

Michigan in Washington Program Highlights of the Fall 2009—Winter 2010 Semesters

The 6-foot-2-inch student put his hands on his hips and looked down at me as we stood outside, perplexed and more than a little disgusted at the impassable streets after the extreme winter storms in the District of Columbia in early February 2010. “Why didn’t the District just issue snow shovels to us all? We could have dug out by hand faster!”

Spoken like a true Wolverine.

An Unusual Winter

Mother Nature’s icy fury tops the list of highlights of the internship program this year. Usually, the annual report on this internship program’s highlights would begin with a recitation of how many students came from Ann Arbor to Washington, D.C. (20 in Fall 2009 and 21 in Winter 2010), how many schools and departments they represented (18), and how many organizations provided internships (34). This school year’s weather made the Winter 2010 students the group that could say it survived the snowiest winter in Washington ever.

The National Weather Service public information statement of February 11, 2010 stated that Washington had 55.9 inches of snow, breaking the previous record of 1898-1899 of 54.4 inches. Almost 11 inches of that record-breaking total came in two days, February 9 and 10, 2010, with snow falling at the rate of an inch per hour. The average annual snowfall in Washington is about 17 inches, less than one-third of this year’s total.

The Fall 2009 group just missed the first big storm of the season that dumped nearly two feet of snow on Washington Saturday, December 19. The University of California Washington Center (UCDC), where the Michigan in Washington Program rents dorm, classroom and office space, closed for the end of the fall semester on Saturday, December 12, so the students had already moved back to Ann Arbor or their respective homes by the time that snowstorm hit D.C. a week later.

The Associated Press quoted a National Weather Service meteorologist as saying that the critical problem for D.C. in February 2010 was that three snowstorms hit in succession within less than two weeks’ time, paralyzing transportation, leaving hundreds of thousands without power, and closing the federal government for four days, Monday through Thursday, February 8—11.

The Michigan students dutifully trudged through the drifts to their internship offices or called their supervisors that Monday. The student who interned at the White House worked throughout that week, but most of other students either could not get into their organizations’ offices because their supervisors were snowbound at home or were the only ones who showed up for work.

The transplanted Wolverines reveled in their unexpected holiday and organized a snowball fight in the vacant parking lot next door to the UCDC building, claiming to have beaten the untrained U-Cal students. Several Wolverines also partook of the large and generally friendly snowball fight at Dupont Circle, three blocks away from UCDC, organized by neighborhood residents of all ages on the Internet social networking site, *facebook*. Luckily, the UCDC building had power

and water throughout the “Snowmageddon.” The Michiganians were amused by the California students, ill-prepared for dressing for ice and slush and ignorant of winter survival techniques commonplace in the upper Midwest. Those who had never before experienced cabin fever were introduced to it in short order. By Friday, February 12, the students were eager to get back to their regular routine of classes and internships.

Washington’s reputation for having rollercoaster weather was reinforced when record spring heat and humidity hit D.C. in April, and the UCDC building manager turned on the air conditioning.

The Usual Schedule

When not dealing with record-breaking weather, the Michigan in Washington students worked at their internships Mondays through Thursdays. They attended a series of discussions with guest speakers every Monday evening, and they attended required seminars and elective courses Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday evenings and during the day on Fridays.

Usually, the women outnumber the men in the program. Of the 20 students who came in the fall, six were men; however, in the winter semester, the men outnumbered the women 13 to eight, a first for the program. Of the 41 students total, two were sophomores, 17 were juniors, and 22 were seniors.

Although the majority of MIW students come from Political Science, four were from the “hard” sciences: Biological Math; Brain Behavior & Cognitive Science; Interdisciplinary Physics; and, Health Sciences (our one participant from the Flint Honors Program). Twenty-six of the 41 (63 percent) were political science majors, six of the whom were double-majoring (two in Economics and one each in Middle Eastern Studies, Psychology, Women’s Studies, and Latin American & Caribbean Studies). MIW had three other double majors: one in American Culture and Spanish; one in Latin American & Caribbean Studies and English; and, the third was the aforementioned Physics major who was also majoring in Public Policy. Two students from Sociology and one each from Public Policy, Psychology, Anthropology, English, History, International Development & Social Justice, and Latin American & Caribbean Studies came to Washington in the 2009-2010 academic year.

