

My Summer in Senator Feingold's Office

I learned a lot at the Dartmouth Civic Skills program which helped me during the course of my internship. The office I worked in was very large and at first very confusing in terms of where to help out. Through preparation in the week leading up to my internship, entry into the office was eased, and I knew mostly what to expect and how to navigate the office. During the week of Civic Skills I also learned the importance of connections to the office and utilized my connections to meet people in the Senate office that I otherwise would not have met. I also learned at Civic Skills to document work whenever possible so that I could turn in substantive evidence at the end of my internship thus making it easier for someone to write me a letter of recommendation. Civic Skills helped me to avoid the monotonous work usually given to interns and do more meaningful work.

A Senate office is very large and consists of legislative assistants (LAs) which are responsible for different topics such as the judiciary, health, foreign relations, crime, etc... My first day in the office I created a list of all the topics I was interested in and found the names of the responsible LAs. I proceeded to introduce myself to the LAs responsible for health (due to my interest in psychology), foreign relations (I was very interested in Africa, and Iraq), and the judiciary (I wanted to be involved with the impending Supreme Court vacancies). All of the LAs I spoke to received my enthusiasm very well and told me they would get back to me if they needed help with my particular areas of interest.

I wanted to make sure I received work from one of the LAs, so I organized a lunch between a Dartmouth alum and the expert in the office on foreign relations. The

alum was a high level employee at the State Department named Tom Callahan, and held a student discussion at Dartmouth the previous trimester where we met. He knew a woman in the office who was the Senator's top assistant (one step above the corresponding LA) on foreign relations. The lunch went well and the next day her assistant, the foreign relations legislative assistant, told me to write on current political turmoil in Uzbekistan, and a raging civil war in the Ivory Coast. Both turned out to be very interesting topics, and I assisted in drafting language on letters that would be used for constituent responses. By the end of my internship I wrote about 30 pages on a wide range of topics. During the periods when I wasn't writing I did other tasks such as mail sorting, data entry on received letters, capital tours, and my favorite; intra-office memos based on congressional hearings.

In any given day, Senator Feingold's office received approximately 2000 letters and emails, all of which receive a written response. After Justice O' Connor announced her retirement, the daily number of letters received ballooned to approximately 13,000. The amount of work needed to process these letters consumed much of the interns' time in the office for several weeks. In addition to mail sorting, all of the office interns also received training to give capital tours. The office scheduled tours twice daily and although sometimes younger constituents often paid little attention, the tours provided an opportunity to meet Wisconsinites and give them a good impression of the Senate office.

Of the tasks allotted to interns, my favorite besides research and writing, was seeing Senators speak, whether in committees or giving public lectures. LAs often asked interns to go to House or Senate hearings and write them a memo on important information from the hearings. During these times I watched senators and House

members debate a wide range of issues. I also witnessed the media circus associated with certain topics such as Iraq and the Reporters Shield laws associated with the imprisonment of Judith Miller of the New York Times. The hearings provided an amazing education both in how decisions are made in Washington, and on the topics being debated. Through these hearings, I learned about impending threat of China's fast increases in GDP and flagrant human rights violations. I also learned about predictions of oil shortages in the future, problems with psychology of soldiers in Iraq, and I even saw Ani DiFranco, the Indigo Girls, and the main character from the movie "Babe" discuss non-proliferation in the basement of the capital. In addition, many Senators considering Presidential bids such as John Kerry, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Chris Dodd gave talks to interns and provided a rare opportunity for Q&A which proved extremely interesting.

The eight weeks I spent in Washington provided me with an education that I don't expect to ever be matched in such a short period. Writing letters granted me the chance to do legitimate work for the Senator, while capital tours allowed me to meet constituents and gave me something to show to visiting friends and family. During the Civic Skills class I learned that I should keep a record of as much work as possible in order to ease the job of my supervisor should he write a letter of recommendation at some point in the future. I put together a binder of all of my research and letters at the end of the internship which was well received. I'm very happy with how my summer worked out, and after my time in DC I even had time cap off the summer by relaxing at home for five weeks before school started.