

The effect of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme on the political beliefs and aspirations of past interns

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Abstract

For each of the past 30 years the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme has hired eight university graduates to work for Members of Provincial Parliament on an annual basis. Interns spend four months working for a government Member and four with a Member in opposition. This paper attempts to gauge the political impact of the internship on its participants. Past interns were surveyed to reveal how the experience affected their existing political beliefs. The paper also explores how the experience influenced their desire to run for elected office. Finally, the paper draws links between common experiences and the how these have shaped intern beliefs and aspirations.

Introduction

The Ontario Legislature Internship Programme (OLIP) is a 10-month internship program in which eight recent university graduates work for representatives elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Interns split their time evenly between government and opposition in order to experience both sides of the House. Interns serve in the Queen's Park offices of their Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP). Some also spend time in the constituency of their MPP. The purpose of this paper is to gauge the impact of the Programme on the interns themselves, attempting to discern whether OLIP changed or solidified existing political opinions. The paper also tries to determine whether the Programme encouraged or deterred interns from entering into elected politics.

Methodology

Legislative internship programs have existed in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom for almost 40 years. Research did not reveal existing studies regarding the impact of political internships on participants. Contact with co-ordinators and academic advisors of internship programs in Canada and the United States confirmed this.

Therefore, a written questionnaire was circulated to past OLIP participants in order to contrast their pre- and post-internship opinions. The survey is attached as Appendix A. Surveys were mailed to all participants for whom postal addresses were available. Results were kept confidential. Although the questionnaire explored political beliefs, it was non-partisan. No effort was made to identify the substance or affiliation of any political opinions. This was done to keep the focus on *how* and *why* the program affected interns.

The survey treated the internship as an intervener upon the existing beliefs and desires of interns. Participants came to the internship with certain attitudes and desires.

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The survey asked for baseline information regarding attitudes before entering the Programme. These included whether interns held definite political beliefs, whether they were politically active, and whether they had any aspirations to enter elected office. Respondents were then questioned about the Programme itself, specifically whether one of their placements coincided with their political beliefs, if the internship made them more positive or negative towards running for political office, and how the internship affected both their political belief and their potential political aspirations. The survey then asked interns about post-internship factors, specifically their desire to run for office, whether they had worked political positions at Queen’s Park, and their current occupational status. This was done to compare the role of the internship as an intervener in the attitudes and potential behaviour of interns. The questions are part of the survey, included in Appendix A.

The internship has 228 alumni. Surveys were sent to the 177 interns for whom current contact information was available. Eighty-four completed surveys were received.

The majority of questions were completed and well answered. In particular, qualitative responses provided a number of revealing ways the internship changed intern attitude and beliefs. Many have been included directly in the report.

Certain questions did not elicit particularly revealing responses. When asked if they held definite political beliefs, some interns found this to be ambiguous, as it made no distinction between political partisanship and political philosophies. Some failed to respond to this query, while others answered it inconsistently with other responses. For example, a few interns responded they had no definite political beliefs yet indicated they had a placement that agreed with their beliefs. Therefore this question was discarded when preparing this report. Similarly, the two final questions regarding whether interns had gone on to work in political positions and their current employment status were also not of use. Many interns did not answer the question regarding their current employment status, as it asked them to identify their position and place of employment. As well, the question that asked whether interns worked for MPPs or political parties after their internship was not consistently answered. Some mixed political employment and volunteer activities, while others felt it was an invasion of privacy. Therefore, the results from these two questions were not reliable, and have been excluded from the report.

The following sections will explore the results of the survey and, ultimately, the effect of the internship on the political beliefs and aspirations of interns.

Results

1.0 Political Activity

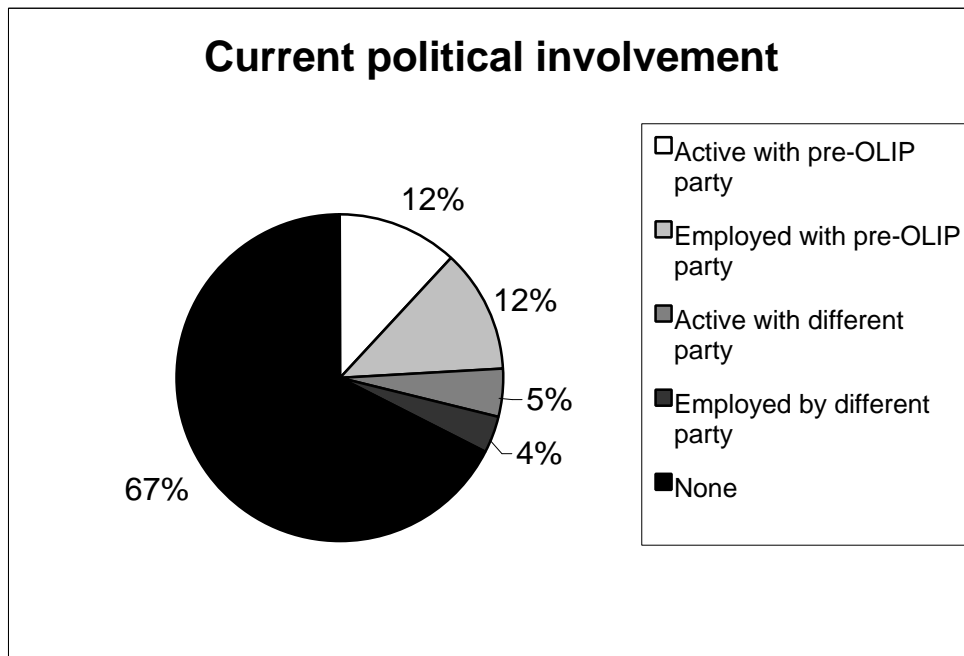
Interns were questioned regarding previous political activity in order to gauge their background in partisan politics. The results reveal that the majority of interns did not participate in party politics before their internship, as only one quarter were members of a party, and only 37 percent were active with a party before their internship.

TABLE 1.0 INTERN POLITICAL ACTIVITY PRIOR TO INTERNSHIP

	Yes	No
Politically active	37%	63%
Member of a political party	25%	75%

Survey results indicate that political activity changed little after the internship. Sixty-seven percent of respondents are not involved with any party at this time. Twenty-four percent are active or employed with the same party they were involved with before their internship. Few interns professed to switching party affiliations, and half of those never had party affiliations before OLIP. Current political involvement is illustrated in Figure 1.0.

FIGURE 1.0 CURRENT POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT



These statistics carry a few caveats. Political activity results may be higher as some former interns who currently work in politically sensitive positions may not have returned the questionnaire due to the confidential nature of their jobs. Additionally, the OLIP selection process also influenced results. In order to maintain the non-partisan nature of the Programme, the selection committee takes political activity into account when selecting interns. They may select against some who are too politically active. Similarly, the purpose of the internship is not to pre-select those destined for political office. The selection process may pass over some candidates who seem too eager to run for elected office. Age, job and family obligations of former interns also factor into current political activity as well, however these factors are outside the scope of this report.

2.0 Political Beliefs

Past interns were also surveyed regarding their political beliefs. They were asked three questions:

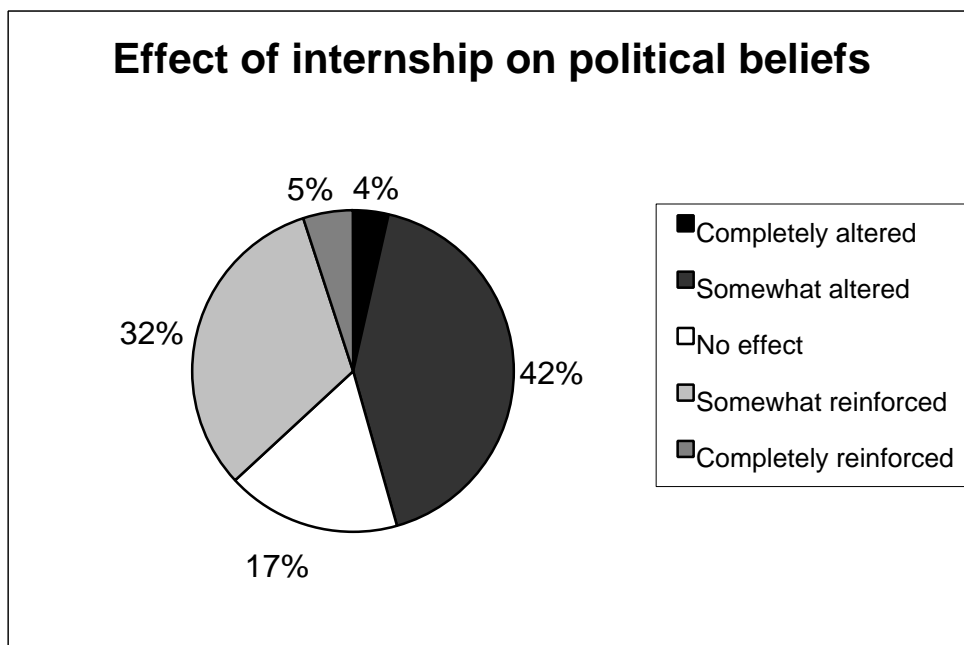
- Did one of your OLIP placements coincide with your political beliefs at the time?
- Did the internship alter or reinforce your political beliefs?
- How or why did the Programme alter or reinforce your political beliefs?