The 41 MIW students worked in 32 different internship providers’ offices in the past school year. Below is a chart of those organizations that provided internships for MIW student in 2009--2010.

Internship Providers

Legislative Branch

House Judiciary Committee
House Energy and Commerce
Sen. Debbie Stabenow

Sen. Mark Udall
Rep. John Dingell
Rep. Gary Peters

Rep. Mark Schauer
Rep. Fred Upton

Executive Branch

White House Office of Climate Change and
Energy Policy
Department of State
Department of Justice, Environmental
Enforcement
National Defense University

International Organization

Organization of American States

News Media

Black Entertainment Network (BET)
CNN Library

Consulting Firms

Bryan Cave Strategies LLP

Think Tanks, Professional Organizations

Brookings Institute
Northeast-Midwest Institute
Strategic Health Care
Woodrow Wilson International Center
for Scholars
Center for American Progress
Middle East Institute
Center for Strategic and International
Studies
Association for American Universities

NGOs, Not-for-Profits

Girls, Inc.
Habitat for Humanity
International Justice Mission
Congressional Management Foundation
National Head Start Association
National Women's Law Center
Public Citizen
Voices for America's Children
U.S. Global Leadership Coalition

District of Columbia

DC Attorney General

Speakers

Every Monday night at the University of California Washington Center where the MIW students live, a guest speaker is invited to talk and field questions from the students for one hour. The students arrive outside the auditorium at 6:15 p.m. and help themselves to a light supper, which they finish as the guest speaker begins his or her remarks at 6:30. Two of the Monday night guest speakers, Michigan alumni John Dugan and Jonathan Kempner, discussed the financial credit crisis from different vantage points, but agreed on fundamental points about the reasons for the recession and the need for the development of prudent regulation.

Jonathan Kempner, who had been the President and CEO of the Mortgage Bankers Association, was frank with the students in his October 19 opening remarks about the mistakes that some

bankers had made that cascaded into an international economic crisis. At that time in the fall semester, the House and Senate were only beginning the long process of sorting through various proposals for increased regulation of investment banking. By the time John Dugan, Comptroller of the Currency of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, spoke to the winter semester students at a Monday night forum on April 12, discussion about the merits of proposed legislation was at its peak. The Comptroller of the Currency regulates national banks. Mr. Dugan explained each proposal, careful to point out that the banks regulated by the agency he heads already have to adhere to a number of regulations, and none of those banks had been the precipitating cause of the fiscal implosion. When I introduced Mr. Dugan to the students, I noted that he was a party to the late night and weekend discussions with Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson on how to save the nation from economic collapse. A respectful voice punctuated the momentary silence in the auditorium: “Thank you!”

Other Monday night guest speakers included: *Washington Post* journalists Anne Kornblut and Rajiv Chandrasekaran and *New York Times* journalist Adam Nagourney; authors Dan Balz and Haynes Johnson on the 2008 Presidential election and Beth Ryne of the Center for Financial Inclusion on microfinance; Cameron Lynch of the Bipartisan Policy Center on the future of the Republican Party; White House speech writers Sara Hurwitz and Josh Gottheimer; White House Research Director Elizabeth Jarvis-Shean and Deputy Director of Cabinet Affairs Michael French; Thayer Scott, chief speech writer for Secretary of Defense Robert Gates; and, Warren Bass, chief speech writer and policy advisor for United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice.

