



Q: What is a Civic Houston internship?

A: The University of Houston's Hobby School of Public Affairs (HSPA) offers University of Houston (UH) undergraduate students an opportunity to gain public service experience in the Houston area through the **Civic Houston Internship Program (CHIP)**. 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 emphasis. The program is offered during the fall and spring semesters.

The Civic Houston Internship Program offers many benefits to students and participating offices:

- Creates a "real world" working environment for students interested in public service
- Allows students opportunities to develop valuable job skills and enhance interpersonal abilities
- Presents networking and mentorship prospects to both the student and the host office
- Promotes ties between the academic community and the public sector
- Provides offices with engaged students who can assist with daily operations and special projects
- Gives an office a way to get to know a potential staffer without a long-term commitment

Q: How many hours do the interns work and when?

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.* For example, a student who has morning classes on Tuesday and Thursday may ask to schedule 4 hours on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons (1.00 – 5.00 pm). Or a student without any Friday classes may ask to work an 8 hour day on Fridays. Again, the schedule is entirely between the office manager and the student. But we do ask that offices be flexible with their intern's work schedule during exams.

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).

Q: Is the internship paid?

A: The part-time Houston internship is unpaid. However, we do ask that offices cover parking costs if free parking is not available.

Q: What are the eligibility requirements for the interns?

A: UH sophomores, juniors and seniors will be considered for admission to the program. 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. Past interns have had GPAs ranging from 2.25 to 4.0; however a 2.5 GPA is the general threshold, with the majority of accepted students having a 3.0 GPA and higher.

An applicant does not have to have previous experience working in politics or government but is required to present themselves in a professional manner. Experience in government or politics is less important than possessing a desire to learn about the political process and a willingness to work hard. It is our opinion 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. Classroom research skills may assist an intern in compiling a report for an elected official. Experience gained while participating in campus activities could provide the intern with skills to coordinate projects or events.

Strong writing and speaking skills and computer proficiencies are always in demand with the host offices so these attributes are ranked high. Bilingual ability, especially in Spanish and Vietnamese, is also considered an advantage, particularly regarding placement in certain offices.

Q: How are the interns selected?

A: Each intern candidate submits an application including a written essay, a transcript and a resume. Each applicant is then scheduled for an interview with the program director or coordinator, which generally takes 30 minutes to an hour. Upon acceptance to the program, the intern is enrolled in the accompanying academic course. CHIP interns earn 3 hours academic credit (political science or public policy at UH).

Q: If the interns are enrolled in an academic course, do they receive a grade for their work?

A: Yes. The academic hours earned count in the same manner as other courses so the intern must pay tuition for the hours, perform the minimum required number of hours during the semester (112), attend 4 class sessions (usually on Friday afternoons) and complete the written assignments. The course grade is computed as follows: Research paper 50%; Performance evaluation (completed by the intern's office supervisor) 25%; Activity journal (a written account of activities and responsibilities) 15%; and Participation in class sessions 10%.

Q: How are the interns assigned to offices?

A: The Civic Houston Internship Program (formerly known as the Local Government Internship Program) has been in existence since 1996 and has placed over 1,700 students in Houston area offices. The internship director has extensive experience in human resource management and governmental relations. Student factors considered in assignments include the following: 1) Policy interests; 2) Partisanship and ideology; 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 (keep in mind that most students live relatively close to campus so it is sometimes difficult to place interns in outlying suburban areas); and 6) Specific office requests.

Special requests and feedback by the offices are also significant factors in the assignment process so input on the office request form is very important.

In addition, with the information from the interns' activity journals and class discussions, we have a general idea of how various offices utilize their interns. While there are differing variables (for example, staff turnover; what day of the week an intern works; the level of skill that the intern possesses, etc), a pattern of intern responsibilities and activities usually emerges in any given office. Consider the following hypothetical office situations. Office A tends to give their interns a special project (after they have demonstrated basic competence at work). Office B frequently assigns the intern to be with the elected official much of the time (this could be driving the official to events; taking notes at a meeting; acting as the advance person, etc). Office C expects their intern to do a substantial amount of clerical work. Considering these 3 scenarios, we may place a student with high GPA, interpersonal skills and demonstrated organizational abilities to Office A or Office B, while a student with less professional experience would likely be assigned to Office C.

Q: Our government official has an upcoming election. Can an intern work on a campaign?

A: Yes, there are no campaign restrictions since the interns are unpaid. Some offices split the intern's time between government and campaign offices or will place their intern solely on the campaign.

Q: What kind of responsibilities do CHIP interns routinely get?

A: It is anticipated that most interns will be expected to do clerical work, particularly in the early weeks of their assignment. However since this is an upper level political science course and due to their unpaid status (keep in mind that many of them could get paid \$10 or more an hour for clerical work), we expect the majority of interns to also be assigned more substantial responsibilities. For example, if an office needs assistance with a web development project and their intern has HTML experience, the intern could be assigned a special web assignment. Or consider a student with exceptionally strong writing skills. Instead of having a gifted writer spending 75% of their time filing, the intern could be given writing assignments such as drafting constituent responses, writing proclamations, assisting with talking points, etc. Any government intern — especially one that is working only 8 hours a week — can't expect to be taking the lead in important projects, but with a good work ethic, diligence and enthusiasm, they should expect increasing responsibility as their internship progresses.

Q: Do I need to put together a detailed job description for the intern or can work be assigned on an as needed basis?

A: As long as the intern is kept busy, how the responsibilities are designated is at the office's discretion. However, it is often helpful to have a general job description available on the intern's first day.

Q: We frequently need errands done throughout the city. We can also use help at one of our other offices occasionally. Can an intern work off-site?

A: Possibly. Since this is an unpaid internship, interns are not expected to cover additional expenses such as gas on travel beyond their assigned office location. Also, an increasing number of students ride the bus so alternate locations are not always feasible. However it is certainly acceptable if a satisfactory arrangement can be made between the intern and the office manager.

Q: What if an intern proves to be a bad fit for our office?

A: This rarely happens (thankfully!) but if it does, the Hobby School will make other arrangements for the student.

Q: We need an intern more than 8 hours per week. Is this possible?

A: Interns are frequently paid to work additional hours. This is between the office manager and the intern.

Q: We had a terrific intern last semester and she plans to participate in the program again. Can we request her?

A: Yes. If interns want to return to their previous office, the Hobby School will contact the office to make sure that they would like to have the intern re-assigned to them. Conversely if an office requests a specific student, the Hobby School will confirm the intern's interest in returning to that office.

Q: Can we request more than one intern?

A: Yes. However we try to fulfill all requests whenever possible before assigning additional intern(s) to an office.

Q: Are we guaranteed an intern if we request one?

A: Unfortunately no. The demand for interns usually exceeds the supply each semester. Also, due to all the variables made in assigning interns – the student's partisanship, where they live, what special skills an office has requested, etc. – it is impossible to guarantee all requests every semester.

Q: How do we request a Civic Houston Intern?

A: Invitation emails are sent to Houston based offices to participate in the program approximately 6-8 weeks before the fall and spring semesters. A request form is included and it should be completed and submitted by the specified deadline. The Hobby School will confirm your request as soon as it is received and will notify interested offices after assignments are finalized.

Still have questions? Contact us!

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