

43 JOURNALING INTERNS — TELL 'EM TO WRITE IT ALL DOWN

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chris uggen's weblog

sociology, criminology, self-indulgerly*

i supervise a fair number of criminal justice internships. i ask my students for two things: (1) a short paper applying some aspect of their liberal arts education to the experience; and, (2) a journal of daily or weekly experiences.

the papers tell me how my course materials are refracted through students' own experiences. the journals give me their blow-by-blow accounts of these experiences. i'm reading two terrific journals now, and they're absolutely fascinating.

the best journals record things like lunch conversations as well as more official work-related activities. the excerpts below are taken from a single journal by an excellent student who did an internship at a highly-regarded agency.

i asked the student (let's call her *holly*) for permission to reprint these excerpts, but will use pseudonyms and anonymize people and places just to ensure that nothing comes back to haunt her. holly's journal gives a sense for the range of experiences and the mix of formal and informal training and networking one gets on a good internship. you can also see her perceptiveness and personality in the writing and observations.

...I then went to lunch with two other interns (names restaurant). We ended up sitting with two agents from [names agency]. They told us about their jobs, their past jobs + education. Both are very friendly + talkative. [Name] seems like a person who won't put up with any shit. [Name 2] is very easy going + relaxed.

... For lunch we went to this little [place], two blocks from [agency]. We waited for over a hour, but the food was worth it. It also gave me time to talk to [name] about what it takes to be an agent... I can't wait to start applying for jobs. [Name] gave me a website that lists police/investigator positions that are open.

... We arrived on the scene, the local officers had us wait to enter the house because the search warrant hadn't been signed yet. The news crews were already setting up their equipment... Then the two of us went inside to take more measurements. We started in the basement + worked our way room to room. Then we went upstairs to where the body was...

... I called in sick with a bad cold.

... By the way the [agency's] electric stapler is a piece of CRAP. It jams all the time + two out of every three staples won't go through the paper. AARRR!

... [Name] stopped by my cube + asked if I would be willing to help unload + enter in some new shotguns...

... The M-4, I have never shot before. It can be switched from manual, semi-automatic or fully automatic. It was like a machine gun.

... I have an interview with the [city] Police Department! It was the first of several tests + interviews. I passed the written + video tests. I completed the Behavioral Questionnaire — now I have to fill out a background packet.

... I had to look through several months of files for any thefts of copper wire (the things people steal). I actually found eight reports.

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... The coroner came in + told me not to wear my mask. It would stink, but I would be able to breathe better. I went out + they got started. She made a Y down the chest of the male with a scalpel. There is a bright yellow fatty layer under the skin + then the muscles. After pulling that away, she took basically hedgeclippers + clipped each rib + took out the front of the rib cage...

... The use of force training was fun. This time I was the dummy for [agent's name] in the demonstrations + I partnered up with [name] for the baton usage. I supposedly have a high tolerance for pain because the pressure point demo didn't really work on me.

... Man, I'm a dumbass.

... I talked with [agent] about my dilemma with [2 agencies]. he thinks since i'm a girl and have a degree, i will be heavily sought after. he really is a great guy.

... I learned that I'm left-eye dominant but i can still shoot with my right eye.

... He said he could get me some great connection with the [names police department]. This would be great, but I'm not sure I really want to be in the midwest.

... Made another trip to [place] to pick up another truck. Mine smelled like smoke + her's smelled like vomit.

... I sat in on a course for child abuse + sexual abuse.

... We will be making labels + entering everything into a computer. It won't be very fun work...

the full journal is (much) more intriguing and revealing than the excerpts, of course. such well-written journals take me back to both the mundanity *and* the shock and awe of my internship twenty years ago. my summer as an investigator in the hennepin county (minneapolis) public defender's office was a career turning point, which still shapes my views on crime and inequality. holly seems to have had a similar experience. most students find the journals to be pretty painless and the more reflective papers a bit trickier. if the journals are going well, i'll sometimes ask them to use the papers to analyze the "journal data" (or some portion of it) sociologically.

internships are great for students, but tough for faculty to supervise and evaluate. though i can't carve out much time for independent studies these days, holly and the other students i supervised this year made it easy and fun. plus, sharing students' excitement in making fateful career and life choices is one of the great underrated perks of academic life.

See Professor Uggen's *Deviant Behavior* syllabus on page 91, or visit him online at <http://chrisuggen.blogspot.com/>.