

Criminal Justice Internships at Valdosta State University

Program Information

What is a Criminal Justice internship? An internship is an opportunity for a student to gain field experience through limited participant observation by working with a Criminal Justice agency/organization. The amount of actual participation will depend on the various department's needs and policies. Students will never be allowed to conduct operations that they are not certified to do, e.g., make an arrest. However, they might very well have the opportunity to observe officers engage in field operations. The internship allows the student to gain first-hand knowledge about what it is like to work in a specific Criminal Justice agency.

What are the benefits of a CJ Internship? First of all it's a great learning experience! It's a terrific way for a student to expand their education outside the classroom. In many ways the internship is like an extended field trip, but one with more responsibility and thus more opportunity for learning. Students obtain first-hand knowledge about the day to day functions of a particular agency. They get a personal view of what it is like to work as a police or probation officer, a district attorney, a criminal defense lawyer, a corrections counselor, or a juvenile justice professional. A successful internship is a great resume builder, especially for traditional students whose work experiences may be somewhat limited. An internship is a way to begin networking, students will meet successful criminal justice professionals as they go about their everyday routines. Not only will you gain from personal interactions and interviews with these people, many times they will agree to become a reference for you, this is not an opportunity easily made in a typical university setting. Insiders may also have tips about upcoming jobs. While an internship is certainly not a guarantee of a later placement, many students "got their foot in the door" by completing successful internships. An internship is also an opportunity for potential employers to evaluate YOUR work habits and social skills.

Who is eligible for CJ Internship? The eligibility requirements are as follows: the applicant must be a CJ major with a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher, they must have permission of their academic advisor, and the Director of the CJ Internship program; application forms must be filled out and returned to Dr. Prine no later than midterm of the semester prior to the internship. Section A is for three semester hours of credit and Section B is for six. The student must have accumulated a minimum of 60 semester hours of credit, including CRJU 1100, Introduction to Criminal Justice, and nine additional hours of CJ course work. Other specific academic requirements will be determined by the nature of the field agency, e.g., CRJU 4100, Survey of Law Enforcement is a requirement to intern with law enforcement agencies.

In addition, CJ Agencies will not accept anyone that they wouldn't consider hiring. In other words students will have to pass a background investigation. ANY STUDENT WHO ATTEMPTS TO DECEIVE EITHER THE INTERNSHIP COORDINATOR OR THE CJ AGENCY DURING THE APPLICATION PROCESS WILL BE DENIED AN INTERNSHIP. IF THE DECEPTION IS UNCOVERED AFTER PLACEMENT THE STUDENT WILL RECEIVE AN AUTOMATIC U AND MAY VERY WELL FACE DISCIPLINARY CHARGES FROM THE DEPARTMENT AND THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES.

What is the time commitment per week? There are two options for students. CRJU 4910 A, for three semester hours of credit, requires a minimum of 150 contact hours with the agency/organization. Spread over the course of the fifteen week Spring semester this equates to an average of 10 hours weekly.

CRJU 4910 B requires a minimum of 300 contact hours for 6 semester hours of credit. Over the course of a fifteen week semester this means an average of 20 agency contact hours weekly.

What types of agencies participate? A wide variety of agencies participate in intern programs including: Office of Juvenile Justice (several locations including the Valdosta Office), District Attorneys' (generally these Interns are assigned to the Victim/Witness Assistance programs), Probation, Parole, Police Departments, Sheriff's Departments, State Corrections (generally these are limited to the Counseling Unit), Social Security Administration, Victim's Assistance Programs, Department of Family and Children's Services, Georgia State Patrol, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (very competitive). Keep in mind that filling out an application doesn't guarantee placement, some internships are highly competitive and spaces are limited. Currently, most federal placements will require students to live and work in the Atlanta or some other metropolitan area. One of the most prestigious Internships in our area is at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glynco, Ga. This is a highly competitive placement with applicants from all over the U.S., not only must the student have an outstanding GPA they must apply several months in advance. Check the FLETC website for specific dates.