Interns were asked to select one of five categories to describe the effect of the internship on their political beliefs – completely altered, somewhat altered, no effect, somewhat reinforced, completely reinforced. They were then asked to respond qualitatively to indicate how their beliefs had been altered or reinforced due to the internship.

Sixty-seven percent of interns had a placement that coincided with their political beliefs at the time. Thirty-three percent did not. This is unsurprising, considering that interns have placements with two of the three parties at Queen’s Park and select the Members they work with.

Forty-six percent found that the internship altered their political beliefs. Of these, four percent felt that their beliefs were ‘completely altered’. Thirty-seven percent felt that the internship confirmed their existing beliefs, and five percent ‘completely reinforced.’ Seventeen percent professed that the internship had no effect.

FIGURE 2.0 EFFECT OF INTERNSHIP ON POLITICAL BELIEFS



The following sections will explore the reasons why interns categorized their beliefs as having been altered, reinforced, or unchanged due to the internship experience.

2.1 Beliefs Altered

A plurality of interns felt that the internship altered their political beliefs. Eighteen of 39 respondents were politically active prior to entering the Programme, while only six are still active with the same parties today. Twelve respondents indicated that their placements did not coincide with their political beliefs, a ratio which is consistent with the fact that there are three major political parties in Ontario. When asked how or why their beliefs were changed, a number of different reasons emerged along common lines.

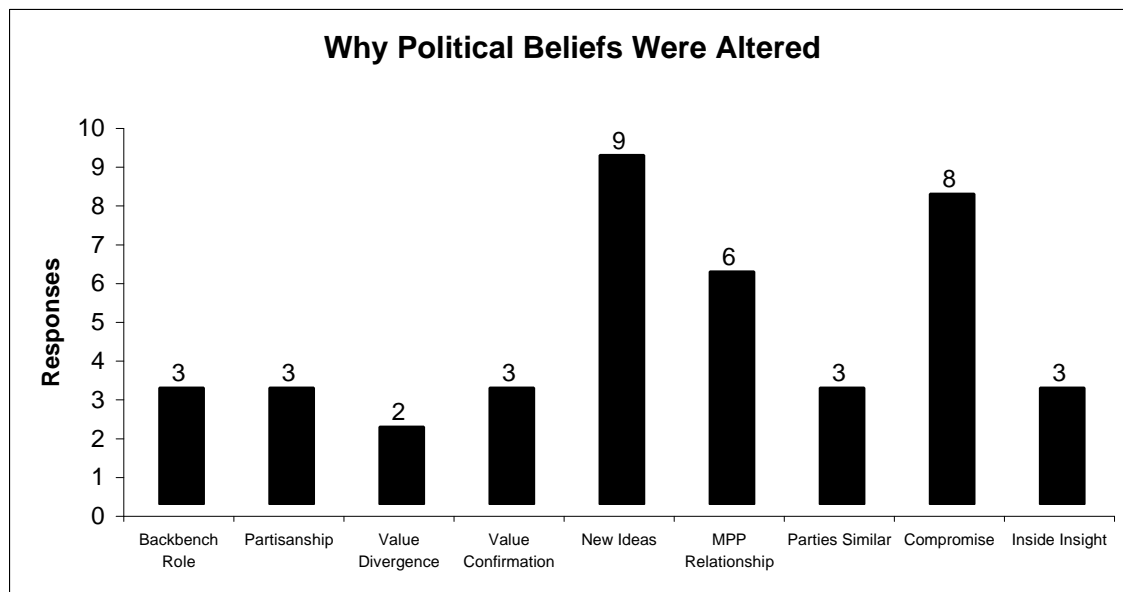
TABLE 2.1 REASONS FOR ALTERED BELIEFS - CATEGORIES

Categories	Comments regarding...
<i>Backbench Role</i>	Limited role and influence of backbench politicians
<i>Compromise</i>	Need to compromise with opposing MPPs, and own values/goals
<i>Inside Insight</i>	First-hand look at the inner workings of Queen’s Park and parties
<i>New Ideas</i>	Exposure to new ideas and approaches
<i>MPP Relationship</i>	Experience with or the influence of their specific MPP
<i>Parties Similar</i>	Values, goals, and strategies of political parties relatively similar
<i>Partisanship</i>	Distaste for the trappings of partisan politics
<i>Value Confirmation</i>	Confirmation that interns held the values they entered with
<i>Value Divergence</i>	Confirmation that interns did not hold certain values

As illustrated in Figure 2.1, exposure to new ideas and opinions they had not previously considered was the most common factor. The comment below is an example of one intern whose experience helped change their experience with policymaking.

“I could see policy-making from a different angle and not so much through theoretical approaches.” - INTERN RESPONSE

FIGURE 2.1 WHY BELIEFS WERE ALTERED



Many interns highlighted the role of compromise. Some expressed their distaste for the need to compromise their personal values in order to get elected and affect progress in the Legislature. Others related compromise to the pressures of governing.

“...governing often involves difficult choices and compromises. In that sense the internship softened my support for the NDP – perhaps Liberal pragmatism makes more sense?” - INTERN RESPONSE

A defining influence was the relationship between intern and MPP. Interns tend to work very closely with their placements, often accompanying them throughout the day and on

trips away from the Legislature. In general, respondents indicated that the personal connection they had with their MPP helped transform their beliefs.

“It puts a human face on politics. You get to know the staff and indeed the family members of the MPPs...the personal relationships tend to mitigate against previous partisanship. Us against them becomes rather simplistic when we are one of them.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Interns also provided a number of different aspects of the internship that altered their beliefs. The partisanship of Queen’s Park affected many, and inside insight into the workings of the Legislature and political parties shattered some previously held illusions about the parties they supported.

“I became quite disillusioned with the whole political process...(I) had studied political science and believed that the legislature meant something...power is very centralized and the role of MPP, except for promoting the official party line, is pretty meaningless.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Similarly, the limited role of backbenchers and the lack of personal influence was a factor. A few felt that, once inside Queen’s Park, all three political parties were generally the same, as evidenced by the following comments:

“...parties were obsessed with media coverage and it got to be rather unsettling to watch the same antics day in and day out.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“A lot of it is based on practical self-interest and partisanship, as opposed to responding to the principles involved in any issue.” - INTERN RESPONSE

In general, participants identified a wide variety of reasons why their beliefs were altered. Although there is no single conclusive response, exposure to new ideas, the need to compromise individual beliefs, and the personal relationship between intern and MPP were the most common. All of these aspects are predictable by-products of exposure to the inner workings of political parties and the work done at Queen’s Park.

2.2 Beliefs Reinforced

As noted in Figure 2.0, 37 percent of interns indicated that the experience reaffirmed their existing political beliefs. The majority, 17 of 31 respondents, were politically active prior to entering the Programme. Twelve are still active with the same parties today. These results are much higher than those for interns whose values changed. Seven respondents indicated that they did not have a placement that coincided with their beliefs.

The results were less varied than those whose beliefs were altered. Answers were tabulated along common threads, listed below.

