



CDWSP CENTRAL

Nurturing the Next Generation of Community Development Professionals

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Office of University
Partnerships
Community
Development
Work Study
Program

Interns Help Chattanooga City Government Save Taxpayer Money

Whether they want to report a broken traffic light, complain about their tax bill, or get information about a city recreation program, citizens of Chattanooga, Tennessee, only need to dial one telephone number—an easy-to-remember “311”—to talk to a government employee. By all reports, the 3,000 residents who dial Chattanooga’s new 311 Call Center each week are enjoying their new-found access to City Hall. And, thanks to a graduate student at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC), the city is using the information it collects through the center to improve its efficiency and save tax dollars.

The UTC student—Rachelle Thompson—was in her second year of the university’s Master of Public Administration (MPA) program when she was assigned to a semester-long internship with Chattanooga’s new Office of Performance Review (OPR), which oversees the 311 Call Center. Working 20 hours a week under the tutelage of OPR Director David Eichenthal, Thompson helped the city begin to design an internal system by which it can collect and track information it receives from the 311 Center and other sources, and measure departmental performance.

OPR is a relatively new part of Chattanooga’s city government. Established in July 2002 by Mayor Bob Corker, the office has an ambitious

mission: to help Chattanooga deliver the best possible service to its citizens at the most effective cost. Modeled on a performance measurement initiative called CitiStat—which Baltimore, Maryland, officials claim saved that city \$13 million in its first year of operation—Chattanooga’s approach to performance review has three basic components: the new call center, which came on line in February 2003; the performance measurement system, which will be up and running



MPA students and HUD interns sit in the Chattanooga 311 Call Center conference room with Dr. David Eichenthal, director of performance review and director of finance for the city of Chattanooga: (left to right) Rachelle Thompson, Christian Montz, Eichenthal, Ian Bratton, and Tonya Beeler.

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Mishawaka Internship Benefits IUSB Graduate Student

“I was looking for an opportunity to learn as much as possible about community development and the programs used in this field,” says Melissa Kinsey, a Master of Public Affairs graduate in the CDWSP program at Indiana University, South Bend (IUSB). Her search ended when she was granted an internship with the city of Mishawaka’s Department of Redevelopment in Mishawaka, Indiana.

Melissa credits her internship director, Dr. Leda McIntyre Hall, for arranging her internship. “Dr. Hall knew that Laura Wagley, the department’s project manager, would be my supervisor,” Melissa says. This was important because Wagley is a former CDWSP intern with the Department of Redevelopment as well as a graduate of IUSB’s Master of Public Affairs program. “I felt her background and experience would provide a great guide for my internship, and I was right. Laura is familiar with



Laura Wagley, project manager; and Melissa Kinsey, IUSB intern

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by August 2003; and a centralized grants management program designed to increase outside funding for city initiatives.

Thompson is one of four UTC graduate students—all participants in the university's CDWSP program—who have been assigned to OPR since August 2002. Dr. David Edwards, who coordinates the university's MPA program, says the students have benefited greatly from the opportunity to learn the "ins and outs" of performance review, a relatively new public administration tool.

"Our students have been involved in getting a new office and service off the ground, experiencing all the organizational puzzles and conundrums that have to be solved in such an enterprise," says Edwards. "In addition, they are working in a cutting-edge area of public administration so they get to see the application of the material they've been studying in class."

In return for all this experience, says Eichenthal, CDWSP interns have provided

the city of Chattanooga with high-quality analysis and hours of hard work, all of which have been instrumental in getting OPR off to a good start.

"Simply put, OPR could not have done much of what it has accomplished over the last 9 months without the assistance of UTC interns," says Eichenthal, who also serves as the city's chief finance officer. "They were the primary staff persons on several projects and have done much of the analytical work that OPR has produced thus far. At this point, we don't have a full-blown policy analysis staff, so the interns really are carrying out this function for us."

The partnership between UTC and OPR began soon after Eichenthal, a former New York City official, was tapped to head the newly established OPR. Finding himself in need of additional staff for his new office—and having had positive experiences working with graduate interns on previous jobs—Eichenthal approached Edwards looking for help. As a result, two interns—Thompson and Ian Bratton—were placed at OPR during the Fall 2002 semester. Two more interns—Tonya Beeler and Christian Montz—joined the OPR staff for the Spring 2003 semester.

