



CDWSP CENTRAL

Nurturing the Next Generation of Community Development Professionals

Education Through Hands-On Experience

Nurturing the next generation of community development professionals is a goal of the Community Development Work Study Program (CDWSP). One way CDWSP grantees achieve this is by securing meaningful internships for their program participants. These placements provide graduate students with hands-on experience in community and economic development; community planning and management; public administration and policy; and urban economics, management, and planning. Local agencies and organizations that house CDWSP interns welcome the expertise, insights, and energy that they bring to their work.

Choosing an Internship Site

Before students are placed, CDWSP grantees are actively involved in identifying, evaluating, and choosing internship sites. Just ask Dr. Janet Griffin-Graves, director of Howard University's Center for the Advancement of Service Learning; Dr. Damien Ejigiri, dean at Southern University's Nelson Mandela School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs; and Dr. Akhlaque Haque, director of graduate studies in public administration, Department of Government, University of Alabama at Birmingham. They uphold a set of standards and criteria to ensure that internship sites provide graduate students with quality hands-on education through relevant workplace experiences.



Dr. Janet Griffin-Graves.

Howard University

"A good internship site should have dedicated space in which the intern can work and a well-defined project," says Griffin-Graves, "with a structure for measuring the intern's job performance and correcting deficiencies. Also, the lines of communication between the organization and the CDWSP internship coordinator should be characterized by openness."

To make a CDWSP internship successful, Griffin-Graves believes that grantees should carefully screen the student applicants. "As a part of the intern selection process, have the intern complete a written application and then meet with the internship coordinator or a selection panel for a face-to-face interview. Ascertain the intern's commitment to the program and choose only those students who exhibit a true commitment to completing the program and a sincere interest in the program activities," she explains.

In addition, she advises grantees to choose the internship site as carefully as they choose the interns. "Make sure that there is a contact person at the organization who is responsible for supervising the intern and reporting back to you about the intern's work progress," says Griffin-Graves. She cautions against partnerships with organizations without a well-defined internship project. "We recognize that there is a wide range of appropriate work that interns can do. We also are aware that some areas are inappropriate. Therefore, we screen each site applicant's description of its project. If the activity is clearly inappropriate, the site is not considered further. If the activity is ambiguous, some followup telephone conversation is conducted to provide the site an opportunity to revise its activity so that a well-defined, eligible project is submitted," Griffin-Graves explains.

Interns should not be knowingly placed in situations where you know there is strife among the staff, especially where the intern's supervisor is disgruntled, Griffin-Graves says. An awkward situation may develop with the intern becoming a pawn between the disputing parties, creating an unproductive work environment.

"Interns know what they hope to gain from their internship, so involve them in the workplace site selection," advises

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Griffin-Graves. "Site supervisors know what type of employee they need. Try to set up more than one interview between the intern and contacts at the workplace site. Based on prior knowledge of the organization and your perception of the intern's goals, internship coordinators should give the intern guidance in selecting a site but not make the final decision. Let the intern and the site supervisor have the final say, maintain open communication with the site supervisor, and make periodic calls for updates on the intern's progress," Griffin-Graves continues. In addition, she advises internship coordinators to intervene only when necessary if a workplace problem arises. "Encourage interns to solve problems independently as this is a good teachable moment," says Griffin-Graves.

Southern University

"Several factors are considered in choosing our internship sites," states Dr. Ejigiri. "Based on our 5-year experience with many sites, we know those that respond to our students' needs. These include sites or agencies that make an honest, measurable effort to provide



Dr. Damien Ejigiri.

professional training, from how to answer phones professionally to attending executive meetings where policies and issues are discussed; provide the school with evaluations at the end of each semester; and welcome visits from the school's internship director," he explains.

According to Ejigiri, before an internship site is assigned, a student is asked to list three measurable objectives that he or she wishes to accomplish during the internship period. For example, some students list learning how to manage a nonprofit organization; developing good organizational skills; getting involved in the management of low-income housing; learning personnel skills, such as bookkeeping, how to best address customers in a large service community agency, and how to handle disgruntled customers.

Internship sites are selected based on a student's interest. Then, Ejigiri and the CDWSP director visit the site. "This lets the agency know how serious we are about the internship project," explains Ejigiri. A good site must have an interest in working with students, allow students to attend various meetings, designate someone to supervise the intern, exercise patience in correcting the student when a mistake is made, and provide significant tasks that lead to a good learning experience. "An agency that assigns students clerical or administrative tasks, has difficulty providing evaluations and progress reports, has no contact person with whom the university can communicate, or assigns the intern an unprofessional supervisor is not a good site," states Ejigiri.

When considering an internship, Ejigiri advises grantees to visit the agency with an administrator of the school, such as the dean; discuss the school's expectations with the agency; make periodic visits; and have students discuss their progress and concerns and make public presentations of their work.

