The Gregg and Livingston Harper Congressional Internship Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities
(The Harper Intern Program)

FALL 2023

History

- Established by Rep. Gregg Harper in 2010 as the Congressional Internship Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and was renamed in 2018.
- Rep. Harpers' advocacy was inspired by his son Livingston, and he sponsored many pieces of legislation to help those with disabilities.
- Goal: To help individuals grow and lead to the alumni of the program being hired on the Hill.
- The program works with George Mason University's LIFE program.
- To date, nearly 200 offices from the House and Senate have participated.

Mason LIFE
Harper Internship Overview

George Mason University

What is Mason LIFE?

- LIFE stands for Learning into Future Environments

- Four-year inclusive post-secondary, non-degree program.
- Educates students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Consists of 4 components:
  - Employment
  - Academics – Foundational & Exploration (University) Courses
  - Community Involvement
  - Independent Living

- As a certificate program, we mirror the degree-seeking experience.

Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

- Impairment of general mental abilities that impact adaptive functioning in three areas:
  - Conceptual
    - Language, Reading, Writing, Math, Reasoning, Knowledge, Memory
  - Social
    - Empathy, Social Judgement, Interpersonal Communication Skills
  - Practical
    - Self-Regulation and Executive Functioning

American Psychiatric Association –
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)

About LIFE Students:

- 2022-2023 Academic Year
  - 50 Students participating
  - Ages 18-27

- Students love the college experience:
  - Learning & trying new things
  - Hanging out with friends on and off campus
    - Movies
    - Concerts
    - Bowling
    - Sport Events

- Take pride in accomplishments and achieving independence

Overview of Employment Component

- Supports students in learning job-specific tasks, general employee responsibilities, and social behaviors appropriate for work environment
- Aids in development of professional portfolio
- Students placed in numerous settings on and off campus:
  - GMU President's office
  - Capitol Hill offices
  - Gyms
  - Bakery
  - Pet Spaw
  - Child Care
  - UPS

- Worksite placements based on numerous factors such as:
  - Skill level
  - Employment interest
  - Needs of Employer
  - Schedules
- Support Staff may be assigned based on intern's individualized needs, with ultimate goal of workplace independence

Role of Support Staff

- Support Staff are assigned to an intern based on individual need.

- Support Staff are current undergraduate or graduate students at George Mason University
  - Staff are trained upon hiring

- Support Staff serve two important purposes:
  - Support interns in learning job-specific tasks, general employee responsibilities, and social behaviors appropriate for the work environment
  - Supports the office in developing a relationship with the intern, learning how the individual learns/works best, and being a point of contact for questions or concerns within the work environment

What can a LIFE Intern do for you?

- Support your office by providing services in an area of need
- Bring a fresh perspective, unique skill set, and new ideas to your office
- Provide an opportunity for staff members of your office to increase their professional development by mentoring an intern
- Provide an opportunity to learn and increase your awareness about individuals with disabilities
- Allow for an opportunity to evaluate current office trainings, and day-to-day processes to ensure you are being inclusive
    - Showcase commitment to Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

What can you do for a LIFE Intern?

- Provide a patient, friendly, and inclusive learning environment
- Be a role model and mentor
- Provide an opportunity for an intern to gain experience and professional skill development
- Expose an intern to the work force and allow them to explore numerous job tasks & responsibilities
- Make an impact by inspiring an intern to set goals and aspire for post- college opportunities in pursuing employment

Students' Work on the Hill

- **Students historically attend Capitol Hill offices on Fridays:**
  - 2 hours in a morning office (10am -12pm)
  - 2 hours in an afternoon office (1pm-3pm)

Capitol Hill Office Tasks

- **Students are capable of performing a variety of different work tasks.**
- **Previous examples, including, but not limited to:**
  - Data entry (constituent information)
  - Filing
  - Photocopying/scanning
  - Stuffing and sealing letters
  - Opening, sorting, distributing mail
  - Collection/distribution: mail, flag office, supply store, etc.
  - Signatures: (stamping, autopen)
  - Assisting/accompanying on tours
  - Organizing (desks, files, supplies)
- **Flexibility for additional tasks as well…**

Expectations of Worksites

- Communicate directly with intern regarding work tasks, responsibilities, feedback, etc.
  - Utilize support staff as needed
- Establish relationship with intern by building rapport
- Prepare meaningful work for intern for duration of internship
  - Provide a variety of tasks for entire shift
- Showcase patience and understanding
  - Mistakes may happen and this is how interns will learn & grow
- Utilize person-first language
  - For example: A person with autism vs. an autistic person
- Ensure there is adequate work space for student
- Communicate any large overarching concerns with Mason LIFE Staff as needed
- Commit to participation for semester period (average 15 weeks)

How Can We Be Successful Together?

- Maintain open line of communication
  - We are a team
- Be patient and understanding
- Agree to terms established in partnership
  - Work expectations for students
- Keep ultimate mission in mind:
  - We are helping a student develop and practice skills to achieve a level of independence and success in employment

Thank You!

Christopher Williams, M.A.
Employment & Adult Services Coordinator
cwilli23@gmu.edu

Aurora Klyne
Employment Liaison
aklyne@gmu.edu

https://masonlife.gmu.edu/

Spring 2023 Intern Program

- February 3rd – May 5th
- Two sessions on Fridays
  - 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
  - 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.
- Sign-up is through Google Forms
  - The link will be sent out after the briefing
  - Dear E-Colleague
  - CHA Republican Website

Spring 2023 Intern Program

- Please request a badge through the House ID office for your intern
- Volunteering for the program is a commitment to the interns

Q&A