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Career and Leadership Development

Sewanee: The University of the South

#### Franklin County Mayor's Office Internship: Summer 2013

This summer, I was honored to intern for Franklin County Mayor Richard Stewart. Not only did I learn the intricate technicalities of county government, I also learned more about myself and people in general than I ever thought possible when starting the internship. The ten weeks I spent with Mayor Stewart and Abby Pickett, Mayor Stewart's Administrative Assistant, were enlightening, eye-opening, and so incredibly fun.

Mayor Stewart is the glue of Franklin County. From overseeing all county offices to presiding over county meetings to managing county employees to leading the Industrial Development Board, he is an extremely busy man, to say the least! However, in spite of his seemingly endless duties, he never loses sight of his unceasing compassion for the people of Franklin County. It would be easy to get lost in the hustle of this stressful, hectic job, but he faces every task with the grace and finesse of a seasoned leader. Mayor Stewart truly is one of the finest men I have ever met, and I intend on leading his campaign in Sewanee for next year's election.

Although Mayor Stewart allowed me to attend various meetings with him, I spent most of my time with Abby, his Administrative Assistant. Abby and I became fast friends. While we completed the typical office duties (answering phone calls, managing emails, communicating with Franklin County Commissioners and other various tasks), Abby would regale me with endearing stories about her two young children, and we'd swap recipes and funny stories. We

were able to get everything in the office finished while laughing together; it truly was a wonderful, productive environment. There was never a day that I dreaded going into work; I looked forward to it every day. Not many people can say that about their job!

During my first week of working at Mayor Stewart's office, I was given an exciting project to work on: a brochure for the Franklin County Industrial Development Board's Business Development Center. I had never even heard of a "business incubator" before! In spite of my lack of knowledge regarding business startups, Mayor Stewart and Jackie Axt, a member of the Industrial Development Board, entrusted me with this undertaking. Not only was I completely ignorant on the topic of the publication, I had never designed a brochure before. However, with encouragement from Abby, Mayor Stewart, and Jackie, I dove right in. After editing and re-editing the seven-page brochure, it was sent to the printers, and is now the principal handout for the facility. I'm so grateful for Mayor Stewart's and Jackie's confidence in a total brochure novice!

It is often said that even unsatisfactory internships can be beneficial because the intern will know what he or she does not want to do. That is certainly not the case for me. After this internship, I know one thing for certain: I want to work with people. Like Mayor Stewart, I thrive on helping other people. Mayor Stewart's office offers a traditional office structure with a completely unpredictable element. People often come into the office with complaints or heartbreaking stories because they simply don't know where else to go. I could be copying Labor Force Estimates for the County Commissioners one minute, and the next minute I'd be listening to a Franklin County farmer's life story. I loved that aspect of the internship.

On the surface, I learned about countless aspects of government, which was absolutely fantastic! However, and most importantly, I realized what it truly takes to be a compassionate, effective leader; Mayor Stewart is the epitome of an honorable, empathetic elected official.

On top of all of the meaningful life lessons gleaned from these past ten weeks, I made three lifelong friends, and for that, I am truly grateful.