient time for a serious review of the contract? Did s/he entertain your ideas or was the contract provided you as a *fait accompli*? Concerning the finished product: How satisfied are you with the assigned tasks? Are there tasks that you wanted to do, that you are not doing? If so, were the reasons why clear to you? In no event, should a sponsor certify a contract that requires interns to dedicate more than one-third of their time to "routine office tasks" or one about which a student has serious misgivings. It may be necessary at this point for the sponsor to have a conversation with the office supervisor.

At about the halfway mark of the internship, the intern and his/her office supervisor should fill out a mid-session evaluation form together. Such a mid-internship evaluation meeting between interns and supervisors can be quite useful at "clearing the air" for both parties as minor problems are highlighted before they become major difficulties and people expecting other people to "remember things that they forgot to say" are afforded the opportunity to say them. After this document is completed, a joint effort should be made by the faculty sponsor and the intern to ascertain how the internship has evolved, in terms of both actual work effort and the relationships between and among office personnel. The instrument itself will point to specific issues and concerns that have emerged but the responses need to be carefully parsed by the faculty sponsor in order to move beyond formal responses to what may be more important underlying issues.

Informal communications have the benefit of helping to alert the faculty sponsor to the problems of students who are prone to "suffer in [formal] silence." The mutually reinforcing use of formal assessment instruments and informal communication provides faculty sponsors with the opportunity to assess on an on-going basis the direction of the internship experience while affording interns the opportunity to discuss any concerns they might have with the progress of the internship. Whether in relation to problems that emerge during reviews of formal assessment instruments or during more informal conversations, students need guidance as to how they might cope with difficult situations.

It is not enough for a faculty sponsor to state that some behavior or situation is not acceptable; conversations should revolve around strategies to achieve desired ends. Interns must feel that they are "armed with options" when they sit to discuss office problems with supervisors. It is crucial—both for the future success of the internship in question and to the process of experiential learning—that the first line of problem-coping strategy be focused on the intern. Sponsors need to suggest methods of raising issues and concerns with supervisors that are compatible with the intern's basic personality type. Advice on coping with problems should revolve around the sponsor's best understanding of the intern's level of comfort in confronting issues and interacting with authority figures. In that light, it is simply dishonest to advise a shy or unsure intern to "just march in there and confront the problem." Finally, sponsors need to remember that they are hearing one side of a story, not all personality clashes are caused by the supervisor's

personality, and that, at times, even two positive and individually pleasant personalities may simply clash when put together.

A final observation concerning monitoring is critical. Some students are hesitant to raise concerns because they do not wish to “cause trouble”; or they are uncomfortable with confrontations; or they simply want the academic credits and are not concerned about the actual experience. Faculty sponsors have an obligation to address all three potential problems by assisting the first two types of students to be more assertive about their interests and by trying to somehow regulate the cynical behaviors of the third type of student. Although the documents referenced above are designed to accomplish just those ends, they are not sufficient in and of themselves. Continual faculty sponsor-intern discussions throughout the experience, incorporating questions, challenges, and, if necessary, faculty-intern confrontations over the nature of the internship experience are critical in trying to prevent students from falling in between the documentary cracks.

Table 1
Perceptions of Internal Actor Influence
on the Legislative Process

	Percent responding that influence was	
	VERY STRONG	
INTERNAL ACTORS	Jan	May
Political Parties	22.8	57.3
House Leadership	34.1	66.1
Legislative Staff	16.2	11.9

n = (495)

Table 2
Opinions about Internal Actor Influence
on the Legislative Process

(In percents)

	Percent responding that influence was	
	TOO GREAT	
INTERNAL ACTORS	Jan	May
Political Parties	41.0	61.8
House Leadership	20.2	51.7
Legislative Staff	6.7	5.5

n = (494)

Table 3
Perceptions of External Actor Influence
on the Legislative Process
(In Percents)

EXTERNAL ACTORS	Percent responding that influence was	
	VERY STRONG	
	Jan	May
Governor	29.1	44.6
Lobbyists	18.1	10.9
Agencies	20.0	9.3

n = (495)

Table 4
Opinions about External Actor Influence
on the Legislative Process
(In percents)

EXTERNAL ACTORS	Percent responding that influence was	
	TOO GREAT	
	Jan	May
Governor	18.0	41.9
Lobbyists	34.9	26.5
Agencies	9.5	12.2

n = (493)

Table 5
Perceptions of the Political Process

	“Strongly agree” January (%)	“Strongly agree” May (%)
Politicians can be trusted to do right	46.0	43.0
The political process responds well	54.5	41.6
Legislators do a good job in representing constituents	59.4	87.1
Politicians can handle complex issues	78.2	69.3

n= (493)

Table 6
Perceptions of Citizen Involvement

	“Strongly agree” January (%)	“Strongly agree” May (%)
The average citizen has little influence over policy	60.4	61.4
Government is too complicated for the average citizen	71.3	70.3
Public officials do not care about average citizens	23.8	15.8

n = (493)

Table 7
Perception of Treatment and Levels of Satisfaction

INTERN PERCEPTIONS	Somer's d's	n
1. Were assigned interesting work (+)	.456*	(587)
2. Were treated well in the office (+)	.364*	(607)
3. Member treated me well (+)	.294*	(595)
4. Had frequent contact w/ member (+)	.273*	(604)

* Significant at the (.00) level.

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