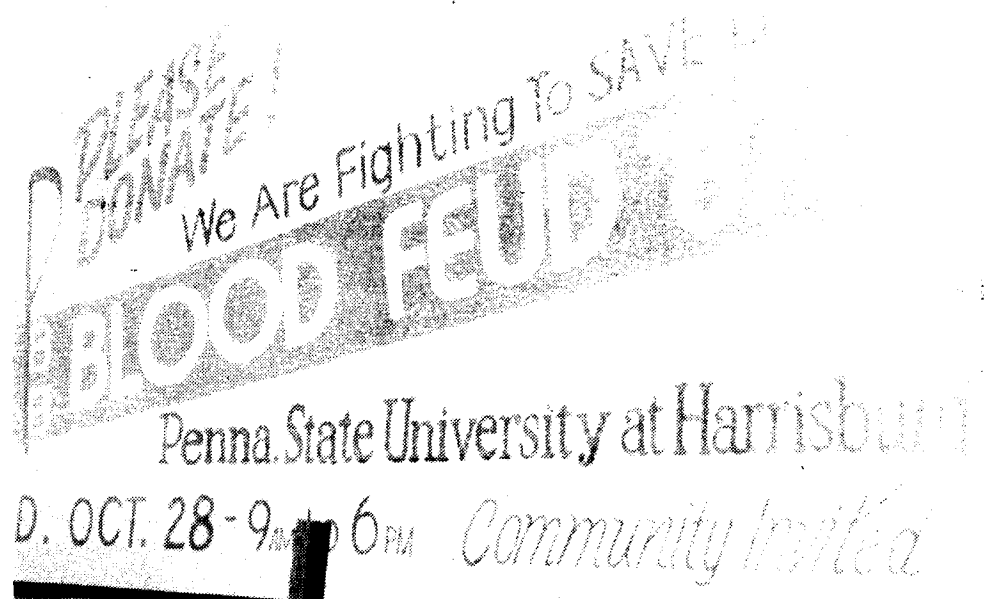


Photos by Kyle Weaver



XGI Blood Drive Sets Record of 138 Pints



Put Classroom Theory to Work in Internship Program

By Andrea Williard

Seven years ago, David Behrs, Penn State Harrisburg's coordinator of undergraduate admissions, spent four months in jail--not as an inmate, but as an intern.

Behrs, then a senior at Elizabethtown College pursuing a degree in counseling, was chosen to participate in an internship program at the State Correctional Institution at Camp Hill. Assigned to the diagnostic ward, he worked with a psychologist and social worker interviewing and counseling inmates.

Behrs is just one of many successful professionals who participated in an internship program while in college.

Internships--working in a professional setting for college credits--are valuable educational experiences. They provide students with the opportunity to use classroom theory in real-life situations.

Rie Gentzler, coordinator of Penn State Harrisburg's behavioral sci-

ence internship program, feels it is very important to combine academics with field experience. "What students learn in the classroom is really being learned, in a sense, in a vacuum," said Gentzler. "It's not until students actually get out and work in the field that they understand the value of what they've learned. They come back with a whole different perspective of what they're doing in the classroom . . . and are a lot more enthusiastic."

Internships vary and can be structured to develop individual interests. One student may get involved in drug and alcohol programs and use the theory learned in courses such as "Substances in Society," while another may intern at the state Capitol as a legislative researcher.

Stefan Jordan did just that. Jordan, a political science student, interned at State Rep. John Davis's legislative office during his senior year at Lincoln University. "It gave me a chance to develop communications

skills. I had to do research, develop newsletters, and meet and deal with other government agencies," said Jordan.

A good internship should be a testing period and an opportunity for the student to find out if he or she is making the right career choice. "Even though you can speculate on what a job setting is going to be like, it's not until you're actually there on a continuing basis that you know what it's really like," said Gentzler.

Another primary value of doing an internship is that "the students will be exposed to job opportunities in their field," said Eton Churchill, coordinator for communications internships at Penn State Harrisburg. Students usually intern in their senior year right before graduation. It helps them develop a valuable network of contacts.

Students are expected to have the basic skills to function professionally in their fields. "If a student goes into an internship well prepared for the tasks he is undertaking, the student can

become a productive part of the participating employer's staff in two or three weeks," said Churchill.

Why does an organization accept an intern? Is it basically just a trade-off in which the student gets experience and the employer gets cheap labor? Not always, according to Gentzler. "In the best internship programs, it is a real commitment on the part of the organization or supervisor to the education of the next generation of professionals," she said.

Students interested in an internship should contact their academic adviser or department.

