

Interns learn the ropes with jobs at police department

By JENNIFER FROST
Staff Writer

While some UNC students worked in air-conditioned offices this summer, sophomores Dawn Williams and Laura DiGiano hit the streets.

The two worked for the Minneapolis Vice Squad this past summer on an eight-week internship sponsored by the Morehead Foundation.

The foundation placed 58 other scholars in internships across the country.

Williams, of Boone and DiGiano, of Chapel Hill, worked in departments of the Minneapolis Police Department with duties ranging from aiding bar and brothel patrols to serving as decoys for solicitation of prostitution.

The two say that the internship taught them respect for police officers.

"It's a tough job because people are always apprehensive and nervous around police," says DiGiano. "People have the attitude that the police are an intrusion instead of help and protection. I could never do what they do, and I'll always respect their efforts."

Williams adds that police are just regular people. "They're human beings who make mistakes, and, like



Laura DiGiano

in any profession, there'll be a bad apple. Police are held on pedestals as if they're supposed to be perfect.

There are so many demands on them, but they are people who really care and are committed to helping people. Every day they go out with no guarantee they'll come back."

And when they do make it back, DiGiano says she found that unpleasant circumstances often await. "Many times," she says, "all police officers are surrounded by unsolved cases, frustration, high expectations from society and five pounds of paperwork."

DiGiano also found that she was unaccustomed to the police environment. "I feel like I went into a different part of society," she says. "We've learned not only how law enforcement works, but how the bottom 10 percent of the population lives. . . . Many of them are repeat offenders with files inches thick."

Most people don't realize that police treat symptoms and not diseases of society, Williams says. "Crime is a way of life for people in slums. They want what they can't have but try to get it through crime.

It's easier for them to steal than to work."

DiGiano says that seeing underprivileged people gave her a more well-rounded view of society. "(At UNC), people tend to be sheltered. We're lucky we have an education and to know we have a future," she says. "To many, there's no future besides emptying garbage cans at Hardee's. Some don't even realize there's a world outside their housing project."

Williams says she discovered that police work was not what most expect. "Most people who watch TV don't understand. So many take crime lightly. It's not a glamorous profession."

DiGiano says police must deal with frustrating murder cases and the upset family members who survive. "But what can be done when a Miller beer can by the victim's body is the only lead?" she says. "A lot of police officers burn out. They get so immersed in their work that they become great cops, but one day they

can't handle constantly giving themselves, only to have people and circumstance throw brick walls at them."

Both Williams and DiGiano urge people to have more relaxed attitudes about police.

"By now, most people have had a run-in with the police and are nervous whenever they see a police car on the road. They're not out to get anyone. If you happen to be doing something that's illegal or looks like a hazard, yes, they'll stop you. But they have more important things to do than stop you for signaling improperly," Williams says.

"They don't get brownie points for turning in the most tickets," DiGiano says. "The policemen's attitude is that by speeding or whipping around a corner or running a light you could hurt yourself, not to mention others."

"Give the police a break," she says. "These people work long, hard hours. . . . The next time you see one, be nice and stop and say hello."



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