

Internship Review

If you asked me at the very beginning of this summer, it wouldn't take long for you to realize that I wasn't really looking forward to my summer political internship with the Taiwanese American Citizens League. It was originally because I felt that my personality wouldn't be suitable for the field of politics, and the only reason why I decided to take on this internship is to verify that that was, in fact, the case. However, after working in State Senator Gil Cedillos' office, and by participating in the lobbying trip that was organized by TACL, I was able to learn how the political system works in the State level, and by doing so, I had a lot of fun.

Although I had a general idea of how the government worked through my AP US History class back in high school, it wasn't until I was placed in a State Senator's office did I have a better understanding of how laws were made, and the political strategies that were used to get these bills passed. I also realized that in legislative offices, especially in the district offices, the staffers are required to deal with a lot of casework that revolves around helping constituents with their problems. It is through this process, they are able to acquire a better understanding of what the people they are representing are experiencing, allowing them to have a better idea of what kind of laws should be passed. From my experiences working in the elected office, I realized how important it is to have a strong staff. The elected member is only a small part of the team. Although his/her political views and leadership is important, without a strong staff, the elected member wouldn't be able to fully serve their constituents.

The Sacramento project that we did also played a huge part in my whole intern experience. The reason why we went up to Sacramento was to lobby for Assemblymember Ted Lieu's Assembly Bill 295, a bill that would add ten new Asian/Pacific Islander American categories to the existing list of APIAs on state agency surveys. The main purpose of the bill is to dispel the Model Minority Myth—the whole misconception that Asian Americans are doing better than other ethnic/racial groups in education and on the socio-economic ladder. Although it is true that when the state collects data on Asian Americans as a whole, they are generally always in the middle-upper half of the socio-economic ladder, and they always have the highest educational attainment rate, but that is not necessarily the case for *all* Asian/Pacific Islander Americans. Numerous studies have shown that a lot of APIAs are not living up to be the Model Minority. By having a disaggregated data collection process, the government will be able to specifically see the problems that some of these ethnic communities, which are neglected through the existing data collection process, are facing.

One of the most memorable things I've done when I was up in Sacramento was testifying in front of the Senate Appropriations Committee. It was really lucky for us to arrive in the Capitol when the AB 295 was being heard. Although I was nervous and wasn't as prepared as I wanted to be when I was speaking, I was able to argue strongly in support for the bill by utilizing the Model Minority Myth. Unfortunately, since none of the state agencies have an accurate estimate on how much the bill would cost to implement, the bill is still currently in suspense in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

I am definitely glad that I participated in this TACL political internship. Not only did I learn a lot about the ins and outs of politics, I also figured out a more specific direction for me in the future. After going up to Sacramento, I've realized that dealing with legislature that is aimed to solve social issues is something that I wouldn't mind doing for the rest of my life. I really enjoyed the whole lobbying process, and I loved talking about the bill that we had to lobby for. The workshops that TACL had during weekends were also very helpful for me after I learned that policy might be a possible career option. Kristine, our intern coordinator, did a great job at trying to get Taiwanese American speakers that are involved in all areas in politics to come in, and explain how they got to where they were. This gave me a general idea of what I needed to do in the future if I wanted to get to where they were. Being part of this internship not only enhanced my understanding of the world of politics, but it also provided me opportunities to network with people, build connections that would be beneficial for my future.

Although I really enjoyed the program, there were definitely things that I wished it could have been done differently. The first complaint I had was definitely during the training session we had at the very beginning of our internship. I felt like we could have spent more time during the session going over some office skills that we would be using when we work in our elected offices. The information that we went over during the training session was definitely important, and I really learned a lot from it, but I didn't really feel confident when I went to my office the first day, especially since this is my first time working in any kind of office. Eventually I did learn all the skills I needed by being in the office, I just feel that by having that initial preparation would have definitely made my first week a lot easier.

Overall, I did have a great experience, and I did learn a lot. I would definitely miss the friendships that I've established through the TACL political program. Although it's nothing to be sad about because I know I will be seeing these people again when I decide to help out the program in the future.