TABLE 2.2 REASONS FOR REINFORCED BELIEFS - CATEGORIES

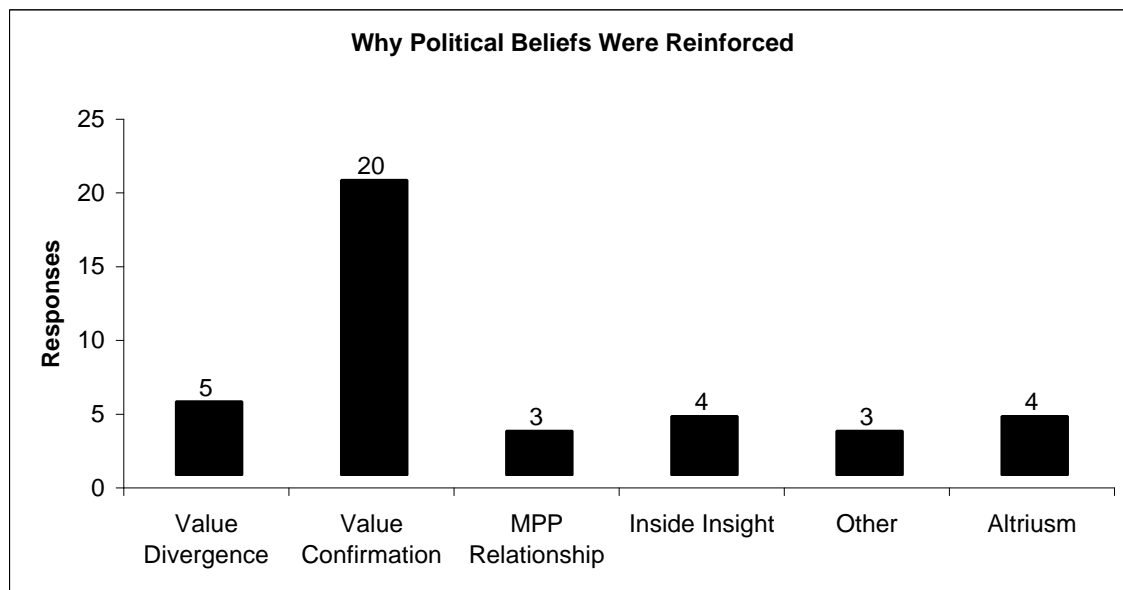
Categories	Comments regarding...
<i>Altruism</i>	Altruistic ideals regarding politics, policy, and the role of MPPs
<i>Inside Insight</i>	First-hand look at the inner workings of Queen's Park and parties
<i>MPP Relationship</i>	Experience with or the influence of their specific MPP
<i>Value Confirmation</i>	Confirmation of what they believed in
<i>Value Divergence</i>	Confirmation of what they did not believe in

As displayed in Figure 2.2, the vast majority of respondents whose beliefs were confirmed felt that the internship strengthened their existing values. Although only 37 percent of interns were politically active before participating in the Programme, some responses indicated that existing beliefs stayed true.

"I continued to believe that my party was more thoughtful and informed on most issues." - INTERN RESPONSE

"Prior to the Programme I was a committed partisan. I saw nothing that would have led me to reconsider my beliefs and support a different party." - INTERN RESPONSE

FIGURE 2.2 WHY BELIEFS WERE REINFORCED



Others, however, indicated that experience with their preferred party reinforced their beliefs when compared to their other placement, while others found a lack of vision.

"(The Programme) illustrated the apathy / lack of critical analysis in my other party placement." - INTERN RESPONSE

"I saw no compelling or inspiring visions from either of the two parties...also from the party I had a history with...but it all left me where I started." - INTERN RESPONSE

It is interesting to note that even among those whose values were confirmed, some found no compelling vision in their own party. This could be a symptom of a lack of political vision, or just disillusionment of existing over-expectations.

Three responses indicated that direct experience with their MPPs helped confirm their beliefs. The effect of individual casework, specific tasks, and the connection with an MPP is exemplified by the comment below:

“I was embraced – so to speak - by the party and by the member. I was strongly encouraged (and had the confidence of my Member) to do a variety of tasks, most of which required delicacy in handling...and made a real difference in someone’s life.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Similarly, the internship helped determine what values interns did not hold. First-hand exposure obviously turned a few interns away from other parties.

“Clearly the priorities of the government were not anywhere close to being close to mine and also showed that mainstream opposition was far too ‘pragmatic’ to be trusted to make principled decisions.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Various other responses were received, including the effect of first-hand insight to the inner workings of Queen’s Park and its parties. Another indicated that experience with other interns influenced their beliefs as well. However, the internship generally strengthened the values of these participants by confirming exactly what they believed in.

2.3 No Effect

Seventeen percent of interns indicated that the internship did not affect their political beliefs. However, these responses provided very little qualitative information. Eight of eleven respondents stated that none of their placements coincided with their beliefs. Similarly, few indicated whether they were politically active before or after the Programme.

Of the 13 respondents only two included any comments regarding why the internship had no impact. Both indicated an interest in governance and policy, as opposed to partisan politics.

“I found that the practice of politics diverged, at times, sharply from political theory – so my beliefs were not much affected.” - INTERN RESPONSE

It is plausible that many selected ‘no effect’ to complete the survey as quickly as possible. The qualitative question may have reduced the number of responses, as interns were asked how their beliefs had been altered or confirmed, and did not explicitly include those who felt no effect. Responses are insufficient to determine trends from this group.

2.4 Partisan Implications

This portion of the survey revealed many comments pertaining to partisan politics, even though no questions of that nature were asked. From the responses, there is a noticeable

interchangeability of political beliefs and partisanship. While only asked about changes to their personal values, many interns commented on the parties themselves.

“It showed me that the Liberal Party is more all-encompassing than I thought. This made me more attracted to the party (I felt there were people like me in it) and also repulsed by it (they have no core values, no firm beliefs and just reflect the mood of the day.)” - INTERN RESPONSE

Other comments reinforced or softened strong partisan attitudes towards other parties.

“The member I worked for...was everything I believed to be Conservative at the time – judgemental, heartless, rednecked, and stupid. The member I worked for in opposition was savvy, intuitive, plugged in and hilarious. He represented a party I never voted for but opened my eyes somewhat – some Liberals actually were bright after all!” - INTERN RESPONSE

“Working with other parties, and with (a Liberal MPP), showed me that the motives of people from other parties could be as pure and noble as I believed my own to be...also exposed me to some of the less savoury aspects that I had thought New Democrats were immune to.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Some respondents used partisan affiliations and political values interchangeably. However, this was more common from those whose beliefs were strengthened, meaning that they may have become more partisan in the process. This indicates a definite intermingling of beliefs and partisanship for many participants, and was most common with those whose beliefs had been confirmed by their experience.

2.5 Conclusions

Comments regarding the impact of the internship on the beliefs of participants revealed many reasons for value change, including a close relationship with MPPs, introduction to new ideas, the need to compromise personal values, and distaste for partisanship. These are common to the experiences of those intimately involved in politics. Interns whose values were reaffirmed found their beliefs strengthened by the experience. The following conclusions can be drawn from the information provided by respondents regarding the effect of the internship on their political beliefs; responses are compared in Table 2.5.

The majority of interns:

- were politically-inactive prior to OLIP;
- remain politically-inactive today;
- had a placement that coincided with their political beliefs at the time;
- found their beliefs were altered due to involvement in the Programme.

TABLE 2.5 CONCLUSIONS

	Interns - Beliefs Were Altered	Interns - Beliefs Were Confirmed
Had a placement that agreed with their political views	Approximately two thirds	More than two thirds
Most common reasons for change in personal beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to new ideas • Compromise of personal and political views • Relationship with MPP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience confirmed existing beliefs
Pre-OLIP Political Activity	Slightly less likely	Slightly more likely
Post-OLIP Political Activity	Much less likely	Much more likely
Other		Tended to use partisan labels and personal values more interchangeably

The next portion of this paper focuses on the political aspirations pre- and post-OLIP, and how the experience changed their desires regarding political office.

3.0 Political Aspirations

Interns were also surveyed to gauge the impact of the internship on any existing political aspirations to see if the internship deterred or encouraged former participants from entering into elected politics and to highlight any changes to their perception of the political process as well. The interns were asked a number of questions:

- Before enrolling in the Programme, did you harbour aspirations to run for elected office, and why?
- Did the Programme alter your desire to run for elected office, and why?
- Do you currently harbour aspirations to run for elected office, or have you previously run?

Interns were asked to select one of three categories to describe their interest in running for elected office - definitely interested, considering, or not interested. They were then asked to respond qualitatively in order to indicate how their aspirations had changed.

Fifty-seven percent responded that they had no desire to run for elected office. Thirty-five percent indicated that they might want to run in the future, while only eight percent indicated a definite interest.

As with the political activity statistics contained in Section 1.0, the OLIP selection process most likely influenced these results. One respondent felt that the Programme avoids those who are too likely to run in order to ensure group diversity and dynamics.

