

Junior girls do capital internships in D.C.

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By Rael Linder, Op/Ed Writer

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Muhlenberg encourages students to study abroad junior year, and we have many options. Exotic, discipline-specific programs like Maastricht and Goldsmiths may sway students with the opportunity to travel and speak foreign languages. And the Office of Global Education boasts about exposure to diverse traditions and perspectives through international programs. While this is all well and good, I am here to persuade and recruit for the Washington, DC semester.

In times of a skyrocketing unemployment rate, we're all forced to compete for jobs. Unfortunately, an undergraduate education, high GPA, and leadership in an extracurricular activity doesn't mean you'll get a job after graduation. Internships provide students with on-the-job training, professional references and resume credit. In Washington, DC, we have the chance to explore future career possibilities, while making connections and learning skills on site. A full-time internship (4 days/week) for a full semester (14 weeks) is well respected by organizations, and provides profitable development for students.

The College's Washington Semester is remarkably fun. The program sets up about 40 students from around the country in fully-furnished apartments with kitchens, living rooms, and balconies, one block from the metro in Rosslyn, VA (just one stop from GWU). We work four days a week and reserve Wednesdays for field trips. Two favorites were the Newseum and Billy Crystal's 700 Sundays performance at the National Theatre. Students must register for two classes, which meet once a week at night. Plus, we get academic credit for everything. To give you the run-down on our lives in the District, I interviewed a fellow junior, Andrea Ouellette, who is a double major in Communication and Spanish. In Washington, Andrea interns at Sutter's Mill Fund Raising & Strategy, which is a fundraising office on Capitol Hill for 16 Democratic members of the House of Representatives. She starts by telling me, "Internships aren't glamorous," and I realize she may not have the most exciting typical day. When she arrives in the office at 8:30 am, she checks the headlines for information about the 16 House members she follows, and clips relevant articles. Andrea works with the donor and lobbyist database updating the contact list with phone numbers, fax and e-mail addresses.

From there, she uses the database to check for those who have donated before. She highlights the relevant donors, so that later, when a House member is in her office, he or she can call the person directly. Andrea will then follow up by contacting the individual. Andrea is often assigned tasks like filing checks for clients, running errands to the bank or congressional buildings and making phone calls. Her duties may, indeed, seem menial, but phone manner is an important skill. She also mentioned that many of the seven employees at Sutter's Mill had started as interns. So, interns are respected with the opportunity to be considered for a future job.

Andrea also works on networking and lobbying events. She enjoys watching the event go from an idea to a final product. She's attended an Orioles game, two professional lunches and one networking breakfast event. Meeting professionals at events is a great networking skill that everyone should have. Andrea's PR skills will continue to flourish, and she's building confidence to shake many hands and make connections for future jobs.

Andrea feels the internship is a fabulous learning experience and Sutter's Mill is a good name to have on her resume. At interviews she can use them as an important reference.

Andrea will be studying abroad in Spain during the Spring 2010 semester and feels a little disconnected from the college community. She said, "I appreciate Muhlenberg for letting me do this and my opportunities are definitely worth it."

The Washington Semester is giving us an off-campus, independent and self motivating experience. Andrea is challenging herself to make the most out of her internship and is loving DC in the process.

The city is full of culture and she attends events in the community that would never be offered in Allentown.

The College typically sends 2-4 students to Washington per semester. Admittedly, I didn't decide to come to Washington until March. The program is often overlooked because it doesn't thrill people the way going overseas does. Sure, you won't get a world view or meet good-looking foreigners. But, you will get a chance to become self-aware about your future career goals and meet interesting professionals in your field. And believe me, the program really does cater to all majors. As a business and theatre double major, I'm interning in entertainment marketing for film.

If you have questions, please contact us.

