When it comes to nonfiction writing,” says Maury Povich, C’62, “it’s the independence of the journalist that is sacrosanct to me.” Povich family roots go deep into journalism. He was a reporter and newscaster before turning host of the Maury Show, and his dad, Shirley Povich, was an eloquent sportswriter at the Washington Post for over half a century. “I basically learned journalism at his knee,” he recalls.

Povich doesn’t want to “see the written word die” in journalism, so he endowed the Povich Writer-in-Residence in the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing. According to Al Filreis, the Kelly Family Professor of English and CPCW director, “the new position is another way in which we are taking seriously the idea that a practicing writer has something to teach our students.”

National political columnist Richard Polman is the first Povich Writer-in-Residence. He teaches Advanced Journalistic Writing and Political Writing in the Blog Age. “I like talking about writing as much as I like writing,” he says. Polman has written for the Philadelphia Inquirer for over two decades and has been a foreign correspondent, baseball reporter and feature writer. He is still a deadline-meeting journalist and maintains a well-regarded political blog, Dick Polman’s American Debate. “I don’t want to lose that edge,” he explains. “I feel it informs my teaching.”

Povich and Polman are strong backers of old-school journalistic values like accuracy and objectivity, values under attack in a charged political culture where opinion and information are axes for political ends.
You can count the number of great political journalists on one hand,” Povich observes, “and Dick is one of them.” Polman believes there will always be a place for skilled writing and impartial reporting, no matter how the culture and media technology change. “Journalism is a noble calling,” he contends, “and this is a terrific opportunity to take what I know and impart it to the next generation of writers.”

All the World’s a Classroom

“It’s not a curriculum add-on,” emphasizes Donald Kettl. “An internship is an integral part of learning that builds on the need to integrate theory and practice.” Kettl, the Stanley I. Sheerr Endowed Term Professor in the Social Sciences and director of the Fels Institute of Government, understands the importance of testing political theory in “the laboratory of real-world politics and government.”

Each summer, the Fels Public Policy Internship Program places undergraduates in D.C.-area federal agencies, lobbying firms, media outlets and even in congressional offices and the White House to do just that.

The College of Arts and Sciences recognizes the value of rich, classroom-enhancing experiences like internships and works hard to make them accessible to as many students as are interested. Each year, the College sponsors about 20 summer research internships, real-world learning experiences in Philadelphia arts and cultural institutions. Ideally, these internships provide hands-on “data” that lead to unique research projects. Urban studies co-director Elaine Simon, GEd’71, says the internships required of majors and minors in her program “can introduce students to a field or career that they can try on.” Undergraduates in the joint SAS-Wharton Roy and Diana Vagelos Program in Life Sciences and Management must do two summer internships. The first gives them direct experience in a business setting and the second places them in a laboratory, where they carry out research. “Working experience is the best way to understand how ideas do — or sometimes do not — get translated into practice,” explains co-director Mark Pauly.

Paid internships are especially needed by students who wish to extend their undergraduate experience through the summer. Many need a modest but critical stipend to support themselves and their study through the academic year. Only with the support of alumni, parents and friends can internships become an enriching mainstay of undergraduate education at Penn. “Students bring the practical experience back to Penn and use it to shape their preparation for positions of leadership,” Kettl says. To offer financial support or paid internship positions, contact Laura Weber at lweber@sas.upenn.edu or 215-898-5262.