“I don’t believe OLIP necessarily attracts or hires a group of A-type personalities each year – in fact, it very consciously tries to avoid this in the interests of group harmony.” - INTERN RESPONSE

The following sections will explore the reasons why interns categorized themselves as definitely interested, considering, or not interested in elected office before OLIP

3.1 Pre-OLIP: Definitely Interested or Considering Elected Office

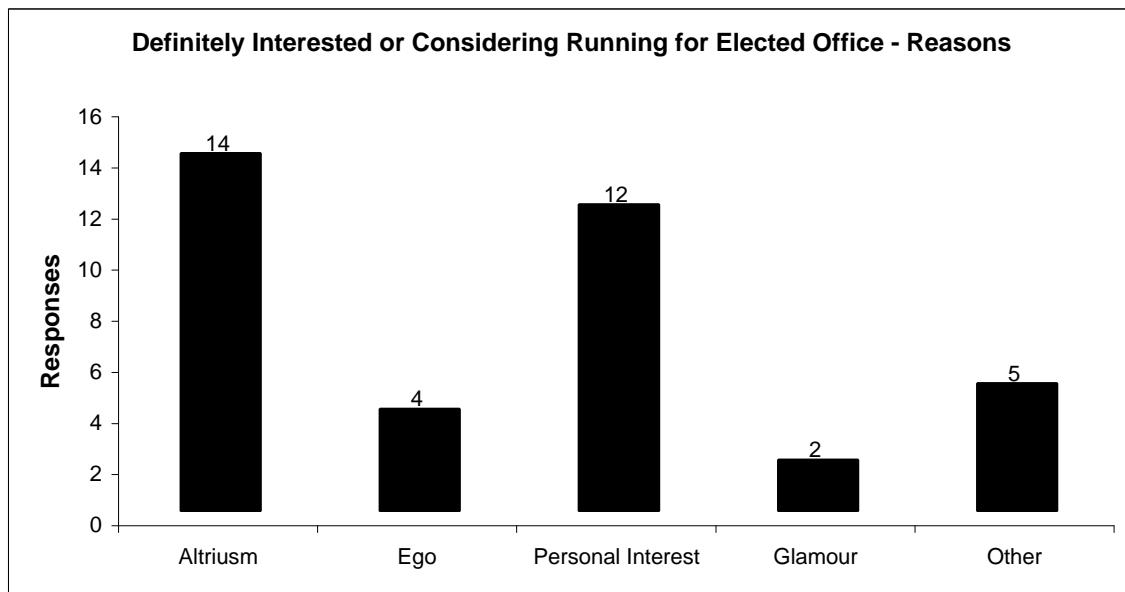
Only eight percent of interns expressed a definite interest in running for elected office, while 35 percent indicated that they were considering a future in politics. Due to the low number of those definitely interested, and the similarity in reasons behind their interest, these two groups have been combined. Reasons for an interest in elected office were centred on three common themes, which are listed below.

TABLE 3.1 DEFINITELY INTERESTED OR CONSIDERING ELECTED OFFICE - REASONS

Categories	Comments regarding...
<i>Altruism</i>	Altruistic ideals regarding politics, policy, and the role of MPPs
<i>Ego</i>	Belief of being a good potential MPP, or could do a better job
<i>Personal Interest</i>	Personal interest in the job of an MPP, or issues of the day

Fourteen interns traced their desire to run to the idealism surrounding the job of an MPP. Those with altruistic tendencies tended to believe that MPPs served the greater good, and made a positive difference in society. Twelve interns indicated that their personal interests were behind their desire to run for office, as being an MPP would be rewarding and interesting. Many indicated that their academic studies served as the foundation for their desire to enter into elected politics, or that they were interested in specific issues.

FIGURE 3.1 DEFINITELY INTERESTED OR CONSIDERING ELECTED OFFICE - REASONS



Four responses indicated that ego was a factor in their desire. These interns believed that they would be well suited to being a representative in the Legislature. Others indicated that they could do a better job than those MPPs currently elected, as considered below.

“The age old reason – that I could do things better!” - INTERN RESPONSE

“As a strong communicator not shy about voicing my opinion and gathering support, I thought elected office would figure into my plans at some point, as did many of my friends and family.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Only two interns indicated that they were considering running due to the glamour of politics.

“...we were living in one of the most glamorous political periods in Canadian history – i.e. Pierre Trudeau, Rene Levesque, even Stephen Lewis and Bill Davis had good issues.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“...mostly romantic notions of campaigning and being a representative: parliamentary democracy, debates, speechifying – all of these had visceral appeal to me.” - INTERN RESPONSE

One response indicated the role of women in the Legislature as their primary determinant of political ambition.

“I was very inspired by the stories of ‘ordinary’ women who had successfully sought public office and who often encouraged young women to run...to express their ideas which are often very different from a man’s.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Interns who responded that they were considering a future in elected politics also pinpointed a few negative aspects. Some highlighted the personal toll of political life. Another indicated their aversion to campaigning. Others pointed towards their interest in policy as a reason to not become involved in politics.

In all, those considering entering elected politics had similar reasons as those who were definitely interested. These included altruism and personal interest in the job and current affairs. Ego, glamour, and two negative reasons – personal toll and campaigning – were also factors in their potential interest.

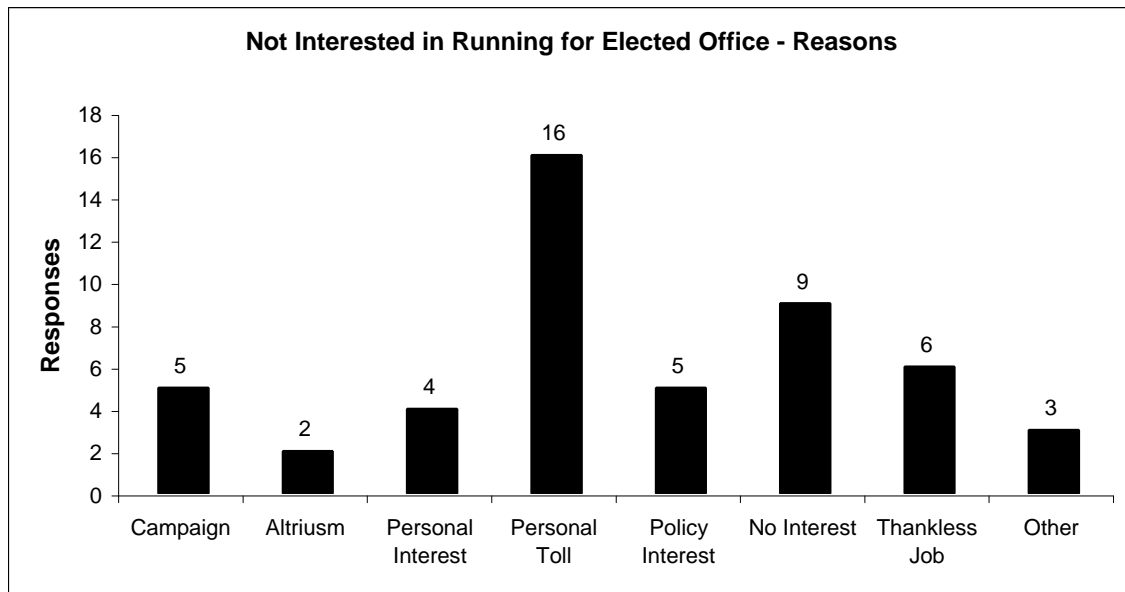
3.2 Pre-OLIP: Not Interested in Elected Office

Fifty-seven percent of interns indicated that they had no interest in pursuing elected politics. The reasons why were tabulated along common themes in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2 NOT INTERESTED IN ELECTED OFFICE - REASONS

Categories	Comments regarding...
<i>Altruism</i>	Altruistic ideals regarding politics, policy, and the role of MPPs
<i>Campaign</i>	Campaigning and other realities of needing to get elected
<i>No Interest</i>	No personal interest in being an MPP
<i>Personal Interest</i>	Personal interest in the job of an MPP, or issues of the day
<i>Personal Toll</i>	The toll of being a politician on family, friends, and lifestyle
<i>Policy Interest</i>	Interested in policy, not politics
<i>Thankless</i>	Being an MPP is not rewarding, and at times a thankless task

FIGURE 3.2 NOT INTERESTED IN ELECTED OFFICE - REASONS



As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the personal toll of running for elected office was the most cited reason why interns were not interested in running for election. Comments regarding the impact of a political life focused on time away from family.

