

BRIGHTLIGHTS

[Christina Grier ('12)]

The elite grad school boot camp

BY AMELIA WOOD ('13)

It all started with a literary review of a last-minute paper. Christina Grier ('12) had unfortunately added a ton of pressure on herself by putting off a paper due in Assistant Professor of Political Science Valerie Sulfaro's research methods and statistics course.

Grier had no idea how much this paper would change her life, but she threw herself into the research.

Sulfaro, who always stresses the importance of hunting down original sources instead of relying on secondary references, was amazed by Grier's diligence.

"Christina hunted down the original sources for all of her articles and read them, and then read their original sources, and then read those piece's original sources. Then, she started to panic when she realized that this cycle would probably never end," Sulfaro recalls.

A diligent researcher, Grier shrugs and says she just did what she thought she was supposed to do. After reading Grier's paper, Sulfaro recommended that she check out the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute.

"I knew I wanted to go to grad school, but this program can lead to a doctoral program which can be five years long — five to seven depending on what you study," says Grier.

She convinced herself to apply to the prestigious Ralph Bunche Institute and accepted when she received the offer to participate in the grueling five weeks of intensive study. The institute is a graduate school boot camp. Well known among U.S. university political science departments, the institute is a highly recommended program for



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minority students looking to pursue a doctoral degree.

Twenty students are chosen annually from well over 100 applicants to attend the graduate-level classes at Duke University in North Carolina.

"There were students from New York and Texas and California and Michigan," says Grier, who took two classes at Duke — Race in American Politics and Statistical Analysis.

"The days were just so long," says Grier, repeating the sentiment more than once.

Within those few, short weeks Grier read more than 15 books and numerous articles, and produced a graduate-level paper on a research project that she hypothesized and empirically tested. "My paper was 34 pages, and I finished it in the last three to four days. I just stayed up and didn't sleep or eat," she says.

Students in the Bunche Institute spent many lunch breaks with a writing tutor receiving help with both the research paper and weekly class papers. Added perks included dinners on Thursdays with guest speakers and graduate student presentations; bag lunches with Duke professors; GRE prep courses and practice exams; and a recruitment fair with at least 20 representatives from graduate schools.

Grier says her "crazy summer" and hard work paid off. She applied to 10 graduate school political science programs as close as American University and George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and as far as the University of Minnesota. "I really didn't have a top choice," she says. "I didn't apply to a school that I couldn't see myself going to."

By early February Grier had heard from four schools and received acceptance letters from Penn State University and Ohio State University. She chose Penn State and plans to focus on American politics. Grier says she would like to research election campaigns from the voters' perspectives. Eventually she would like to become a professor and write books about her research and experiences.

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