



Feds offering high-paid internships despite sequester

By: Barnini Chakraborty – March 14, 2013

Remember the days when an internship involved working strange hours, fetching coffee and making copies -- for free, or maybe minimum wage?

Those days are over, if you're lucky enough to snag one with the federal government.

Despite this new season of sequestration, a host of federal agencies continue to offer high-paying internships, often requiring applicants have little more than a mediocre GPA and a year of college under their belt.

A cursory search Wednesday on the USA Jobs federal employment website showed 84 open internships and student programs posted in the last 10 days.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, even as it warns it will have to furlough meat and poultry inspectors later this year, has recently posted 12 openings. One opening for a student trainee at the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in Iowa offers up to \$24.16 an hour.

One NASA internship advertised on the site pays up to a whopping \$83,126.

"It doesn't surprise me but it does strike me as odd," Tad DeHaven, a budget analyst with the Cato Institute, told FoxNews.com.

The internship postings, along with postings for thousands of other government jobs, continue to go up despite warnings from federal agencies about the Draconian cuts they will have to make to comply with the sequester. On Wednesday night, NASA Administrator Charles Bolden issued a warning to employees about the effects on the agency. He also rolled out a number of new cost-cutting guidelines. Scaling back internships wasn't one of them.

According to the job posting on USAJobs.gov, the NASA internship at the Dryden Flight Research Center in California is open to a wide-ranging group of students "seeking a degree from an accredited college or university with major study in engineering, physical sciences, mathematics, life sciences, computer science or other field of science."

NASA's internship is part of the government's Pathways Student Program which was created "to provide the intern with exposure to public service, enhance educational experience and provide financial support to encourage and support educational goals."

Applicants must have at least a 2.9 grade point average – a solid B grade -- be at least 16 years old and enrolled in an accredited college or university on at least a half-time basis.

They must also have at least a year of academic study remaining toward getting their degree. Under the Pathways Student Program, the agency that offers the internship has 120 calendar days after the participant graduates college to “non-competitively promote and convert an intern to a career/career-conditional or term appointment.”

But the marriage of intern-turned-employee post college graduation isn't a done deal. “The conversion is not guaranteed and is based on the need of the agency,” according to the posting.

NASA isn't the only department offering up pricey internships.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is under the Department of Commerce, has posted an internship at the National Weather Service with a salary range of \$31,315-\$62,678.

The Department of Health and Human Services is shelling out more than \$61,000 for a “student extern.”

Several federal agencies that posted these internships did not return requests for comment from FoxNews.com.

Natalie Parris, a former teacher in Richmond, Va., who recently lost her job due to state government budget cuts, called the federal offerings unreasonable.

“I am out of work, out of money and am tired,” Parris told FoxNews.com. “Come on already. No college student needs an \$85,000 (internship).”

On a broader scale, there were more than 2,700 federal jobs posted in the past 10 days across a variety of agencies. This includes 327 jobs at the Department of Agriculture, 149 in the Department of Health and Human Services and 140 at the Department of the Interior. NASA has 23 openings.