“Growing up in a family where (a parent) was often absent due to a seasonal job...I saw parallels with that and the life of an MPP. It could be an OK job if you’re single, but not if you want a family.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“(My) Member had young children and he was absent a great deal...The plane ride between the northern riding and Toronto was 1.5 hours each way, and his hearing began to suffer from the hundred of trips...on weekends, there were often party or riding functions... when dad came home for short periods it was ‘fun stuff’ and then headed back to QP and mom had to resume all the routine responsibilities.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Others pinpointed the intrusion of the media into the personal lives of politicians. The constant spotlight, probing questions, and lifestyle standards that the media imposes were enough to repel participants before they had even started the internship.

“The show ‘Question Period’ on CTV where Bruce Phillips asked John Turner about his drinking - while that may be a legitimate question to pose, it signalled for me the beginning of the media’s over-scrutiny of politicians’ personal lives.” - INTERN RESPONSE

The second most common response was that interns simply were not interested in being elected officials. They found the job of an MPP uninteresting, or had other interests that did not involve elected politics. Some referenced previous experiences in an elected setting, and expressed distaste for the electorate themselves.

“I was more interested in Ontario politics from a process/procedural orientation...how and why the legislative proceedings happen the way they do.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“(I) ran for high school president: idiots complain significantly but do nothing to remedy the situation. That was a microcosm of the electorate - most are stupid.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Six interns expressed the feeling that being an MPP was a thankless job. This is different from those who said they were just not interested in being an elected representative. These responses indicated that the trappings associated with elected office – dealing with an often irate electorate, the negativity in the Legislature, party and riding obligations, caucus rivalries – were more than they could bear, thus making it a thankless task.

“...how little power they have, how all decisions are made by Cabinet and the Premier’s office, how long the hours were, 7 days a week, the abuse from constituents, the lack of respect, the backstabbing and nastiness within caucuses...” - INTERN RESPONSE

Other responses indicated that an interest in policymaking, and not politics, was a leading factor in why they were not interested.

“Political parties in Canada are not the place for substantive, nuanced policy development.” - INTERN RESPONSE

It is interesting to see that some interns already had a perception of elected politics as a thankless job with a massive personal burden. This suggests that politically inclined members of the electorate do appreciate the pressures facing elected officials. It is also interesting to note that five interns signalled a policy interest as a reason to *not* enter elected politics. This suggests a heightened awareness of the delineation between politics and policy – noting that the two often do not necessarily intermingle beneficially.

Others highlighted distaste of campaigning, while others found that organizing a nomination, putting together an election team, and the inherent inability to predict results, was too great a challenge, or just not for them.

“Too much energy goes into campaigning rather than changing policy, improving the way government works.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Three interns expressed other reasons for not wanting to become involved. One response indicated their lack of self-confidence as a primary reason for not wanting to run for elected office.

“...lack of self confidence about breadth of knowledge, ability to speak to public / debate, having a positive contribution to make...” - INTERN RESPONSE

It is interesting to note that even among those who were not interested in running for office, a few expressed positive comments regarding elected office. Two interns spoke to altruistic ideals regarding public service. Similarly four interns said that the job interested them, but were still not interested in running for election in the future. This

suggests that interns still have a positive view of elected politics, even if they do not aspire to it themselves.

In general, the majority of participants were not interested in pursuing an elected future. Interns were wary of the impact of political life, as well as the challenge of getting elected. Others had interests outside of the political sphere, including policymaking. Some thought being an MPP was thankless and unrewarding. The results reflect an educated group of young people already savvy to the political realities of political life, policymaking, and electoral politics.

The survey went on to explore how the internship changed these views. The following sections will reveal how the experience in the Programme altered or reinforced these existing opinions, and whether interns are more or less likely to seek elected office after their internship experience.

3.3 Effect of OLIP on Political Aspirations

Interns were surveyed to determine how the internship affected their desire to run for elected office. The results were overwhelmingly negative in regards to running in the future, and are compared in Figure 3.3.

- Forty-five percent of interns felt the internship made them less likely to run;
- Forty-three percent felt that the placement had no effect on their aspirations;
- Twelve percent said that the internship made them more positive about a future in elected office.

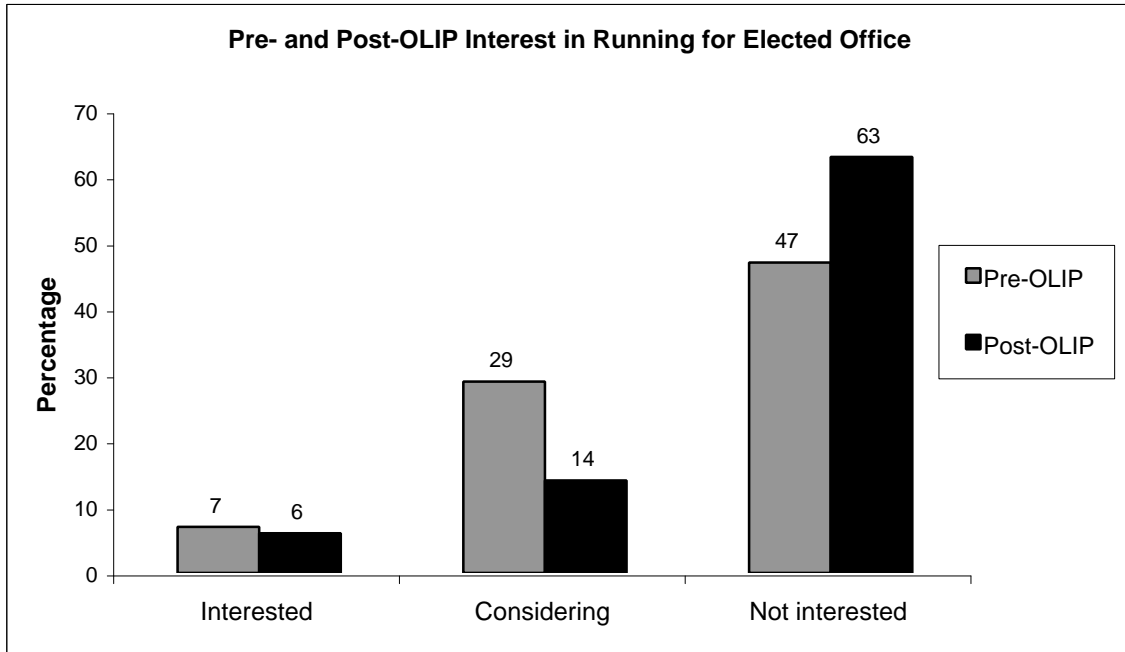
When asked whether they were currently likely to run, the results were overwhelmingly against.

- Seventy-six percent of responses indicated no interest in running;
- Only 17 percent of interns would consider running for elected office in the future;
- Seven percent were definitely interested in running in the future;
- Only three respondents have ever tried to run for political office.

The number of former interns not interested in a future in elected politics increased by almost 20 percentage points after participation in the Programme. A similar number are no longer considering a potential future election run. Those still definitely interested remain generally unchanged.

A more in-depth look at the statistics confirms that the increase in ‘not interested’ responses came at the expense of those who were previously considering a future run. Nearly 72 percent of respondents who were originally considering a run decided that it was not for them. The vast majority of those who were not interested in the first place did not change their opinion. Meanwhile, interns who were definitely interested are most likely to still want to run, as only one response indicated a complete reversal of aspirations.

FIGURE 3.3 INTEREST IN RUNNING FOR ELECTED OFFICE - COMPARED



The following section will explore why interns categorized their enthusiasm for elected office as increased, decreased, or unchanged after completing the internship.

3.4 Effect of OLIP: More Enthusiastic

Few interns became more enthusiastic towards running for political office after their internship. Only ten respondents, twelve percent of interns, found that the internship increased their enthusiasm regarding elected politics, and only six of them were actually interested in running. Interns were asked why they felt they were more enthusiastic about elected office after the internship.

Most interns who left with a more favourable opinion of elected office found that the experience confirmed some of the altruistic ideals behind the role of an MPP. These respondents admired the change that can be achieved, and the positive impact of elected officials in the House and in their communities.

“The programme exposed me to the variety of activities that elected officials get to do. I was mostly impressed by the role that they can play in mobilizing communities.” - INTERN RESPONSE

In addition to confirming ideals regarding public service, six interns also listed personal interest as a factor, as they found the job and its current affairs a rewarding career.

“Being immersed in the political world for the first time gave me a first-hand view of how fun it is...diversity of issues and fast pace.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“I enjoyed my experiences in the political realm – question period, leadership conventions, visiting other legislatures, working for members. I found it fascinating.” - INTERN RESPONSE

One response indicated that the internship had provided the experience necessary to run for political office. This intern had previously indicated that they lacked the confidence to attempt a political career, and that the internship had reversed their opinion.

