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THE WASHINGTON PROGRAM:

Building Careers through Experience

By Lauren MacCormac '11

WASHINGTON, D.C. IS a global city. There are countless non-profits, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as pundits, politicians, and powerbrokers of every stripe. In addition, Washington is an epicenter of higher education with more than a dozen colleges and universities. Students from around the world flock to the District to engage in scholarship of every kind, pursue coveted internships, and build careers. Within this fast-paced atmosphere of study and statecraft, there exists a thriving and diverse group of people: the St. Mary's College of Maryland community.

"For a small school, St. Mary's truly punches above its weight when it comes to producing alumni involved with political affairs." This is an observation that Matt Fehrs, assistant professor of political science, shares with St. Mary's colleague Sahar Shafiqat, associate professor of political science. Together, they lead the College's Washington Program.

The realization that so many St. Mary's community members were pursuing successful careers in the District, coupled with the private, philanthropic support of St. Mary's community members, was the impetus for Shafiqat and Fehrs in establishing the Washington Program. Created in the summer of 2012, the Washington Program is designed to introduce political science students to the incredible scholastic and professional resource that is D.C. The program is a three-part, summer-long curriculum that entails intensive classwork to establish an "intellectually rigorous theoretical foundation" in policy followed by an internship and an alumni-peer mentorship. Shafiqat and Fehrs work to pair students with internships relevant to their academic interests and pursuits, connecting them with an alumni peer mentor that works in a field related to the student's internship.



"My first time on Capitol Hill was surreal.... For someone studying political science, having the opportunity to regularly be in the same room with national figures was ideal."

—Zara Marvi '14

Fehrs contends that the alumni component of the program is a unique and rewarding aspect of the internship. He says, "The alumni assume an important part of the student's professional development by offering their advice and experience. Throughout the summer, students meet with alumni for coffee or lunch and get a taste of what working in the District is really like." Kerry Crawford '07, an alumna mentor who is currently pursuing a PhD in international affairs at George Washington University says of the program, "St. Mary's is unique in that the alumni truly want to give back and help current students in any way we can; the tightly-knit community we all enjoy as students lasts beyond our years on campus."

Shafiqat believes that the younger generation of alumni living and working in D.C. offers a particularly valuable perspective to the students. "The newer alumni truly understand what it's like out there as young professionals, they can approach the internas on their own terms, they can relate to the challenges and provide tailor-made advice.

This is not your typical corporate mentor program, but instead a relationship bonded by the shared experiences of a St. Mary's education and ethos. The professional and networking advice garnered is truly invaluable."

Ambitious, intelligent and cosmopolitan, Zara Marvi '14 exemplifies the energetic cohort of St. Mary's students pursuing education and careers within Washington. Marvi, who went to high school in Singapore, was hardly intimidated by D.C.'s fast-paced, global current. She felt invigorated and at home as a sophomore intern in the Washington Program during the summer of 2012. Harnessing a passion for global affairs and civil rights, she was placed as an intern with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). PHR taps



TOP: 2012 Washington Program group. ABOVE: 2013 Washington Program group.

into the international community of physicians and medical professionals to investigate, report and help prosecute various war criminals by using the documentary tools of medical science.

For Marvi, working with an organization such as PHR was not merely a summer gig, but rather a professional affirmation that allowed her to put her analytical strengths in writing and research to work. Her internship consisted of an exciting array of professional assignments that sound more in keeping with a junior State Department desk officer than the duties of a 19-year-old.

Marvi recalls a typical day in the District as beginning before the summer sun rose above the Potomac, and riding the metro to Farragut-North station, where the headquarters of her NGO was located. Following a morning staff meeting, surrounded by world-class analysts, case managers and medical investigators, she would be briefed on her assignment and dispatched to Capitol Hill. It was her job to note and report on various Congressional hearings related to foreign policy relevant to PHR's global operations. Speaking of her memorable experience, Marvi remembers, "My first time on Capitol Hill was surreal.... For someone studying political science, having the opportunity to regularly be in the same room with national figures was ideal."

Marvi took away much more from the Washington Program than just college credit. Reflecting on the collective experience, she came away with lasting professional development in a field that is notoriously hard to break into. She notes, "The non-profit contacts I made working with PHR are worth so much. I got to routinely engage in discussions over coffee and lunch with well-regarded professionals in a field I aspire to join." When Marvi graduates in May, she plans on taking time off to travel before pursuing graduate studies and a career. However, thanks to the experience of the Washington Program, she is confident that when the time comes, like so many St. Mary's students past and present, she will be competitive for even the most sought-after jobs within the Beltway.

