

TRANSFORMATIONS



A passion for politics

Washington Semester experience balances learning and friendship

BY LISA MAURER ('09)

From the second I began unloading my van on busy Connecticut Avenue, I knew my semester in Washington, D.C., would be unlike any other. Away from my friends and my comfortable niche at JMU, I excitedly settled into my new apartment, hungry for the hustle and bustle of the city and all that Washington Semester could offer. This program lets students intern while taking classes, and my Washington Semester provided me with some of the best job experience, friendships and career preparation that I will carry with me in all my future endeavors.

Participants in the Washington Semester are required to find their own internship at the start of the semester. My peers in the fall 2007 program participated in a multitude of internships ranging from placements in the White House to the Fed-

About the Author *Lisa Maurer ('09) of Warminster, Pa., is a legal assistant at Fisher & Zucker LLC. The political science major and political communications minor participated in the JMU Washington Semester in 2007. She also studied abroad in the JMU program in Florence, Italy, and volunteered for Relay for Life in 2007 and 2009.*

eral Communications Commission. I landed my favorite job to date working as an intern at the Department of State. I worked in the senior coordinator's Office of Global Women's Issues. I offered help on various projects in exchange for insight on the inner operations of the department. The Department of State staff arranged for interns to meet high-ranking public officials. A dream come true for any political guru, my internship allowed me to brush shoulders with officials like Sandra Day O'Connor, Karen Hughes, Condoleezza Rice and the Dalai Llama. I still feel starstruck, honored and grateful for my Washington Semester experience.

In addition to the full-time internship, students are required to take two classes. One covers the media's role in politics, and the other details Washington, D.C., culture and political opportunities. The classes were conveniently located in the basement of the Boston University Center, where students lived. After a long day of interning, I would muster up the energy to slink

Hanging out after a program reception at the Capitol are Shruti Chaganti ('10), Robbie Kirk ('08), Jamie Lockhart ('08), Julia Fisher ('08), Lisa Maurer ('09), Michael Gruccio ('09) and Justin Purser ('10).

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down the stairs. Thankfully, I discovered that classes were quite enjoyable. Political science professor David Jones, the Washington Semester director, taught student participants about the background of our nation's capital. Dr. Jones showed us the Library of Congress, the Capitol and the State Department. As a supplement to the program, Dr. Jones also offered optional outings to enrich our experience, including baseball games, theatrical shows, an opera, hiking in Rock Creek Park and frequent dinners to local restaurants.

Thanks to Dr. Jones, I quickly became acclimated. No longer viewing myself as a tourist, I felt completely at home in our nation's capital.

Washington Semester also provided me with some of my best JMU friendships. The program's housing, located in scenic Woodley Park, allows JMU students to live together. The diversity of students, combined with unique internships, created an opportunity to learn from the experiences of our peers.

Students in the program possessed different interests because any major can participate in the program. One thing we all had in common was our passion for politics. Most of the students were pursuing a degree in political science and that created an interesting social environment. We spent many nights huddled around the TV watching presidential debates or sneaking away to visit memorials. Many nights ended by viewing the *Colbert Report*.

Shruti Chaganti ('10) shared my enjoyment of this adventure in Washington. Chaganti says, "Applying to the Washington Semester program was one of the best decisions I made. Academically, it

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Visiting the Lincoln Memorial are Shannon Abbott ('09), Julia Fisher ('08), Lisa Maurer ('09), Michael Gruccio ('09) and Shruti Chaganti ('09). (Below): Julia Fisher ('08) and Lisa Maurer ('09) visit the U.S. Department of State.



helped guide me on my career path and gave me the opportunities to work closely with high-level individuals on a daily basis. More importantly, I made friendships that will last forever. If there is anyone I will keep in touch with, even as we grow further apart physically, it is the individuals with whom I shared my life with for a semester."

Overall, Washington Semester created the perfect balance between career advancement, learning and friendship. The program helped me fall in love with the city and fostered my desire to return one day as a professional. ✎

*** If you are interested in the JMU Washington Semester, learn more at www.jmu.edu/polisci/washington.html.**

D.C. and Richmond area alumni interested in politics ... why not join the JMU Politicos

The JMU Politicos and the Richmond Politicos alumni organizations are for graduates living in the Washington, D.C., and Richmond areas who work in – or are simply interested in – politics, policy and related fields.

The Richmond Politicos have met in the Virginia Capitol building. Both alumni groups host career programs for current students and recent graduates, and offer networking opportunities for alumni. If you are interested in getting involved in either the D.C. or Richmond group, please e-mail political science professor David Jones at jones3da@jmu.edu.

*** Learn more at www.jmu.edu/polisci/alumni.html or join the groups at <http://groups.google.com/group/jmu-politicos>.**