



## *Washington State Legislative Service Project: Legislative Staff*

### **Executive summary - Spring 2010**

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**Acknowledgments: Secretary of State Sam Reed and Lieutenant Governor Brad Owen**

The Washington State Legislative Service Project focuses on preparing student legislative interns, engaging and preparing the next generation for public service and improving legislative bipartisan collaboration. As part of the project both current and past legislative interns, current legislative staff, current and past legislators, news media representatives and registered lobbyists are being surveyed.

The staff portion of the Legislative Service Project focuses on Washington State legislative staff who worked in Olympia during the 2009 legislative session. Legislative staff were contacted by e-mail and provided a web link to participate anonymously in the research. Survey questions included the areas of: legislative staff employment preparation, occupation experience, job satisfaction, the state legislative process, legislative bipartisanship and collaboration, and personal traits.

Of the 580 legislative staff contacted by e-mail, 77 participants responded and participated in the research. Participants were slightly more likely to be female and most were from the Puget Sound or the NW region of Washington State. Most participants had little involvement with political parties prior to being hired, but almost a third had previously served as a student intern. On average, each participant had experienced 8 legislative sessions.

Legislative staff found their work to be very meaningful. The most worthwhile aspects of their work include: affecting policy and legislation, the interesting people with whom they work, learning the legislative process, and helping constituents. The most trying aspects of their work include: dealing with (unhappy) constituents, the hectic work schedule, the frequent frustrations of the legislative process, and seeing poor legislation enacted. Legislative staff uniformly feel their job has greatly increased their understanding of Washington State government.

Legislative staff strongly agree that bipartisan collaboration improves the effectiveness of legislative sessions. They are, however, mixed in their perception of what issues feature the greatest or least bipartisan agreement. The issues of budget creation and healthcare policy end up on both lists in reflection of these mixed views. Issues of greatest bipartisan agreement include: education, transportation, and public safety. Issues of least bipartisan agreement include: taxes, spending, environment, gay rights, domestic partnership, and labor vs. business interests. Legislative staff identified the following hindrances to bipartisan collaboration: party loyalty, influence of special interest groups, and lack of respect for those in the opposing party.