PLACEMENTS ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE VALDOSTA/LOWNDES COUNTY AREA. Students who spend the Summer Sessions back home may find suitable agency placement closer to their residence. Internships are also available for students who are taking courses on-line.

What are the academic expectations? All interns must keep a **weekly journal**. The journal will summarize the students experiences for each week of work completed. As a general rule there will be 15 weekly reports required in the Spring and Fall semesters and 10-12 in the Summer.

What type of information is appropriate for the weekly reports? Weekly reports should be clear, concise, and proofread. Weekly reports are mainly descriptive in nature. In Anthropological terms you are an Observer/Participant. Your main role is a university student, you are observing the functions of a CJ agency/office and you are a reporter. Your secondary role as participant is to help carry out the functions of your agency/office. In a sense you are doing fieldwork, qualitative research if you will, in a CJ environment. You should report what interests you and is relevant to the study of CJ. Were you a part of an interesting conversation related to policies/procedures? Did you learn something new today? Did you attend an interview, an arrest, a court case? Did you help someone in the office accomplish a task? Did you assist a victim, citizen, or client with specific information or aid? All of these items and more are relevant to your weekly observations. In order to keep your observations accurate and detailed, it is recommended that students keep a daily journal of their internship experiences.

In addition to the journal the student will construct a Term Paper which will include: a brief history of the agency, an overview of the agency (mission statement, jurisdiction, and organization), and an analysis of the agency which may include suggestions for improvement or reform based upon the internship experience. In addition, the student is expected to apply course concepts to their internship experience. E.g, if the internship is with a law enforcement agency the student should apply principles and concepts gained from CRJU 1100 Introduction to Criminal Justice and 2100 Survey of Law Enforcement, to their experiences. However, other coursework may be equally relevant e.g., CRJU 3300 Criminal Law, CRJU 3310 Criminal Procedure, and CRJU 3700 Ethics in Criminal Justice. You should place these observations within your analysis section.

What is the code of conduct for students? Each student intern **MUST** abide by the following rules of conduct:

- 1) Always show up for work on time and dressed in an appropriate fashion. If you have to miss a day due to illness, family emergency or other reasonable excuse you must notify your agency supervisor in advance or ASAP depending on the circumstances. Unexcused absences will result in a grade of U (Unsatisfactory).
- 2) You should never volunteer for work that you are not qualified to do, you do not make arrests and you do not carry firearms.
- 3) You must respect all the rules pertaining to agency information. You never discuss the elements of cases or records and you never share that information with anyone outside the agency. You must maintain the agency's protocol on confidential information. Any violation of confidentiality rules will result in an immediate dismissal and may include additional sanctions from the agency.
- 4) You must avoid participating in office "gossip" and you should not show favoritism toward any of the people that you work with. Fraternalizing with agency personnel is not allowed, simply put, you do not date the people that you work with at any time during your internship. If you experience any problems during your internship you should report those ASAP to your agency supervisor and the intern director.
- 5) You must conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times. Behavioral standards are different in CJ agencies compared to academic institutions. E.g., falling asleep in class may get you a scolding from a Professor but taking a nap while "on duty" in an Internship will get you dismissed.
- 6) If you are dismissed from an Agency for cause (you have violated either the agencies' or VSU's rules of conduct) then you will receive a "U" Unsatisfactory for your final grade. There are no exceptions a dismissal will result in a grade of Unsatisfactory.

Are students paid for their services? As a general rule students are **NOT** paid for their work either by the agency or the Criminal Justice Program at VSU. Occasionally interns will be offered a stipend by an agency, but these are relatively rare. Students should not approach agencies with the expectation of financial award. However, there is no rule that prevents interns from receiving compensation from the sponsoring agency.

When should students apply? Due to the amount of time needed to complete background investigations students should apply early, **applications should be completed no later than two weeks prior to the mid-term of the semester PRIOR to the semester of the internship.**

For more information and/or applications: Address all inquiries to Dr. R.K. Prine, VSU Nevins Hall 1008, e-mail rkprine@valdosta.edu, and postal address is: Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice, VSU, Valdosta, GA 31698