“(The internship) gave me the experience/understanding of the process and politics to build confidence...(and) built a network of support for candidacy.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Seeing women active in the political arena made one respondent more enthusiastic.

“Saw some women working to balance lives in office...much stronger sense of role of institutional government in our lives (and need for such versus civil society which can be anarchic or corporately co-opted.)” - INTERN RESPONSE

Few interns felt that their experience in the Programme led them to be more enthusiastic about a potential career in elected office. Those who did identified the altruistic nature of public service and the interesting nature of the job, as reasons for their improved opinion. Responses are similar to those provided in section 3.2, which examined those not interested in running for office prior to OLIP.

3.5 Effect of OLIP: Less Enthusiastic

The internship reduced the desire to enter political office for 45 percent of participants. Of the 37 respondents who became less enthusiastic, 29 were not interested in running for political office in the future. Interns were asked why the internship had made them less interested in a political career. Results are tabulated along common themes below in Table 3.5. Many of the responses, seen in Figure 3.5, were similar to answers provided by those who were not interested in running prior to OLIP, as explored in Section 3.2.

The most common response was the personal toll on the lives of MPPs. This is consistent with earlier survey results, where interns stated that their desire to run for office was tempered by the effect of a political life on family and lifestyle. This indicates that while the internship sheds light on the intricacies of life as an MPP, many were cognisant of this prior to being an intern. Sixteen interns gave personal toll as a pre-OLIP reason for not wanting to run, increasing to 20 responses post-OLIP.

TABLE 3.5 LESS ENTHUSIASTIC TOWARDS ELECTED OFFICE - REASONS

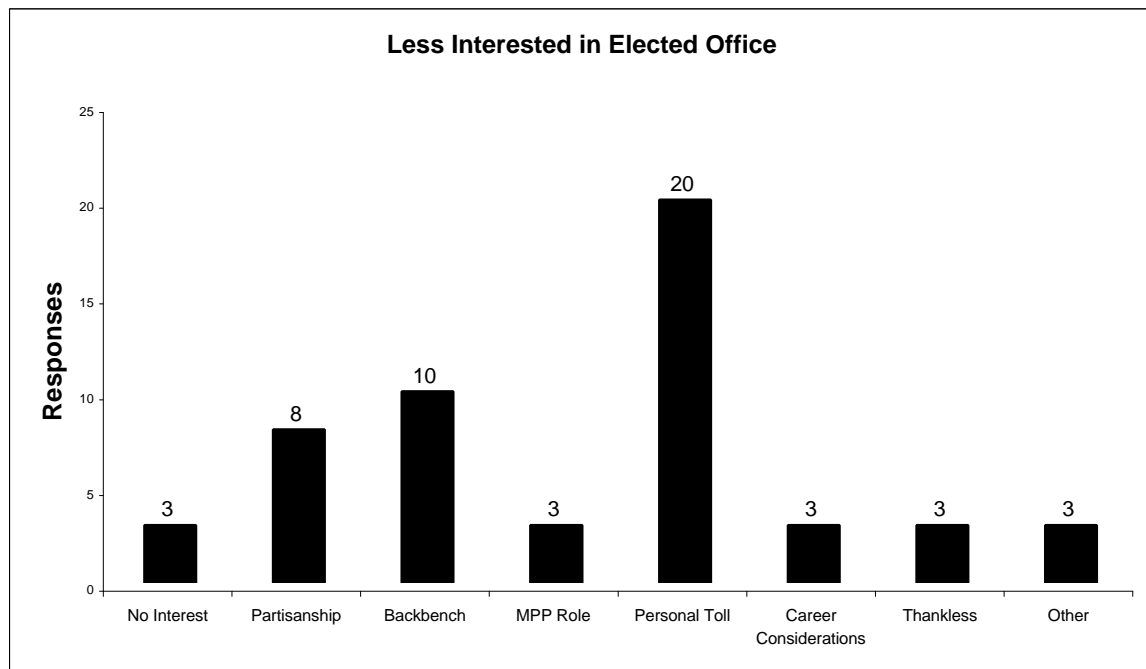
Categories	Comments regarding...
<i>Backbench Role</i>	Limited role and influence of backbench politicians
<i>Career</i>	Limited ability to build a career
<i>MPP Role</i>	Found the MPPs themselves as a negative factor
<i>No Interest</i>	Personal interest in the job of an MPP, or issues of the day
<i>Partisanship</i>	Distaste for the trappings of partisan politics
<i>Personal Toll</i>	The toll of being a politician on family, friends, and lifestyle
<i>Thankless</i>	Being an MPP is not rewarding, and at times a thankless task

The limited influence of backbench members was another factor common to both pre- and post-OLIP questions regarding running for political office. The role and intensity of partisan politics turned eight interns away from a future as an elected official, exemplified by the comments below.

“(The internship) turned me off party politics, which so many times works completely against getting things done and doing them well.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“I became discouraged by the lack of ideas and the cyclical arguments regardless of the topic.” - INTERN RESPONSE

FIGURE 3.5 LESS ENTHUSIASTIC TOWARDS ELECTED OFFICE - REASONS



Career considerations were mentioned by three interns as reasons for being less enthusiastic about a future elected endeavour. These participants felt that politicians do not have stable jobs in which you can build a satisfying, long-term career.

“With the exception of a small number of powerful incumbents, it is a precarious and very much temporary position (a position more than a profession.) Some members appear to have difficulty adjusting to non-MPP life after they are defeated.” - INTERN RESPONSE²

Similarly, three interns felt that being a politician is thankless. This is common to other considerations mentioned earlier in section 3.2. The internship confirmed that, for these interns, the role of MPP is not worth the unappreciated nature of the job.

² For those interested in the personal toll of political life and the difficulty of adjusting to life outside of politics, see Paikin, Steve. *The Dark Side: The Personal Price of Political Life*. Viking Canada, Toronto: 2003.

“I saw how hard these people work and how much criticism they take for what is in 90% of cases a sincere effort.” - INTERN RESPONSE

The MPPs themselves left a negative impression in some cases. Interaction with individual representatives left some cold to the idea of a future in elected politics.

“I don’t mean to be cynical, but I found the politicians as shallow in person as they seemed on TV.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Three interns expressed ideas that did not fit into the common threads discussed above. Two spoke to the role of women in the Legislature, both finding it a turn-off from elected politics, but for two completely different reasons.

“I also found that being a woman in politics entails lots of sacrifice and is still intensely difficult even after all these years of so-called progress.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“I studied women and politics and felt that having more female MPPs would make a difference to the status of women’s lives in Ontario – boy was I wrong. Some of the female MPPs were regressive and ineffective.” - INTERN RESPONSE

The 45 percent of interns who indicated that they were less likely to run for office post-OLIP were turned off by many of the same aspects that deterred participants even before they took part in the Programme. The personal toll of politics was a major consideration before and after participation. The thankless nature of the job and a lack of personal interest in being an MPP were also familiar. Most importantly, the limited role of backbenchers and the partisanship of the Legislature emerged as two reasons specific to post-OLIP answers. It is surprising that none of the interns highlighted these factors in their pre-OLIP comments.

3.6 Effect of OLIP: No Change

Forty-three percent of interns, 36 in total, felt that the internship did not affect their desire to run for political office. Unlike those who professed that the internship did not affect their values, discussed in Section 2.3, these responses provided much more information.

The overwhelming majority of those who felt the internship did not affect their desire to run were never interested in elected office to begin with. The results are remarkably consistent with their answers from earlier on in the survey.

