

# CASNR offers a unique internship

Every spring semester, one Oklahoma State University student gets the chance to work up close and personal with legislators and lobbyists.

For the past 26 years, the Oklahoma House and Senate agricultural committees have hosted one intern from the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources to be an active participant in the spring legislative session.

CASNR is the only college in Oklahoma with an internship that gives students the opportunity to work with entire committees at the state capitol.

A majority of the intern's time is spent taking notes, doing research and getting a chance to be part of the nuts and bolts of daily activities, said state Sen. Paul Muegge of the Senate agriculture and rural development committee.

Interns are able to participate in various daily tasks to get a taste of what is going on behind the office doors of elected officials.

"I was able to do a lot of different things, including working with bills and policy, working with constituency groups and doing research and bill summaries," said Ryan McMullen, 2001 legislative intern. "I had a number of networking opportunities that will be a great help in the future."

If people were more involved and understood the legislative processes better, they would realize the impact the government has on their lives, said Mary Penick, 2002 legislative intern.

"Until I started this internship, I didn't realize all the important affects the governmental processes have on me," said Penick.

This internship is not designed to prepare students for a political career, said Muegge. Although it is good experience for those who wish to run for an elected office, interns make their own decisions in regard to their future careers. Most of them tend to stay in the field of agriculture because of where they come from, he said.

"Farming is good training for politics because you never know what is going to happen the next day in either profession," said Muegge.

In the case of this internship, an agricultural background can simply be used as a springboard to help relate to people, said Penick.

"I don't know what percentage of the bills passed have a direct impact on agriculture in a state like Oklahoma, but it is quite a few," said Ed Miller, CASNR associate dean. "If you consider all of the bills passed that have at least an indirect influence on agriculture, it would be the majority."

The agricultural legislative internship also gives students the unique chance to add the views of the younger generation to the legislative process.

"My philosophy is that when our founders created this government they wanted to create legislative bodies that represented the entire population," said McMullen. "It is important to have doctors, lawyers, farmers and businessmen, but at the same time, a diverse age range is needed. It's healthy to have the opinions of all ages when making important decisions that affect all of us."

Currently, only one intern is selected for each spring legislative term. However, there is room for growth within this program, and it would be possible to support more than one intern at a time in the future, said Miller. It depends on having legislators who are willing to nurture the interns and having private funds to support the interns' expenses, he said.

The application process is a competitive one, said McMullen. The intern is selected by a committee based on the applications, résumés and interviews.



Mary Penick, 2002 legislative intern, takes a break from her busy schedule at the state capitol. Penick spends her days assisting the Senate and House agriculture and rural development committees in many ways. (Photo by Rachel Young)

A student who is serious about becoming the legislative intern needs to have good communication skills, be professional and should be involved in campus activities, said state Rep. James Covey of the House agriculture and rural development committee.

“The interns really have to be self-motivated; they will have a lot of time on their hands at the capitol when not much is going on,” said Miller. “So they could either sit in their office and read magazines or they could go down to the library, talk to lobbyists or even talk to legislators not involved with the agricultural committees to learn more about their other interests.”

The internship requires the student to take the spring semester off and move to Oklahoma City. The student participating in the spring 2002 internship received three credit hours and a \$3,200 scholarship from several sponsors.

A sophomore or junior level student is usually preferred for this internship. Applications are available by mid-September in 136 Agricultural Hall and are due back at the end of October.

After the applications have been reviewed, the top candidates for the position are selected to go through an interview process. The interview process consists of a group interview with the associate dean, assistant dean, director of student career services, coordinator of academic programs and the previous intern.

The intern we choose for this position is highly visible, said Miller.

“We have to remember the legislators’ view of our col-

lege is often shaped by that one intern,” said Miller. “The person we choose is a representative of our entire college.”

Jami McAnulty Longacre, 1993 agricultural economics graduate, was the agricultural legislative intern in the spring of 1992. She credits her success after college to this internship experience.

“My experience as a legislative intern absolutely laid the foundation for my current career as a lobbyist,” said Longacre. “I had no idea what I wanted to do after college before I had this opportunity.”

Longacre said the contacts she made during her internship resulted in many of her career opportunities.

The benefits of this legislative internship can be evaluated both by the knowledge gained and the valuable connections that can be made.

“The most exciting part of this experience was the people I got to work with,” said McMullen. “I was impressed with the dedication of our elected officials and staff.”

This internship program has been made successful through the hard work and cooperation of OSU and the agricultural legislators.

“We have donors who believe in this program,” said Miller. “It is a long-term investment; people realize these students will understand the agricultural legislative processes and someday become leaders.”

With the goal of creating great leaders, CASNR and the House and Senate agriculture and rural development committees are working to help students gain a promising future.

◆ *By Rachel Young, Bartlesville, Okla.*