

Job Shadow Day Gives Students an Inside Look at Federal IT

The Office of Information and Technology (OI&T) hosted the second annual Information Technology Job Shadow Day on Feb. 7 at VA Central Office in Washington, D.C. Seven high school students from Marshall Academy in Falls Church, Va., participated in the daylong session, which included members of VA's top management in the IT field.

The program is an academic activity designed to give students the unique opportunity to observe the federal IT workforce up close. Through hands-on experience, students learn about OI&T and "shadow" IT professionals through their workday. The program encourages students to pursue federal careers in the IT workforce.

After a brief welcome from VA's Executive Employee Recruitment Office, the students were assigned a mentor. Some mentors, like Arnaldo Claudio, executive director, Oversight and Compliance, offered more than just career advice. "You can set your goals at a slower pace because you're very young, so you have time. But time is of the essence," he warned. "Go through it with passion. If you find something you are comfortable with, stick with it."

The students spent time with their mentors, got hands-on experience, learned tips of the trade, and observed VA systems and programs. At a roundtable discussion, several IT employees discussed how they deal with Freedom of Information Act requests, VA data theft incidents, and how they got into the IT field.

After lunch, former OI&T interns, now VA employees, spoke to the students



Charles Ashley, center, and Socheath Eap, right, were among the students participating in IT Job Shadow Day at VA Central Office with Office of Information and Technology staffers like Dirk Barrineau, deputy director, Certification Program Service.

about how they can parlay an internship into a career. Janine Lafayette, IT specialist, spoke to the students about motivation in the workplace. "Explore! Find what part of IT you like. During your internship, make mistakes. Find out what your passions are, focus, learn, develop and grow. If you don't like it, you can move around. Get a detail. Take every opportunity, even if it's not in the IT field, to build your character."

Later in the afternoon, the students received a tour of the Section 508 Compliance Lab and the Omar Bradley Conference Room.

Peter Kalis, a 17-year-old senior from Langley High School in McLean, Va., is prepared to jump right into the IT field. Already a Microsoft Certified Professional, he is hoping to get an internship as well. "We got to meet with people who were in our shoes not too long ago," he said.

"That was really helpful."

Charles Ashley, a 17-year-old senior from George C. Marshall High School in Falls Church, Va., was impressed with his mentor's knowledge

of software programs. "I learned a lot of useful skills," he said. "The people here have a passion for what they do and they all seem to love their jobs." **VA**

Search Gets Underway for New Under Secretary for Benefits

A 10-member commission has been formed to recommend candidates for the post of under secretary for benefits.

VA's under secretary for benefits directs nearly 15,000 employees and administers a budget of more than \$45 billion, mostly for disability compensation and survivor benefits. The under secretary is also responsible for VA's educational assistance, insurance program and pensions.

"I have asked Deputy Secretary Gordon Mansfield to lead this important effort," said VA Secretary James B. Peake. "With a new generation of combat veterans re-

turning from Afghanistan and Iraq, the search commission must ensure we fill the under secretary's job with a person having the right skills, experience, vision and commitment to our nation's veterans."

The new under secretary will replace retired Navy Vice Adm. Daniel L. Cooper, who resigned recently after six years on the job. Cooper had been the longest serving under secretary for benefits in VA's history. Patrick Dunne is the acting under secretary.

The under secretary for benefits is a non-political appointee, subject to Senate confirmation, who serves at the