

# Step on It

November 10, 2004

Joint Program in Survey  
Methodology Junior Fellow  
Program

[www.jpsm.umd.edu/fellows\\_new](http://www.jpsm.umd.edu/fellows_new)

Student Internships at the U.S.  
Census Bureau

[www.census.gov/hrd/www/jobs/student.html](http://www.census.gov/hrd/www/jobs/student.html)

University of Wisconsin  
Psychology Research Experience  
Program, for underrepresented  
and first generation college  
students

<http://psych.wisc.edu/ugstudies/prepProgram.html>

NSF-sponsored, Research  
Experiences for Undergraduates  
program

[www.nsf.gov/home/crssprgm/reu](http://www.nsf.gov/home/crssprgm/reu)

Summer Internship Program in  
Biomedical Research at NIH  
[www.training.nih.gov/student/ternship/internship.asp](http://www.training.nih.gov/student/ternship/internship.asp)

APA Summer Science Institute  
for “rising” sophomores and  
juniors

[www.apa.org/science/ssi.html](http://www.apa.org/science/ssi.html)

Internship opportunities for 2005  
in the social and natural sciences  
[www.rit.edu/~gtfsbi/Symp/calpha20011.htm](http://www.rit.edu/~gtfsbi/Symp/calpha20011.htm)

Last December, half-way through my sophomore year at the University of Michigan, I started to worry about where I would work the following summer. My problem was one that thousands of students face each year. If I continued to live in Ann Arbor, Michigan, then most of my pay would be used to support myself. But if I went home to my small town, I could relive the horror of my previous summer, when I painted houses for 50 hours a week. (Not that there are jobs painting houses in my town; my brother, a

finance major, started the business so that he would have a job.) I had heard about internships, but I associated them with engineering and business students (i.e., students who had “real” skills).

As luck would have it, I stumbled across a flier in the undergraduate research office. Fliers abound there, but this one caught my attention because it was the first paid internship for social science students I had seen. I wasn’t optimistic about being chosen, however. The internship was in Washington, DC, and I was sure that any DC internship, paid or not, would be populated by would-be lawyers and economic analysts. Sometimes, though, it’s good to be wrong, and I ended up having the most exciting summer of my life.

As a Joint Program in Survey Methodology junior fellow, I had a beautiful apartment at George Washington University (for free!), a full-time job at the Census Bureau (paid!), and about 35 other interns with whom I could romp around the city for 11 weeks. In addition to working at one of the several federal statistical agencies, each of us attended seminars on survey methodology at the University of Maryland, where we learned the basics from some of the most esteemed professionals in the field. It seemed too good to be true – so much so that a group of us broke out into uncontrollable laughter when we reflected on our summer. For some reason, it struck our funny bones that 35 students from around the country took a stab in the dark by filling out an application, only to wake up pampered beyond all expectation in the heart of DC. Now don’t get me wrong. We did work full-time (in cubicles, too – the movie Office Space never meant so much to me), but that was the most rewarding part of the summer.

In between all of the play time, I managed to accomplish my ultimate goal, which was to conduct research. Working with another junior fellow, I carried out an entire project and produced a report that may influence the 2010 Census. I left DC feeling exhilarated and accomplished.

What lessons are there for psychology majors from my summer experience? First, internships are not as difficult to land as you may think. My program accepted fewer than 25 percent of its applicants, which is surprisingly high considering how much it has to offer. Second, “internship” is not synonymous with “slave labor.” Certainly grunt-work was part of the job, but I was given as much responsibility and independence as my skills allowed. Third, what’s important is that you find a good fit for your interests: I wanted to learn more about survey research, and internships offer myriad opportunities. If you’re lucky, yours will allow you to make extra cash or explore a new city. But even if the circumstances are not ideal, you’ll learn more about what you do (or don’t) want to do in the future and have a meaningful job to add to your resumé. Fourth, your experiences will help you plan for graduate school. And finally, let’s not forget the most important perk of an internship: the thrill of keeping your paintbrushes and aprons locked up for at least another year.