

Mickey Leland Congressional Internship Applicants

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Describe the Mickey Leland Congressional Internship Program.

A: Founded by the late U.S. Congressman George Thomas “Mickey” Leland, the Mickey Leland Congressional Internship Program was created to provide students a first-hand experience in our nation’s legislature. More than 200 students from the University of Houston (UH), Texas Southern University (TSU) and University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) have served as interns in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The UH Center for Public Policy (CPP) directs the program while the respective universities coordinate academic credit.

Historically, economically disadvantaged minority students could rarely pursue employment opportunities as congressional staff members due to the reality that internships — the primary recruitment avenue — are available only to those who can financially afford to live in Washington, D.C. These expenses, plus loss of income from a local job, place this opportunity beyond the reach of many students. Unlike the vast majority of Washington internships, the Leland program provides a monthly stipend and round-trip airfare, as well as paid housing at Boston University's Washington Center. Upon successful completion of the program, interns earn 3-12 credit hours toward their degree plan.

The Leland internship program offers many benefits:

- Creates a "real world" working environment for students interested in public service
- Develops valuable job skills
- Enhances interpersonal abilities
- Provides opportunities to meet professionals involved in government and related areas
- Presents networking and mentorship opportunities
- Promotes ties between the academic community with the public sector

Q: What kind of time commitment is required?

A: Leland interns work an average of 40 hours per week in a congressional office during the spring semester. Some Leland interns will work more than 40 hours per week depending on the demands of the office. Leland interns also attend a weekly 2 hour academic seminar.

Due to this workload, Leland interns cannot take any distance courses not related to the internship. Proof of enrollment is required.

Q: Is the Leland internship paid?

A: The Leland program provides a \$4000 stipend (over the course of 14 weeks) and provides paid housing and airfare.

Q: What qualities are desirable in an applicant?

A: UH, TSU and UHD juniors and seniors will be considered for admission to the program. Past students have had GPAs ranging from 2.5 to 4.0; however a 3.0 GPA is the general threshold. Strong writing skills are mandatory. Prior experience working in a government or political setting as an intern or volunteer is highly valued. Demonstrated leadership ability and commitment to community service are also factors in the selection process. If all qualifications are very similar, priority is given to seniors in the selection process.

Q: How are the Leland interns determined?

A: Intern selections are determined by committee. The committee consists of Jew Don Boney, associate director of the Mickey Leland Center on World Peace & Hunger at TSU; Renée Cross, Center for Public Policy associate director; Adolfo Santos, PhD, chair of the social sciences department at UHD; and Keith Wade, CPP advisory board member. The interns' placement, academic work, and performance evaluations are supervised by Renée Cross. There is also an instructor in Washington.

Q: Do I need to be a political science major to be considered?

A: No. While the majority of the Leland interns are political science majors, there have been numerous students from outside of the social sciences who have been selected for the program and proved to be quite successful. We are more interested with your skills, interests, experience and intellectual curiosity than we are with your major.

Q: Do I have to pay tuition for the academic hours earned as an intern?

A: Yes. The academic hours earned count in the same manner as other courses so regular tuition is required. Talk to your advisor about hours and registration.

Q: How are the office assignments determined?

A: The Leland internship director has extensive experience in human resource management and governmental relations, and matches the interns to congressional offices primarily within the Texas delegation. Factors considered in assignments include the following: 1) The student's partisanship; 2) Policy interests; 3) Demonstrated skills such as writing and oral abilities; and 4) Special skills such as fluency in additional languages or special software proficiency. Special requests by the offices are also a significant factor in the assignment process.

Q: What kind of responsibilities can I expect to have?

A: There is not a good answer to this because there are so many variables. For example, if you have worked in government before, you will likely be placed in an office that tends to give their interns more substantial responsibilities such as legislative research or project coordination. Conversely, with no government or even general office experience, an intern will likely begin with clerical work. In fact, regardless of your experience level, you may begin your first weeks doing clerical work. It is important that the office sees that you are dependable and competent at basic work before you are given more significant responsibilities.

Generally speaking, you can expect to provide administrative support to staff, conduct Capitol tours for constituents, attend hearings and briefings on behalf of the office, correspond with constituents and conduct legislative research at some level. Many interns have also coordinated special events, met with constituents and lobbyists, prepared media releases, and worked on websites among other activities.

Your own interests can make a huge difference in what you are assigned. Let's say you have exceptionally strong writing skills and you are interested in learning about media relations, then you may have the opportunity to work with the person that directs media relations. Or if you have solid statistical skills, you may have the opportunity to work on a policy analysis project.

Government interns cannot expect to be intricately involved in making policy in their first few weeks or months of work, but with a good work ethic, diligence, and enthusiasm, they can usually expect increasing responsibility as their internship progresses.

Q: Do Leland internships ever turn into full-time jobs?

A: Although possible, there is no guarantee that you will be hired once your internship ends. However many of the Leland interns are hired by their host office (whether in DC or in the district office) or by someone they met while interning. An internship allows for many networking opportunities that could lead to employment. Check out www.uh.edu/cpp/success.htm to see what former interns are doing.

Q: Will an internship really make a difference in my academic or professional future?

A: An internship in a government office can be a very rewarding experience. In professional terms, interns can explore this potential career path, build a professional network of contacts, and gain valuable work skills. Personally, interns may discover a passion for public service, meet new people, and enjoy the privilege of serving as an "insider" in a government office. See what the *New York Times* reports about the value of internships at www.uh.edu/cpp/NYT.pdf.

Questions?

For general questions, contact Mike Angel at the Center for Public Policy at mangel2@uh.edu or at 713 743 3976. For questions regarding credit or degree plan eligibility, contact your academic advisor.

University Contacts

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