

Researching Reality

The CCS Research Internship Program provides much needed and greatly valued learning experience to college students and recent graduates. Experience not only in real-life application of economic, political, and social theories and principles but also in learning and mastering the skills of research, analysis, and writing. It encourages college students to understand and investigate public policy issues of social importance. It also enables the Centre to conduct studies in areas that require collection of first-hand information and data, which can be done best by enthusiastic, energetic, and dedicated youngsters.

In 2003, we received over 70 applications from all over India and abroad. Through a competitive process of a written application, 13 interns were chosen to work in Delhi in summer. Three interns were also selected to work from their hometowns, Vadodara, Nashik and Dharwad. Sabith Ullah Khan from M S Ramaiah Institute of Technology, Bangalore and Eva Weidrich from the University of Vienna interned in Delhi from September to November.

We organised rigorous training sessions for the interns in and outside the office. These included *First Principles of the Research Internship* by Parth J Shah; *Experiences of Former interns* by Mayank Wadhwa (2001, 2000) & Anupriya Singhal (2002); *Research Training Session* by Dr Shreekant Gupta, Delhi School of Economics and Dr Laveesh Bhandari, Indicus Analytics; *Dealing with Government* by Neena Gulabani, formerly with ACORD, Delhi; *Writing Training Session* by TCA Srinivas-Raghavan, *Business-Standard*; *Understanding Government Budgets* by G R Gupta, Deputy Chief Auditor, New Delhi Municipal Council.

Project Coordinators, Manali and Naveen conducted intensive training workshops on how to write and format a research paper, how to search on Google, references and notes, and making presentations on PowerPoint.

Keeping in mind our research priorities, suggestions from experts, and interns' interests, a project roster was prepared with a short term and a long-term list of projects. Every intern selected one project from each list and chose, if desired, a partner for each of the two projects.

Dilip Rangachari was the Research Guide for the summer interns. He guided the interns in preparing their detailed Plans of Action for every project and held weekly individual project meetings with them to assess the progress. With his eye for details and his detailed knowledge of power structures of Delhi, Dilip was the most notable Research Guide. Manali handled accounting and administrative work of the internship. Naveen Mandava and Parth provided regular guidance and led the interns on the path to their final outputs.

The list of short-term projects focused on licensing procedures for entry-level professions (License & Livelihood) in different parts of India, studying the ABCDs of Delhi Government (agencies, boards, corporations and departments). The list of long term projects provided insight on other issues such as rain water harvesting, history of life insurance in India, education vouchers, BPO industry, second-hand car imports, the logic of central exams.

The USP of the articles lie not in their scholarship per se, but in the glimpses that they afford into ground realities, usually seldom looked into.

The success of the program was evident from the articles that were published. A relentless Mayank Singhal, single-handedly worked and got two of his papers (Porters and Delhi government's advertising expenditure pattern) published in *Business World*. Kriti Kapur's article on state of Delhi Public Libraries found space in an East Delhi local newspaper. Six of the papers were included in our publication, *State of Governance: Delhi Citizen Handbook 2003*, timely published just before the Delhi Assembly elections. The Handbook generated lot of publicity and gave us the Chief Secretary ear! *Hard Talk* on BBC while interviewing Shiela Dixit, sited not one but numerous facts from the Handbook.

Here is what some of the columnists had to say,

...much of the problem stems not from a callous government but a lazy, ineffective citizenry that fails to utilise rights they are entitled to. This has just been proved by a bunch of youngsters who, under the guidance of an NGO called Centre for Civil Society, have put together the Delhi Citizen Handbook, 2003. This is timely, coming just before the Delhi election. But it is no mere election-directed pamphlet. It is a thoughtful guide on how the governance of a city can be improved, and how citizens themselves can play an important role in taking control of the rules that control their lives.

Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar, *The Times of India*, November 16, 2003

Ashok Desai, TN Ninan and several others made similar acknowledgements of the interns arduous work. These young college students have achieved this monumental feat. Instead of *morchas*, *dharnas*, and strikes they toiled to generate knowledge and understanding so that we may have informed debates and decisions. This is activism and leadership for the new information age!

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