

Q: What is a Civic Houston Internship?

A: The University of Houston's Hobby School of Public Affairs' Civic Houston Internship Program (CHIP) is designed to offer University of Houston (UH) undergraduate students an opportunity to gain work experience in public service in the Houston area. Most interns are placed in city, county, state and congressional offices while some are assigned to non-government offices with a public policy or public service focus. The program is offered in the fall and spring semesters.

CHIP 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: CHIP interns work an average of 8 hours per week or a total of 112 hours during the semester. The intern and the office supervisor determine the actual work schedule. In addition, interns attend an orientation and 3 class sessions, which generally last 2-3 hours (we meet as a class approximately every 4 weeks on Friday afternoons). There is also a 10 page research paper so time must be allotted for that as well.

Q: Is the internship paid?

A: The part-time Houston CHIP internship is not paid. However, CHIP interns earn 3 hours academic credit.

Q: What qualities are desirable in an applicant?

A: UH sophomores, juniors and seniors will be considered for admission to the program. Past students have had GPAs ranging from 2.25 to 4.0; however a 2.5 GPA is the general threshold. An applicant does not have to have previous experience working in politics or government but is required to present themselves in a professional manner. Strong writing and speaking skills and computer proficiencies are always in demand with the host offices. Bilingual ability, especially in Spanish and Vietnamese, is helpful but not necessary.

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

A: No. While the majority of the CHIP 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, and curiosity than we are with your major.

Q: What if my political experience is very limited?

A: Experience in government or politics is less important than possessing a desire to learn about the political process and a willingness to work hard. Keep in mind that many skills are easily transferable from one environment to another. For example, retail experience may prepare one to deal with constituents and their requests. Your classroom research skills may assist you in compiling a report for an elected official. Experience gained while participating in campus activities, especially if you have held a leadership position, could serve you with coordinating projects or events in a political setting.

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. After acceptance in the program, UH students will be registered in POL 4390 or POL 4398.

Q: Do I have to find my own internship office?

A: No. CHIP (formerly known as the CPP Government Internship Program) has been in existence since 1996, and has placed over 1000 students in Houston area offices. The internship director has extensive experience in human resource management and governmental relations, and matches the interns to participating offices. Factors considered in assignments include the following: 1) The student's partisanship; 2) Policy interests; 3) Demonstrated skills such as writing ability; 4) Special skills such as fluency in additional languages or special software proficiency; 5) Geography in an effort to keep office assignment close to home or campus; and 6) Student requests. Special requests by the offices are also a significant factor in the assignment process.

Q: I would like to volunteer on a specific campaign. Can I receive internship credit for my volunteer work?

A: Very possibly. Pre-approval must be obtained (one cannot earn credit for work already completed). However with preapproval, campaign volunteers/interns can earn academic credit through CHIP as long as the following requirements are met: 112 work hours are completed; the standard assignments are satisfactorily completed; attendance in the four intern classes (8-12 hours total); and the willingness of a campaign supervisor to complete a performance evaluation. Contact the appropriate instructor at UH to determine eligibility.

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 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. 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. The days and hours you work can also make a difference in what you do. For example, if you are working in City Hall, Fridays tend to be a slower day in comparison to Tuesday and Wednesdays when city council meets. However if you are working in a congressional district office, you might want to work Fridays because the congressional member may work in the district office that day rather than in Washington. Any government intern — especially one that is working only 8 hours a week — can't expect to be making policy in their first few months of work, but with a good work ethic, diligence, and enthusiasm, they can usually expect increasing responsibility as their internship progresses.

Q: Once I complete an internship is it possible to do another internship?

A: Yes, however the University of Houston and the University of Houston-Downtown handles internships differently. Talk to your internship instructor and/or your academic advisor about the possibilities of doing another internship in Houston or a fulltime internship in Washington or Austin.

Q: Do 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 CPP interns are hired by their host 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/hobby/_docs/successtoday.pdf 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 (which can include potential sources of letters of recommendation for graduate and law school as well as for employment), 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/hobby/_doc/NYT.pdf.

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