TABLE 3.6 NO CHANGE IN INTEREST IN ELECTED OFFICE

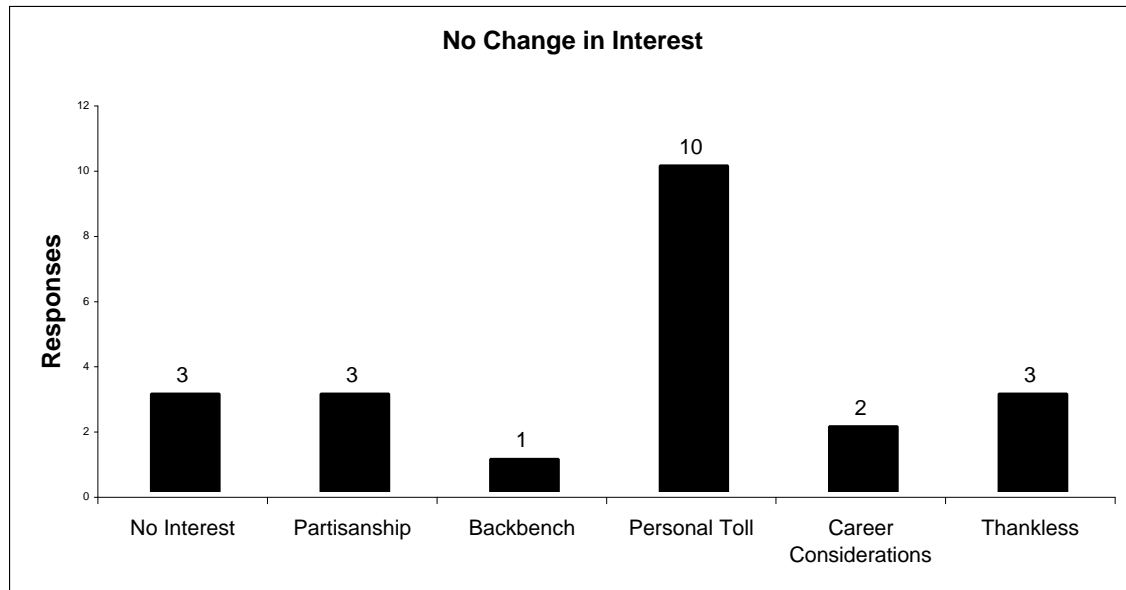
	Pre-OLIP Interest in Running	Post-OLIP Interest in Running
Definitely interested	1	1
Considering	6	5
Not Interested	29	30

Despite stating that the internship did not affect their political aspirations, many interns provided qualitative answers that appeared to reinforce their pre-OLIP opinions. The

vast majority of those who answered ‘no effect’ were consistent throughout the survey. As shown in Table 3.6, there truly was little change from start to finish with those that felt the internship did not affect their aspirations, making these responses fairly reliable.

Similar to sections 3.2 and 3.5, answers centred around many of the same aspects as interns who became less likely to run, as illustrated in Figure 3.6.

FIGURE 3.6 NO CHANGE IN INTEREST IN ELECTED OFFICE - REASONS



Although all the reasons noted above have been previously discussed, there were a few notable comments from these responses. The two comments below show an appreciation of the job of an MPP, and the specific people who represent citizens at Queen’s Park.

“(The internship) confirmed my belief that politicians need to have a certain personality for the job – they enjoy the adrenaline of the public process.” - INTERN RESPONSE

“It allowed me to see that politicians of all stripes are all well-motivated – that they believed it was a worthwhile pursuit and that it is a worthwhile pursuit.” - INTERN RESPONSE

Few interns who stated that they were unaffected were ever interested in running for political office. Pre-OLIP aspirations are largely consistent with post-OLIP answers. Although stating that the internship had no effect on their political desires, many indicated a number of negative aspects that are consistent with those from interns who became less likely to run. The internship reinforced negative opinions of running.

3.7 Conclusions

Interns were questioned regarding whether they were considering a future in elected politics prior to taking part in the internship. When asked how the internship affected their desire to run, 45 percent felt that it made them less enthusiastic, 43 percent were

unaffected, and only twelve percent felt more enthusiastic about a future in elected politics. Results regarding likelihood of running and reasons for interest are summarized below.

TABLE 3.7 CONCLUSION COMPARISONS

Interest in Running	Before Participating in the Programme	After Participating in the Programme
Definite	8%	7%
Considering	35%	17%
Why Interested	Altruism Personal Interest Ego	Altruism Personal Interest
None	57%	76%
Why Not Interested	Personal Toll No Interest Thankless Campaigns	Personal Toll Backbench Partisanship Thankless

There is a fair bit of continuity between both sets of data. Altruism and personal interest fuelled a desire to run before and after participation in the Programme. The fact that some interns who had no interest in running professed to finding the job of an MPP interesting, and acknowledged the altruistic nature of public service, indicates that there is a base level of respect for MPPs. This is to be expected from educated, politically minded people such as legislative interns.

Similarly, the internship helped confirm the personal toll of elected life and the thankless nature of being an elected official. This reflects the fact that interns are thrust into the thick of elected life with their MPPs. The first-hand view of the realities of life in the Legislature confirmed their earlier assumptions.

The internship, however, also highlighted some more unsavoury aspects. The limited role of backbench MPPs became a common post-internship consideration for those who were not interested in running, as did the partisanship of the Legislature. These considerations are also consistent with a first-hand view of the inner workings of elected politics. However, these were not present in pre-OLIP considerations. Considering that ego was only a pre-OLIP factor in wanting to run (and not post-OLIP), and that the thankless nature of the job was both a pre- and post-OLIP consideration, it is conceivable that interns were exposed to how truly challenging it is to be an MPP.

The handful of unique reasons indicate that deciding to enter elected politics is still very much down to personal factors. Examples include the intern who lacked the confidence necessary to run but came out of OLIP more confident of his or her abilities. The comments regarding women in the Legislature, both positive and negative, and explanations from those who found MPPs to be shallow and attention-driven fit into this category as well.

There are some notable absences when discussing reasons for running. Few mentioned glamour as a reason to run. This reflects the view that being an MPP is not a glamorous job. This may be due to the meat-and-potatoes nature of provincial politics, where grand ideological debates are often crowded out of view by constituency-driven issues. This

may also reflect the fact that politicians are not universally held in high esteem. The lack of glamour associated with being an MPP may indicate a level of cynicism, or simply knowledge of the immense toll of being a politician.

A few interns also brought up career considerations as a reason not to run. This would indicate that interns generally view politics as a temporary career at best. One may not need an inside view of the Legislature to realize that politicians have little job security, and that few are able to fashion a long-term political career. Interns did not see politics as a viable career before or after the internship.

4.0 Other Trends

The survey explored two distinct areas of interest – political beliefs and political aspirations. It is worthwhile to explore some trends between the two avenues of inquiry.

Politically active interns were more likely to be definitely interested or considering running for office at some point in the future. Although likelihood to run dropped after participation in the Programme, they were still more likely to run than those whose beliefs were altered or unchanged. Thirty-eight percent of politically active interns are definitely interested or considering a future run for office. This is notably higher than results for the whole group.

Interns were also asked about their political beliefs. Interestingly, pre-OLIP desire to run is similar for both interns whose beliefs were altered or confirmed. However, those whose beliefs were altered were most likely to be uninterested in elected office post-OLIP, as only 18 percent were considering or definitely interested in entering elected politics. Those whose beliefs were confirmed or unchanged were equally likely to be interested in political office, although those whose were confirmed were more likely to have a definite interest. Notably, all three interns who indicated that they had run for political office found that the internship confirmed their beliefs.

There is no relationship regarding interns who did not agree with the politics of either of their placements. In fact, the percentages of interns who are definitely interested, considering, or not interested in elected office were not notably different if interns agreed with their placements or not.

Interns were also asked whether the internship made them more or less enthusiastic about entering elected politics, regardless of whether they were personally interested in running or not. Interns who were politically active were more likely to become less enthusiastic than their inactive counterparts, the majority of whom felt that the internship had not changed their interest in running. Similarly, those who agreed with philosophy of one of their placements were more likely to become less enthusiastic, while the small minority who disagreed were largely unaffected. This could be due to the fact that they were exposed to their own values up close in the Legislative setting, opening them up for more criticism and introspection. The percentage of interns made more enthusiastic by the internship was approximately ten percent for all parameters mentioned in this section.

In this regard, interns whose beliefs were confirmed and altered displayed extremely similar results, with more than 40 percent of both groups feeling that the internship had made them less enthusiastic. Sixty-nine percent of those who reported that

the internship had not changed their beliefs expressed that their enthusiasm had not changed.

In terms of common qualitative responses, a few factors affected both beliefs and aspirations. The role of backbenchers and the partisanship of the House helped alter both the political beliefs of interns as well as reduce their desire to run for office. The limited role of backbench politicians and the partisan nature of the Legislature were not necessarily evident to interns before undertaking the internship.

Also common to both responses were the role of the MPP in the intern's experience and the altruistic motives behind the position. This indicates that interns value the first-hand experience and the influential relationship that they develop with their MPPs. Additionally, the presence of altruistic ideals regarding politics and serving the public demonstrate that there is a consistent respect before and after the internship for the job that MPPs do, even if interns have no desire to be elected officials themselves.