"Joining the staff" is exactly what UTC interns do. Eichenthal is a firm believer in integrating interns fully into his team's operations. As a result, each OPR intern has his or her own desk, phone, and computer. During the 20 hours a week they work at OPR, the interns report directly to Eichenthal and are treated just like the office's five other analysts.

"I can't tell you how important it is for them to be at every staff meeting," says Eichenthal. "This allows them to learn about what the office is doing, but it also provides us with a means of tracking their performance. I don't hesitate to throw them into additional meetings with department heads and other senior city officials. If they are working on an issue, they have got to be able to hold their own in those sorts of meetings."

The interns' full involvement in day-to-day office operations has paid off. Last fall, Thompson was the principal staff member working on a review of how city departments contract with outside vendors for construction goods and services. In

analyzing individual city contracts, the intern discovered that Chattanooga had awarded many construction contracts after receiving only one bid. Thompson helped OPR devise strategies to entice additional vendors to bid on construction contracts. As a result, Chattanooga is enjoying a 30 percent savings on this year's asphalt contract—and Thompson has landed a full-time job at City Hall, which began after her May graduation.

Even greater cost savings may be realized as a result of a performance review, conducted by Montz, which may bring about changes in the way the city handles its court caseloads. "That will probably result, I would guess, in several hundred thousands of dollars in savings in the coming fiscal year budget," says Eichenthal.

UTC interns didn't start out their OPR assignments as experts in the policy areas they were asked to address. But Eichenthal says they did arrive with certain valuable skills, including a basic understanding of government, the ability to do statistical analysis, and an ability to write well. In addition, several of the interns had some previous work experience that gave them a head start on OPR assignments. Intern Tonya Beeler's understanding of neighborhood groups, gained during a previous internship, helped her measure the effectiveness of a neighborhood revitalization initiative. In addition, Montz's legal background helped him conduct his court review.

Even though their community sponsors don't pay CDWSP interns, Eichenthal says it would be a mistake for anyone to assume that interns are "cost free."

"Interns need their sponsors to clearly identify projects, timelines, and goals and take adequate time to manage them," says Eichenthal, who spends slightly more time supervising his interns than he does supervising his other staff people.

When that kind of investment isn't made, he says, interns frequently feel that they're wasting their time, and sponsors end up being disappointed with the results.

"Basically, if no one is willing to devote the time or resources to train interns and supervise them—and if you don't give them a desk, a phone, or a computer—

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Standing in the main foyer of the Chattanooga City Hall: (left to right) Bratton, Thompson, Montz, Beeler, and Eichenthal.



my classes and professors, and she was able to guide my work experience to reinforce concepts I was learning in the classroom,” Melissa said.

Melissa began her internship with the department in August 2002 and had planned to spend just one semester with the Department of Redevelopment. However, by December 2002, she knew that she wanted to continue with the projects on which she had been working. With the aid and approval of Wagley, her time was extended for a second semester, which she completed in April 2003.

Very structured and organized is how Melissa describes her internship. “Before starting the program, I was interviewed just as I would be if I had applied for a job. Once I had been accepted, I completed an internship contract that stated my goals and objectives—which were to learn about the grant writing process, the operations of the community development and redevelopment department, and how to use census information to complete research projects and provide data analysis.” Each semester she completed three internship journals that tracked her progress to ensure that she was meeting her goals and objectives.

During her time with the department, Melissa worked on a number of projects. She learned about HUD’s Community Development Block Grants and first-time homebuyer and residential rehabilitation programs. She conducted neighborhood census research to obtain numbers and information about Mishawaka city population, income, and housing for use on grants and applications. She participated in a review of the Uniroyal Project, a large brownfields redevelopment project, and wrote an article for *The Communicator*, the city’s utility newspaper. In addition, she learned about affordable apartment market study research, Tax Increment Finance district map preparation, and Mishawaka River Walk Department of Transportation grant writing. She participated in an ongoing review of HUD’s Davis-Bacon program—learning rules and regulations for working with redevelopment projects, contractors, and building sites. She made site visits to Mishawaka redevelopment projects, including housing projects and city parks, to learn about redevelopment programs and funding sources used for such projects. Moreover, she learned about the historic preservation trust, Federal Home Loan Bank Affordable Housing program, market studies, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Individual Development Accounts, and rental housing development. “Looking back at my specific goals written 8 months ago, I see that I learned far more than I could have originally imagined,” she says.