Sometimes guest speaking is a family affair, and this past year, brothers of two men who teach at UCDC told the students about their positions as Obama Administration leaders in environmental and energy policies. On November 23, UCDC Law Program Director Steve Pershing quizzed his brother Jonathan, Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Change at the U.S. Department of State, about the international talks in Bangkok and Copenhagen and the difficulties of leading the American diplomatic delegation. On April 5, UC-Merced internship program director Marc Sandalow questioned his brother David, Assistant Secretary of Energy, about how the U.S. ought to balance its seemingly unquenchable thirst for energy with the challenges presented by global warming and pollution. Both Jonathan Pershing and David Sandalow emphasized to the students the need to understand the science, culture and politics of the diplomats of various countries with whom they work, and both told the students that they didn’t mind working long hours and traveling thousands of miles every year because they were happy and energized by their work as public servants. The Sandalow brothers gave a special “shout-out” to the Michigan students because they grew up in Ann Arbor and David graduated from UM School of Law, where their father was dean.

The University of Michigan Washington D.C. Alumni Club hosted the winter semester students to the annual Legislative Breakfast with the Sen. Carl Levin, who, rather than deliver prepared remarks, fielded questions from the assembled alumni. The University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman recognized the Michigan in Washington students in her welcoming remarks, and the March 10 edition of the *UM Record Update* featured a photograph of President Coleman talking to three MIW students at the Legislative Breakfast.

Sharing Elective Courses

Faculty from Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California at Berkeley and Merced offer elective courses to students from all four universities who live at the UCDC Washington Center and participate in their respective internship programs.

In Fall 2009, students could choose from the following classes:

1. “The Theater of Politics: The Politics of Theater—Theater and Society, Culture and Context,” taught by Michigan’s Ari Roth.
2. “America and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Issues in Policy and Diplomacy,” taught by Michigan’s Aaron David Miller.
3. “The Idea of Development—Past, Present and Future,” about political economy and globalization by Penn’s Rudra Sil.
4. “Behind the Bully Pulpit: The History of the Presidential Speech,” offered by Penn’s Josh Gottheimer.
5. “Narratives and Images of 20th Century Conflict,” a history class about the wars of the last century, taught by Berkeley’s Anthony Adamthwaite.
6. “The Congress,” team taught by Berkeley’s Bruce Cain, Barbara Sinclair and Michael Shenkman.

In Winter 2010:

1. Ari Roth of Michigan again taught his theater course, but this time, the theme was how artistic directors of theaters decide which plays to mount and why different audiences may respond in various ways to different plays.
2. Kathy Wagner of Michigan offered “Environmental Policymaking in the Global Economy.”
3. Bruce Cain of Berkeley taught “Political Reform” on movements in American politics about conflicts of interest, bribery, campaign finance reform and redistricting.
4. Penn’s Aaron Strauss discussed how to manage a political campaign and whether get-out-the-vote techniques work in “Campaign Effects and Management.”
5. Matthew Tobin of Penn explored the politics of financial crises in “Manias, Panics and Crashes.”
6. Berkeley’s David Karol taught “Representation in American Politics,” on the degree to which citizens’ wishes are expressed in the three branches of government.

Special Treats

Generous Michigan alumni donated tickets to performances of the New York City Ballet at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in December and the Washington Capitals' hockey games in Washington throughout the season. An alumnus arranged for a specially tailored treasure hunt at the National Gallery of Art's West Wing at the beginning of the winter semester in January. Teams of five fanned out across the museum for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon, searching for the right painting that fit the description in cleverly worded clues. The winning team was treated to a steak dinner afterwards.

Conclusion

Michigan in Washington students often characterize their 16 weeks in the District of Columbia as the hardest semester they ever had, but one they would repeat in a heartbeat. The combination of working four days a week and maintaining a full load of classes keeps them busy, and a common complaint is that they have to leave the nation's capital before having visited all the museums and monuments. The Michigan students love Ann Arbor and are happy to return, but they often mature in Washington in ways they could not in Ann Arbor at internships available only in D.C.

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