University of Alabama at Birmingham

"Our interns are allowed to choose their placement site from a list of agencies," says Dr. Haque. "Their decision is influenced by the relevance of a project to their career goals and also on whether the agency requests HUD interns," Haque explains. Once a site is selected,



Dr. Akhlaque Haque.

the university's CDWSP director makes initial contacts with the placement supervisors and sends formal letters and contract agreements to the internship agency.

There is informal constant communication between the agency supervisor and the director about a student's progress.

"A good internship site must have dedicated personnel to supervise the interns to ensure they have a broad knowledge about the agency's operation. Furthermore, the placement agency should involve the intern in substantive agency policy matters," says Dr. Haque. "They should have access to important meetings and discussions where both long-term and short-term policy matters are discussed." However, Haque believes that interns must avoid all workplace personal and personnel issues.

"Our CDWSP interns are required to submit a monthly journal describing their projects in detail," says Haque. The program director and the program faculty meet with the interns on the first Wednesday of every month to discuss their academic progress and internship. "The discussion is broad enough to incorporate students' career goals and other issues that help the director assess whether the intern is benefiting from the experience," Haque explains.

According to Haque, keys to a successful internship include:

- A strong focus on how the internship benefits the student.
- Strategic placements to ensure that the students learn leadership skills.
- An agency selection to choose those that are high on the community-building list.
- Opportunities for alumni and current CDWSP participants to network.

A classroom setting can never provide students with the extensive learning they receive through internships. Such

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hands-on experience gives them the tools and confidence to pursue their goals, more clearly identify their areas of interest, gain professional experience and maturity in thinking, and strengthen their commitment to community development.

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The Ullman Building houses University of Alabama CDWSP staff.

CDWSP Alumni Spotlight:
**Indiana University
South Bend**

Alumnus Credits Indiana CDWSP With Developing Potential

Debora Conley has not forgotten her roots—her educational roots that is. Nor is she trying to. Currently the executive director for the Indiana Cooperative Development Center (ICDC), Conley credits her educational experience as a CDWSP student at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB) for helping to nurture and develop her potential.



Debora Conley

Conley graduated from IUSB in 1998 with a master's degree in public affairs with a concentration in community and economic development. As a student in the CDWSP, she completed a total of four internships that helped her mature professionally and strengthened her commitment to community development.

Dr. Leda McIntyre Hall, the university's CDWSP director, was a vital link in obtaining these internships. "Dr. Hall was an incredible mentor and tirelessly assisted me and other CDWSP students with everything from internships to maneuvering through the university financial aid system," says Conley. "She reviewed the internship opportunities to maintain quality projects, acted as a liaison between the students and the organizations, and monitored the performance of the students and their satisfaction with the organizations." Dr. Hall remains an important figure in her life even today, is always willing to offer advice and support.

IUSB Internships

During one internship, Conley spent two semesters at South Bend Housing Assistance Office, a nonprofit housing development organization. While there, she created a directory of funding sources and a car ownership program, and developed procurement procedures. This experience allowed Conley to observe how a nonprofit operates, introduced her to the housing field, familiarized her with program development, and introduced her to many Federal regulations.

Other internships included a semester at Niles City Planning Department performing an analysis of the city's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; placement with the Michiana Area Council of Governments performing a well-head protection plan and database; and working at a research institute at IUSB conducting a housing study in a local city, preparing a Federal grant application, completing reporting requirements on other grants, and assisting in other research projects.

"My internship experiences were invaluable in my career development. They helped me develop skills, familiarize myself with potential career paths, and build a network of contacts that otherwise would have been impossible to acquire," says Conley, whose first professional position was as a community development project coordinator for the Elkhart County government. In this position, she dealt directly with grant administration for housing projects, community program development, and compliance with

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Federal regulations. Following that, she worked for a nonprofit organization, helping to direct future community development activities in small rural Indiana communities.

In November 2004 Conley accepted the position of executive director with ICDC. The ICDC provides technical assistance to producers and nonproducer collaborative enterprises to expand or develop new startup businesses. It engages in education, public awareness, and individual mentoring activities. "Since I started working at ICDC, I have been busy developing the organizational structure, establishing a network of trained professionals for service provision, and hiring our first business development specialist. The education and training I received through the CDWSP has assisted me in this position through the knowledge I acquired from classroom instruction in management and economics as well as my internship experience in grant administration and writing, federal regulations, understanding how nonprofits operate, and networking," says Conley.

She describes her experience as a CDSWP student as nothing less than a miracle. "Not only did the opportunity provide funding for my education, but also, through internships, prepared me to enter a career path with knowledge that can only



Conley (center) receiving USDA check on behalf of ICDC

be gained through experience," says Conley. "Overall, the CDWSP provided me with the education and experience I needed to develop a rewarding career in the public sector. I am ever so grateful to IUSB and the CDWSP for creating this opportunity. It has been a long journey since my pregraduate school life of economically strapped single motherhood to my current management position, and I have the CDWSP experience to thank for it."