According to supervisor Wagley, “Melissa’s internship was very productive and went especially well. The department greatly benefited from her work. We were able to provide her with a wide variety of community development and redevelopment experiences.” Furthermore, she believes that internships such as Melissa’s are important for support work and essential to the decisionmaking process of many major community, economic

development, and redevelopment projects. “As a former CDWSP intern, I would strongly recommend CDWSP to other organizations. Not only does the program offer organizations professional quality work free of charge, but it also provides a method of becoming acquainted with potential employees,” she says. Moreover, Wagley believes that internships lead to many friendships and networking opportunities. “I don’t believe I would have my current position without my CDWSP internship experience. It allowed me the opportunity to demonstrate my work habits and skills to our executive director, as well as to work with him personally. I also feel I became much more refined and professional.”

As she reminisces about her internship experience, Melissa says proudly, “I have spent 8 months learning from the city of

Mishawaka Department of Redevelopment seven-member staff.” Having the opportunity to work closely with each of them on a variety of projects and tasks helped to reinforce and support academic concepts. “Each person and project had a different focus, which allowed me to learn about everything from brownfields redevelopment and residential rehab to Davis-Bacon.”

When asked about any challenges she may have faced, Melissa simply says, “Rather than challenges, I have had learning opportunities. With each project comes the

opportunity to better understand how different staff members, departments, and agencies function and work together to achieve a goal.” Moreover, she believes that the ability to work with an employer that is actively involved in community development issues and has an experienced staff willing to allow the intern to play an active role was key for her. “Even something as simple as sitting in meetings to observe the interaction among the players can be a very meaningful learning experience,” she adds.

“This internship was a great experience for me. Laura Wagley and others were terrific to work for and learn from. I developed a genuine appreciation for the city of Mishawaka and the people who run the local government. And as a result of the research I had the opportunity to conduct, I have grown to love the history of Mishawaka as well. The efforts to save old school buildings, like the Mary Phillips School, reflect a pride in the heritage of the community. In addition, the Mishawaka River Center is a brownfields redevelopment project that is turning a very large, abandoned Uniroyal site into a beautiful showplace on the river in the heart of downtown Mishawaka. There are a lot of good things happening in this growing Indiana town.”

Melissa says that she would recommend this internship without hesitation to other graduate students in the HUD fellowship program—and she already has. “I feel I have gained a very solid foundation for understanding community development and redevelopment, and the policies and programs used to achieve them. I had the opportunity to work with professionals in the field while getting hands-on experience in the areas important to my academic and professional growth.” ♦



Laura Wagley working at her desk.

they are going to be pretty miserable and they are not going to be very helpful.”

Eichenthal doesn’t see the extra time he spends with interns as a burden. “That’s sort of the fun of it,” he says. “These are smart, young people who are interested in being involved in government. It’s really a pleasure to spend time talking to them about what you do and how you do it.”

Taking the time to work with interns—and making sure they work as hard as they can—will eventually benefit the entire field of public administration, says Eichenthal.

“Smart, energetic young people are the lifeblood of government and public administration,” he says. “If government entities—as well as public interest groups and nonprofit organizations—can get young people interested in public service, they will be hooked for life. Today’s interns will be tomorrow’s public servants.”

For more information, contact David Eichenthal at (423) 425-6201, or e-mail him at eichenthal_d@mail.chattanooga.gov. David Edwards can be contacted at (423) 425-4068 or David-Edwards@utc.edu. ♦

Standing in the front entrance of the Chattanooga City Hall: (left to right) Montz, Thompson, Eichenthal, Beeler, and Bratton.



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