

The Use of Student Interns in the Louisiana Department of State Civil Service

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While I was at IPMAAC in New Orleans in 1995, I attended a symposium entitled "Doing More With Less in a Reinvented Government-The Role of Student Interns." This topic was particularly appropriate for Louisiana State Government at that time and at this time. Various good government groups were placing more and more demands on us at the same time that our budget was being slashed. We were certainly not opposed to most of the recommendations made by these groups; In fact, we had thought of many of the recommendations ourselves. Our problem was Who was going to do the work? and Who was going to pay for it?

Prior to that symposium, I had always assumed that the cost of student interns was prohibitive. So I was shocked to learn that some students will work for the experience alone-that is, they will work for nothing. The price was right, so I began to listen much more closely.

In fact, as I listened to the IPMAAC presentation by Dennis Doverspike, Kenneth Shultz, T. R. Lin, and Ed Holton; I jotted down things I needed done which might be projects for interns. Among other things my list included designing a home page for our Department so that we could post Civil Service rules, job specifications on the internet; getting our job vacancies announced online through the Department of Labor; and developing a simple, easy performance appraisal system for all 66,000 classified state employees.

Before I go further, I would like to give you a little background on our organization, then I will talk about how we set up the internships, and finally I will show you some of the work our interns have done.

The Louisiana Department Or State Civil Service is the central personnel office for all 66,000 classified state employees. We have 100 employees in our department They are all in Baton Rouge except for 3 in our New Orleans testing and information office. We have 5 major divisions in the Department: The Examining Division has approximately 30 employees who develop and administer written exams, develop qualification requirements and experience and training ratings, screen all applications and rate them. Six of them are clerical employees responsible for data entry, issuing and maintaining grades and lists of eligibles. We received approximately 75,000 applications last year and administered 30,000 written exams.

The Classification and Pay Division is responsible for maintaining a uniform classification and pay system. They have 12 professional employees and 4 clerical employees. We have approximately 2,900 different jobs in our pay plan.

The Personnel Management Division develops our rules, audits all state agencies to assure that they are in compliance with the rules, and advises agency human resource directors. They currently have 1 secretary and 7 professional employees.

Our Appeals Division has 5 attorneys to hear and decide all Civil Service Appeals and 3 legal secretaries. In 1996, we had 563 appeals, and 34 were overturned.

Our Management Information Division has 8 professional employees who are responsible for all automation of the department as well as 12 clerical employees who maintain the official personnel records of all classified state employees.

In recent years, we have had very little money to get training ourselves. In addition, our salaries have never been high enough for us to recruit Industrial or Organizational Psychologists. We hire college graduates who learn Human Resource Management on the job. So you can see how we could use some interns.

When I got home from IPMAAC that summer, I began making appointments with professors in Human Resource Development, Industrial/Organizational Psychology, and Organizational Behavior at the universities in our area. When I went to see the professors I discussed my list of potential projects for interns as well as the questions I had. What would the university expect from Civil Service? Would the interns get academic credit for their work? What kind of oversight would the professor provide? What kind of feedback would the university expect? How much would we have to pay? How long would the interns be with us and how many hours would they work for us each week?

The results of my visits were varied. With one professor of Human Resource Development, there was no match and I have not heard from him again.

With the person responsible for interns at one university, I established a relationship so that she continuously sent me resumes of her students. We interviewed the ones we were interested in and referred others to other state agencies who were looking for interns. These interviews were an education for me because I learned what kinds of things interns were interested in and what kinds of things they really did not want to do. I ended up getting someone on my own staff to do the Internet and Labor projects because I could not find an intern who was either interested in or comfortable with those projects.

We actually placed a third Human Resource Management professor's college Senior as a student worker in our recruiting office for almost a year. This was at a time when we did not have authority to fill a position, but we did have some salary money. So we were able to get some help, pay an hourly wage with no benefits, and the student was able to get valuable experience. When the internship ended, she wanted to work for us and we wanted her; but we still had no vacancy, so we helped her find a job elsewhere in state government

With the fourth professor, I hit a gold mine, Within a week of our meeting, 3 of his doctoral candidates had called me. Because the three students were in New Orleans and I was in Baton Rouge, I traveled to our New Orleans office to conduct a group interview with them. They had an opportunity to look at my list of possible projects, and they presented me with an

internship proposal They wanted a salary of \$8-10 an hour; they wanted to work from 10-20 hours per week, and unfortunately they were all three primarily interested in performance appraisal and somewhat interested in Compensation. I was impressed with all 3 of them and wanted to hire them, but they were really only interested in one of my projects.