The Washington Program internships are not just limited to non-profits and NGOs, but offer St. Mary's students the full spectrum of Beltway

He learned that the realities of successful campaign work are predicated on the ability to talk to people, even those who disagree with you. Canfield's willingness to hit the pavement and connect with the public did not go unnoticed by the higher-ups in the RNC, and he was recognized as one of the hardest-working campaigners. Canfield was invited to return to the RNC during the summer of 2013, where he continued to grow and develop an invaluable professional network.

Following graduation in May, Canfield looks forward to starting a position with the federal government as a security specialist for the Navy, but not before traveling to the Czech Republic to teach English this summer. In addition to his exciting opportunity with the Navy, Canfield was also named a Fulbright Scholar finalist this past February. He attributes a great deal of his success both as a student and a burgeoning government professional to his St. Mary's and Washington Program experiences.

Luke Savonis describes himself as very much dedicated to social justice and political equality. Unsurprisingly, he is a senior student judicial adviser for J-Board, the student government body responsible for maintaining conduct on campus. Campaigning as a Summer Fellow for the Obama for America initiative, Savonis was tasked with a variety of responsibilities including spearheading voter enrollment drives and phone banking on behalf of the president. Taking part in a political campaign was, he says, "very hard work and time consuming, but uniquely rewarding in its own right." In particular, Savonis notes that seeing President Obama in person at a local fundraising event served to "affirm my commitment to campaign for key issues such as healthcare reform and reinvigorating the American economy."

Over the course of his Washington Program experience, Savonis encountered and spoke to numerous high-profile Maryland democrats including Governor Martin O'Malley and Senator Ben Cardin. Having the opportunity to interact with leading figures within the Beltway political community was both hugely exciting for him, and rewarding from a professional networking perspective. "The contacts I came away with from the internship experience were

"The contacts I came away with from the internship experience were incredible."

—Luke Savonis '14

professions. For students of political science and public policy, few things are more exciting than having the opportunity to serve on a campaign, especially when the candidates are vying for the White House. Griffin Canfield '14 and Luke Savonis '14 both experienced first-hand the inner workings of the 2012 presidential campaign when they respectively interned with the Republican National Committee (RNC) and the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

As typical with many of the St. Mary's students involved with the Washington Program, Canfield is an active member of the campus community, participating in the College Republicans, the Omicron Delta Kappa honors society and serving as a residence assistant in Dorchester Hall.

Through the Washington Program, Canfield was placed into the highly selective Eisenhower Summer Internship, where he was one of only fifty students from across the country to serve at RNC campaign headquarters. Early on in the internship, he lent his passion and knowledge of political science to assist RNC officials promote grass roots support in critical areas. In this capacity, Canfield found himself in the trenches of campaign work, going door-to-door canvassing on behalf of Mitt Romney.

incredible," says Savonis. "I have no doubt that working on the presidential campaign during the summer of 2012 helped me to secure an internship with Congressman Steny Hoyer the following summer."

Savonis is confident that the skills he acquired from the Washington Program will serve him well as he prepares for his next adventure with the Peace Corps following graduation.

Washington, D.C. is a vibrant and youthful city, attracting some of the most ambitious and talented young people from around the world. It is an environment that is as fiercely independent as it is competitive, making the Washington Program all the more valuable in giving St. Mary's students a leg up both in acquiring coveted internships and providing them with an alumni

support network. Students take away from the program not only experience, but also invaluable professional contacts with leaders from the realm of NGOs, non-profits and Capitol Hill. Combined with the wisdom and knowledge of a broad, enthusiastic alumni community base, St. Mary's students who take part in the Washington Program are set up for success. To be sure, professors Shafiqat and Fehrs are encouraged by the success of the curriculum thus far, and hope to expand the program down the road. Ultimately, the dynamic liberal arts education afforded by St. Mary's and innovative opportunities such as the Washington Program – made possible in part through private funding – help to make our students uniquely qualified to thrive in a global economy and environment. ❖

Funds for the Washington Program were made possible through the College's Heritage Campaign which culminated in December 2005.

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