

## For Immediate Release

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## Growing internship coop provides opportunities for SUU students

CEDAR CITY — A program originally conceived to provide internships for outdoor recreation majors is rapidly becoming the premier internship program on the Southern Utah University campus, providing trained and motivated apprentices for a broad range of public-lands agencies.

The Intergovernmental Internship Cooperative provides students with relevant, meaningful work experience leading to career opportunities while serving the needs of state and federal land and resource management agencies, IIC agency coordinator Steve McCarthy said.

The coop debuted on campus in 2007 by placing 40 interns and practicum students. Before the current year is over, the program will have supplied some 200 interns for area agencies, said Seth Ohms, IIC campus coordinator.

McCarthy serves as liaison between the university and the public-lands agencies; Ohms works with students, faculty and administrators to recruit and place interns.

Working together, McCarthy and Ohms seek to match students' needs, interests and career aspirations with the needs of public-lands agencies.

"Our goal is to give the students valuable experience while developing the future leaders and managers of our public lands," McCarthy said.

Apart from SUU, current IIC partners include the Bureau of Land Management (Color Country District, Arizona Strip District, and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument), the National Park Service (Bryce Canyon National Park, Zion National Park, Cedar Breaks National Monument, Pipe Spring National Monument, and Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument), the U.S. Forest Service (Dixie National Forest), and the Utah Department of Natural Resources (Division of Parks and Recreation and Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands).

This year, the cooperative placed 40 students with the National Park Service, 32 students with the U.S. Forest Service, 33 students with the Utah Department of Natural Resources, six students with the Bureau of Land Management, and 44 more with SUU-related programs, such as practicums and the Youth Conservation Corps.

Ohms said he expects to place another 45 students before the end of the year and anticipates significant growth in the program next year.

Administrative and agency support has been "phenomenal," he said, especially because the program fits so well into new Provost Brad Cook's vision to emphasize experiential learning.

"Given the level of interest of both the students and our agency partners, we're just at the tip of the iceberg," Ohms said. "We're tickled to death with the collaboration of our agency partners."

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As word spreads through public-lands agencies that SUU interns are well-trained and do quality work, McCarthy said more agencies are expressing interest in the program.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has already inquired about joining the cooperative in time for next year, he said.

At an Oct. 20 social that brought together interns and agency representatives, SUU students spoke fondly of their internships.

Layne Papenfuss, a junior business management major from West Jordan, said he learned early that “a great job has variety,” and added that his internship provided that.

“I learned so much from so many different people,” he said. “I applied a lot of the lessons I learned in the classroom to the internship. It was the best possible experience.”

In an internship jointly managed by the National Park Service and the BLM, Rio Franzman said he learned the differences between the two agencies and how they operate in a way that “really opened (his) eyes” to public service.

“It was hard to believe that they let a punk kid drive around in a \$45,000 truck all summer,” said Franzman, a senior zoology major from St. George, “but I learned an awful lot, and it was fun.”

Working for the Dixie National Forest as an information intern on the fire management team, Jordan Ellis, a senior communication major from Holladay, said the experience changed his career plans.

“At this time last year, I had never heard of the program,” Ellis said. “I learned about it from a public relations professor who thought I might be good at this. It has totally changed my outlook on my career in PR.”

Ellis described the networking opportunities of his internship as “incredible” and applauded the training he received.

“The first month of my internship was just learning how to do the job,” he said.

The students aren’t the only ones pleased with the results.

Terri Saa, a National Park Service employee at Cedar Breaks National Monument, said it had been “a phenomenal experience to work with these young people, to watch them grow up, seeing them fulfill some old dreams while creating some new ones. Each one of them has succeeded in a way none of us — not even them — could have imagined.”

In the midst of all that learning and growing, Saa said, the interns made valuable contributions at Cedar Breaks.

“These students have helped us accomplish things that we have wanted to do for a long time,” she said.

For example, two students spent part of the summer mapping Cedar Breaks’ wilderness. Another devised a new way to accurately count visitors.

“Mapping our wilderness has opened it up to visitors in a way that was not available to them before,” Saa said. “And counting visitors is so important for us because it’s tied directly to our funding.”

Saa said one of the Cedar Breaks interns was nicknamed “Radar” after the indispensable company clerk Radar O’Reilly in the sitcom *M\*A\*S\*H*.

“We’ve come to rely on him,” she said, “and we wonder what we’ll do without him. . . . We couldn’t run the park the way we do now without our interns.”

Steve Robinson, recreation lands staff officer for the Cedar City District of the Dixie National Forest,

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said the U.S. Forest Service has a history of looking to SUU for highly qualified people — and not just forestry, agriculture or recreation majors.

“We are interested in people across the board,” Robinson said. “Administering public lands requires a multi-disciplinarian effort, which means there’s a full range of opportunities for young people who would like to work with public-lands agencies.”

One of the attractive things about the cooperative, Robinson said, is that any student of any major can get involved.

“Our participation is based on matching students’ interests with the agency’s needs,” he said.

The program’s success has also changed the mind of one SUU faculty member about the value of internships.

Dean L. Winward, associate professor of agriculture, said he didn’t like internships because he “didn’t want anything taking away from the classroom experience.”

Several things have changed his mind, he said.

“In today’s job market, graduates are being required to have some experience just to get hired,” he said. “I now see the value of students having the kind of experience and training they get from an internship.”

Winward said he has noted a change in students when they return to the classroom from IIC internships.

“When they come back, they no longer want just a grade; they want an education,” he said. “That makes our jobs as educators much more pleasant.”

Another positive feature is the opportunity for students to “try out” for a career without making a long-term commitment.

“These programs are a little like dating,” he said. “You get to see whether you like the job, and they get to see whether they like you. It’s a win-win situation.”

Today, Winward said he is a “huge proponent” of internships.

“The students come back as better students and better citizens in the university community,” he said.

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Seth Ohms, campus coordinator of SUU’s Intergovernmental Internship Cooperative, explains how the coop has grown from 40 interns in 2007 to some 200 interns this year.