So I went back to Baton Rouge and worked with supervisors in our Classification and Pay Division, to come up with some more specific assignments. Two of the interns began working in October 1996; we never found a match for the third intern.

In your handouts is a copy of the contract we used with our interns. I had gotten this at IPMAAC from the LA Unified School District and modified it to meet our needs.

Our first two interns, Karen and Kristl, worked very independently researching Performance Appraisal Audits, Forced Distributions in Performance Appraisal Systems, Dual-Tracking, and Broad-Banding. They worked in their own homes, offices, or the library at Tulane University and submitted their findings to us. They sent our accountant time sheets and were paid for the hours they worked.

In January 1997, Karen left for Texas, but she had done some excellent background research which Kristl and other interns would use. She had also developed a form for us to use to evaluate the work of our interns. That form is in your handout.

Kristl's next assignment was to develop a questionnaire we could use to survey other states and all Louisiana state agencies so that we could find out exactly what they were doing with performance appraisal and to collect ideas about successful and unsuccessful performance appraisal systems.

About this time, another doctoral student heard from Kristl about the project and contacted me. We now had a snowball; interns were recruiting interns for us. Our third intern, Bob, had excellent computer skills and a lot of experience with survey design and data analysis. He and Kristl polished the questionnaires and began surveying other public jurisdictions. They used the phones, fax machine, and supplies in our New Orleans office to keep their costs down.

One of the most exciting things for me occurred when Kristl and Bob gave me their analysis of all the questionnaires we had gotten back from all the state agencies in Louisiana. I had had these stacks of 50 completed questionnaires sitting in my office for weeks with no time or staff to analyze them. This is one of the great benefits of hiring interns. My staff is fully occupied with day-to-day tasks. Bob and Kristl were able to devote their energies entirely to the project.

Bob and Kristl synthesized the data and gave me their recommendations for a new performance appraisal system for the state of Louisiana. They also evaluated systems we were considering and pointed out the strengths and weaknesses.

Because they were in New Orleans and I was in Baton Rouge, most of our contact was on the phone or via fax or mail, but one of us drove to the others when we needed to get together. We paid the interns' travel expenses.

In the spring of 96, Kristl left for Texas, but before she left she had recruited another classmate. Our fourth intern, Jodi, came to work with Bob. This overlapping pattern of employment has provided a relatively seamless and natural system of orientation among the interns themselves. Each intern got to work with a more experienced intern before being abandoned.

Bob and Jodi designed the prototype for the new performance appraisal form, and he decided he would like a full time job with us and we were able to hire him.

In May or June of 96, we realized that we needed to hire a well-known and highly respected firm with the connections and resources necessary to help us overcome the hurdles of introducing and implementing such a big change in Louisiana State Government. We also knew that if we could not get the necessary funding and support from the new Governor's administration, we would not be able to succeed no matter how good our product was. Fortunately, our director was able to get \$50,000; and Jodi, Bob and I met with our chosen consultants. The consultants were delighted with the expertise as well as the product that Bob and Jodi brought to the project

Shortly after that first meeting with the consultants, Bob got a university teaching offer he could not refuse.

In the fall of 96, we gave 3 focus groups of State employees three versions of Bob and Jodi's performance planning and review form. We asked the employees to perform a mock review of one of their subordinates using each of the forms. Jodi used their comments regarding format preferences, final score calculations, and similar issues to draft the version of the form to be used in the pilot.

Jodi worked very closely with the consultants to design the training manual to be used for the pilot. The pilot training was conducted in three cities with 100 supervisors and Jodi developed a set of Frequently asked Questions and Answers from those sessions that would ultimately be used in training.

After the pilot, Jodi took all of the data from both the actual performance planning and review forms used in the pilot and from supervisor and employee questionnaires and made recommendations based on the results of the pilot. She met with us; we made as many changes as we thought were needed and we were ready to revise the training materials for implementation by July 1, 1997.

Because the director of statewide training was interested in distance learning, he convinced us to video tape 90 minutes of the essential aspects of the training. We had 13,000 supervisors both

classified and unclassified to train, and he was concerned about the consistency of the training. Plus he was willing to pay for the video tape.

Consequently Jodi and I worked together constantly during the first 3 weeks of April to get the script, slides and training materials ready to film the video tape and to train the trainers.

Now I would like to show you 8 minutes of what our interns did.