

2009-11

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JOINT STUDENT PROGRAM -- FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE U.S. -- TRAINS NEW MEXICO BROADCASTERS

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Four University of New Mexico student interns are now reporting on the activities of the current session of the Legislature in Santa Fe, sending their radio reports to more than 55 stations across the state. At the same time, their counterparts in Washington, D.C., a group of five students, are learning the basics of news reporting, serving as actual reporters for the New Mexico Broadcasting Association (NMBA).

All the students are part of a joint project between the University of New Mexico (UNM) journalism program, NMBA and the Young American Broadcasters (YAB). All are from New Mexico communities. The program, now in its second calendar year, provides young people with real life reporting skills and the opportunity to put those skills into practice.

Says Ellen Ratner, Bureau Chief of the Talk Radio News Service (TRNS), "This program is fulfilling a need for the students to learn and practice a skill while preparing a new generation of broadcasters to update and educate the public about important issues in Santa Fe and Washington, D.C. This program is the only one in the U.S. and we hope a model that can be extended across the nation."

The students now interning in Santa Fe spent the fall semester in Washington, D.C. interviewing members of Congress and other government officials. They worked out of the TRNS Washington bureau, lived in intern housing and attended events throughout the District.

“By sponsoring this program, the NMBA is continuing its mission to broadcast information to New Mexicans while at the same time helping train the people who will be working in the industry tomorrow,” says Milt McConnell, NMBA’s current board chairman. “It’s a win-win program.” McConnell says the NMBA provided \$30,000 to UNM for a year of the program, which offsets transportation and housing costs for the first part of the program. While in Washington, they are supervised by YAB and TRNS.

The interns reporting from Santa Fe are supervised by Melanie Majors, a former New Mexico reporter and news producer. UNM Professor Richard Schaefer is the university sponsor.

The Washington interns have interviewed U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, sharing their reports with New Mexico radio stations. Meanwhile, their colleagues in Santa Fe have distributed stories on the state budget, legislation to open the House to webcasting, UNM Day and tax incentives for the New Mexico film industry – a story that was picked up by the major media in New Mexico.

Washington interns include Antonia Aguilar, Monique Cala, Benny Martinez, Laurel Prichard and Sofia Sanchez. The interns now working in Santa Fe are Julie LaJeunesse, Travis Martinez, Laura Smith and Leah Valencia.

One goal of the program is to have the current D.C. interns cover the New Mexico Legislature and other statewide news in 2011. Another plan involves extending the program to students at other New Mexico universities.