Unlike answers for personal beliefs, questions asking about desire to run did not elicit partisan comments. Therefore, the idea of running for political office was not as connected to partisan labels and specific political parties, as were political beliefs. Additionally, interns did not differentiate between the idea of running for political office and actually being an MPP. This is interesting as there are many areas of Ontario in which certain parties have no foreseeable hope of winning the seat. It is obvious that the notion of running for political office is synonymous with winning and becoming an elected official, despite the fact that the vast majority of people who run lose.

5.0 Considerations and Limitations

Some lessons can be learned from this attempt to gauge the impact of an internship programme. As discussed earlier in the Methodology section, certain questions did not yield revealing results. These questions had low rates of response, less than coherent responses, or were too ambiguous for many respondents. Therefore, a more refined survey would have been more efficient.

Additionally, the final question asked for the respondent's current job title and current organization, in order to gauge their type of employment. Feedback revealed that a minority of respondents felt this was an intrusion of privacy. This may have reduced response rates. It may have been more prudent to list more generic employment sectors as a checkbox style response. Similarly, one respondent was put off by the fact that a letter explaining the project and its purpose accompanied the survey. He or she felt that this letter might taint the results by revealing too much about the project before having completed the questionnaire.

From a thematic standpoint, a few respondents were inadvertently confused by the fact that the survey looked at both political beliefs and political aspirations. A small minority of respondents answered only one aspect of the survey, providing answers describing their desire to run when asked about their political beliefs, and vice versa. A single focus may have provided more room to explore more nuanced aspects of the internship.

Future investigation of the intern experience would be valuable and could deal with a number of aspects not covered by this survey. The questionnaire did not take into

account the political realities of the times or their role in shaping opinions and desires. It would be interesting to see how interns of different years reacted to their experience, especially in the presence of Premiers or politicians who were universally considered to be charismatic, respected, or loathed. Potential considerations include:

- The experience today as compared to other decades;
- Majority versus minority governments;
- Internships during times of political turbulence;
- Heady versus turbulent times.

Similarly, the fact that interns only experience life with two of the three political parties at Queen's Park plays a major role. This could change the direction or path of an intern. No one knows what the effect of interning with all three parties might be.

Another point of interest could be the impact of the internship outside the partisan sphere. As interns become familiar with the machinations of government, their opinions regarding democratic government and public decision-making would no doubt be affected. It would also be interesting to see whether the internship changed the direction of interns in regards to future employment in the public versus private sector.

6.0 Final Summary

The purpose of this paper was to gauge the impact of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme on the interns themselves. The report attempted to discern whether OLIP changed or solidified existing political opinions by surveying past participants. The paper also tried to determine whether the Programme encouraged or deterred interns from entering into elected politics. The survey uncovered a number of basic characteristics regarding its participants. Generally, interns:

- Were unlikely to be politically active before or after the Programme;
- Were unlikely to want to run for office before or after the Programme
 - Due to the personal toll, thankless nature of the job, and lack of personal interest;
- Did not view politics as a potential career;
- Did not view politician as a glamorous job;
- Associated running for elected office with winning and becoming an MPP;
- Respected the role of the MPP and the altruistic ideals behind public service.

Interns who were politically active were more likely to be interested or considering running for political office. However, these interns were also more likely to become less enthusiastic about pursuing elected politics after participating in OLIP. Similarly, interns who identified with the politics of one of their placements also were less enthusiastic about running for office after the internship.

Even if interns were unlikely to be politically active or interested in running for politics, the internship still had a measurable impact on the interns themselves. The internship:

- Altered the political beliefs of a plurality of interns
 - Due to exposure to new ideas, compromise of personal values, and the relationship they had with their MPP;
- Confirmed the beliefs of a minority of interns
 - Due to the experience strengthening their existing beliefs;
- Made interns less enthusiastic about running for office
 - Due to the personal toll, limits on backbench members, partisanship, and the thankless nature of the job;
 - Limited backbench involvement and partisanship were insights arising from the experience, and were not present in pre-OLIP answers;
- Made interns less likely to run for office.

A minority of interns felt that their beliefs were reinforced by the internship experience. Those whose beliefs were confirmed by the internship were:

- More likely to have a placement that agreed with their political views;
- Slightly more likely to be politically involved pre-OLIP, and much more likely to be politically involved post-OLIP;
- Slightly more likely to be interested in pursuing elected office post-OLIP;
- Using partisan labels and political beliefs more interchangeably;
- Potentially made more partisan by the experience;
- More likely to have run in the past, as all three respondents who had previously run for political office commented that their beliefs had been confirmed by the internship.

The internship generally altered the beliefs of interns and made them less likely to become active in politics and to want to run for political office. The change in beliefs could have been predicted, as in-depth exposure to the political process could uncover ideas that interns had not previously considered. However the conclusions regarding political activity are somewhat surprising. One might assume that politically minded young people would be inspired to enter into politics after such intimate, first-hand experience. Instead, they seem less likely to participate in elected politics and to remain politically active.

Appendix A

10 October 2005

«First_Name» «Last_Name»
«Street_Address»
«City» «Postal_Code»

Dear «First_Name»,«Next Record»

My name is Marc Peverini and I am a participant in the 2005 – 2006 Ontario Legislature Internship Programme.

As you know, interns must complete a research paper as part of the academic component of the Programme. I am interested in examining the effect of the Programme on the attitudes, activities, and goals of past participants. Therefore, I am focusing my research paper on the experience of OLIP interns.

I would appreciate it if you could complete a short survey on how the Programme affected your political attitudes and aspirations.

The purpose of the survey is to gauge the effect of the Programme on the interns themselves. I am interested in establishing if the Programme changed or solidified existing political opinions, and if the experience played a role in directing future political and employment activities.

More specifically, I am interested in whether participation in the Programme encouraged or deterred any past aspirations to run for elected politics.

I believe that these considerations are central to gauging the experience of past interns and determining if the Programme's direct political experience helped change past conceptions of the realities of elected politics.

Please note that the survey is **non-partisan**. No effort is made to identify the substance of any political opinions, nor the affiliation of party activities or membership.

I am only interested in *how* and *why* the program changed or reinforced your views, activities, and aspirations, **not the substance of your opinions or the affiliation of any activities**.

Enclosed is an addressed and stamped envelope for the return of the survey. All responses will be anonymous and all information gathered will be strictly confidential. I would appreciate if responses would be submitted by 31 December 2005, in order to allow me ample time to compile results and complete the paper.

If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact me at any time. I would be happy to answer any questions about the survey and my paper should you have any inquiries.

Sincerely,

Marc Peverini
OLIP Intern 2005-2006
Home Phone: 416 322 5496
Email: marc.peverini@sympatico.ca

Did you hold defined political beliefs before starting the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme?

Yes No

Did one of your OLIP placements coincide with your existing political beliefs at the time?

Yes No

Did your OLIP experience alter or reinforce your existing political beliefs?

- Completely altered my existing political beliefs
- Somewhat altered my existing political beliefs
- No effect on my existing political beliefs
- Somewhat reinforced my existing political beliefs
- Completely reinforced my existing political beliefs

How or why did the Programme alter or reinforce your political beliefs?

Were you active with a political party before commencing the Programme? Mark one box.

- Active member of a political party
- Member, but not active in a party
- Active, but not a member of a party
- No pre-OLIP partisan affiliation or activity

Current status. Mark one box.

- Still active with the above party
- Employed or previously employed by the above party
- Active with a different party
- Employed or previously employed by a different party
- No employment or activity with a political party

Before enrolling in the Programme, did you harbour aspirations to run for elected office? Mark one box.

- Definitely interested in running for elected office
- Considered running for elected office
- No aspirations to enter to elected office

What prompted your pre-OLIP enthusiasm or apathy towards running for elected office?

Did the Programme alter your desire to run for elected office? Mark one box.

- More enthusiastic about running for elected office
- Less enthusiastic about running for elected office
- No change in opinion

How did the Programme alter or reinforce your opinions regarding running for elected office?

Have you previously run for elected office, and if so, at which level(s) of government?

If you have not previously run, do you currently harbour aspirations to run for elected office? Mark one box.

- Definitely interested in running for elected office
- Considering running for elected office
- No aspirations to enter to elected office

Upon ending the programme, did you work for a political party or an MPP? Mark all that apply.

- Worked for one of my OLIP MPP placements
- Worked for an MPP from one of the parties of my OLIP placements
- Worked for one of the parties of my two OLIP placements
- Worked for an MPP from a party I did not work for during OLIP
- Worked for a party I did not work for during OLIP
- I did not work for a political party or an MPP

Current occupational title: _____

Current organization: _____