Sac State program prepares public service professionals

The focus on problem-solving at Sacramento State’s California Executive Fellowship Program is making a positive difference. No wonder Vault.com rates it as one of the nation’s top 10 internship programs.

Sponsored by the Center for California Studies at Sacramento State, the program provides public service experience for a select cadre of graduate students who serve as full-time staff members in executive branch offices, preparing individuals for public service and leadership positions through a blend of academic training and practical, hands-on experience. During their 10-month stint, which ends Friday, Aug. 17, the Fellows are split into three teams of six to work on public policy issues.

This year the teams served as consultants for state agencies, including CaliforniaVolunteers, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, the California Energy Commission and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy.

Team projects focused on specific problems and potential solutions. A project manager from the state guided each team, but the Fellows were responsible for managing their projects daily and delivered their findings to their clients at public meetings in June.

The most recent project examined the potential impact of increased recreation and tourism in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The demands on Delta resources concerned a complex mix of stakeholders working to advance competing interests. Delta residents were specifically worried about trespassing, dumping, vandalism and theft. The six-member Fellows team was tasked with seeking coexistence between those looking to protect the land and those wishing to enjoy it.

“As government and the private sector struggle to do more with less in a global economy, the ability to manage multiple projects from start to finish becomes increasingly a mandatory skill,” program director Mark Grisby says.
After consulting with law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders, the team crafted a report for the Delta Conservancy Board. That report reflected differing points of view and recommended possible remedies to address residents’ concerns about usage, liability and the means to finance additional security.

A second project involved finding cost-effective ways to reduce recidivism among the state prison population. The team identified roadblocks that prevent volunteer access to prisons and cited prison programs that work.

The Fellows surveyed wardens, inmates, volunteer coordinators and volunteers. Using the survey’s results, they recommended streamlining the volunteer process and implementing volunteer coordination programs. The report also found that stakeholders believed behavioral and life skills programs to be most effective in reducing recidivism.

“The team identified simple and ready-to-implement solutions to improve the use of the department’s volunteers as well as providing long-term solutions,” says Matthew Cate, secretary of the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. He commended “the Fellows who helped in this very important and worthwhile project that can change lives for the better and improve public safety.”

Another project team helped the California Energy Commission and the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research learn more about small-scale energy generation in California. The Fellows interviewed project developers, local officials and utility company staff members in addition to reviewing public documents and news reports. In looking at 14 energy projects statewide, the team focused on procurement, siting, permitting, the interconnection process and necessary operating agreements, and financing.

The Fellows concluded that further analysis may be needed regarding the state of distributed energy generation in California and that the CEC may need to look for data gaps in the types of projects studied as well as key issues. The report recommended that further tracking identify challenges faced by developers in bringing projects online to prompt regulatory agencies to streamline the approval process.

“Every Executive Fellow placed with us has provided an immeasurable benefit to our organization, through their extraordinary work and research,” says Karen Baker, state secretary of Service and Volunteering.

“By adding the Professional Academic Project to the Fellows’ experience, two great things have happened: The state has a project management resource team that can help spur innovation, while Fellows gain invaluable team-building skills and professional development.”

For additional information about the program: [www.csus.edu/calst/executive_fellowship_program.html](http://www.csus.edu/calst/executive_fellowship_program.html). For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office (916) 278-6156.
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