

CORNELL STUDENTS PURSUE CHALLENGES IN THE NATION'S CAPITOL

The Cornell-in-Washington Program

In CIW, students are challenged by

- ↻ An externship
- ↻ A research project
- ↻ Two core courses:
The American Experience and Public Policy

While Ithaca may be called the ideal college town, many Cornell undergrads seek to diversify their college experience by studying away from campus at some point during their four years. Students can travel as far as Spain, Australia, and Nepal to broaden their horizons, but some stay closer to home. One of Cornell's most popular programs is located just a few hours from Ithaca, New York, in Washington, D.C.—the Cornell-in-Washington program (CIW). A select group of undergrads challenge themselves academically and professionally, while taking advantage of everything that the nation's capital has to offer.

The Cornell Center, which houses CIW and is located a block from bustling Dupont Circle, has been welcoming students for over 20 years. CIW saw only six participants when it started in the spring of 1980. Today, about 50 Cornellians come to be a part of the program every spring and fall semester. While government majors are especially interested in studying and working in Washington, according to executive director Linda Jarschauer Johnson, students from all disciplines are attracted to CIW: "We have biology majors, English majors, psychology majors—it really is a university-wide program."

The CIW externship is an opportunity for students to experience the working world and explore future careers. Students work at all types of organizations—small nonprofits, major television networks, government offices. Because of their externships,

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joshua a. teitelbaum '05 (l.), a communications major in the college of agriculture and life sciences, worked for greenberg quinlan rosner research, a public opinion and strategic research firm. one of teitelbaum's most memorable externship experiences was participating in a presentation the firm gave on capitol hill, where he met many high-profile political figures. he consults with steve jackson (r.), associate director of ciw.

Shelia Martner



many students take part in exclusive events, like Congressional hearings and party fundraisers. Johnson believes that the externship is one of the best parts of CIW, as it lets students test out potential careers: "For the majority of students, the externship is really a positive experience. They definitely come away from it with a sense of what they want to do and what they don't want to do."

Along with the externship, the research project is an essential part of CIW. Over the course of the semester, students are faced with the challenge of researching and writing a 40 to 100-page paper on a topic of their choice. Two core courses, the American Experience and Public Policy, are designed to guide students through the research and writing process. The assignment is daunting at first—just about every CIW student admits being overwhelmed by the paper at some point during the semester.

Yet, once they have completed their projects and had time to think about the work they produced, many CIW alumni are glad to have been presented with the academic challenge. Steven I. Jackson, associate director of CIW, elaborates: "During the semester, the students go through various phases of both excitement and frustration. Near the end, there's some period of just wanting the project to be over. But for the majority of students, once they're done with it, it becomes something they're pretty proud of."

During Spring 2004, Shawnakim B. Lowey-Ball '05 and Joshua A. Teitelbaum '05 took part in CIW. Though they explored different fields of work and academic topics, both left Washington with a new understanding of their interests and a fondness for the capital city.

Lowey-Ball, a government and history major in the College of Arts and Sciences, came to Washington to take a break from campus life: "I needed a change of scenery. I wanted to be in a city where there would be a lot of things to do, and the idea of working for something that was less of a student job and

Lowey-Ball wrote about Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and how his time in the Civil War affected the decisions he later made as a Supreme Court justice.

more of a real opportunity appealed to me." Lowey-Ball worked at the Farmworker Justice Fund, a nonprofit organization that has been helping migrant farmworkers improve their wages and working conditions for more than 20 years.

She spent much of her time attending congressional hearings for AgJOBS, a piece of legislation intended to empower immigrants working on U.S. farms. She also researched past immigrant farm worker programs and compared them to their modern-day counterparts. Lowey-Ball was pleased that her externship allowed her to explore two major interests, agrarian history and legislative lobbying. She looks back on her externship as "a great intersection between the historical side of things, and government and politics."

Teitelbaum investigated how income inequality affects the achievement levels of school children.

Like Lowey-Ball, Teitelbaum, a communications major in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, went to D.C. to live the life of a young professional. He worked for Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, a public opinion and strategic research firm that works with many Democratic campaigns. Much of his time was spent researching foreign policy issues for the firm's analysts and writing foreign policy reports. One of Teitelbaum's most memorable externship experiences was participating in a presentation Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research gave on Capitol Hill, where he met many high-profile political figures.

In Lowey-Ball's research project, as in her externship, history, government, and politics converged. A student in the American Experience course, she wrote about Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and how his time in the Civil War affected the decisions he

later made as a Supreme Court justice. Lowey-Ball had been introduced to Holmes and the cases he decided by a constitutional history class she had taken before going to Washington.

Speaking about why she chose her topic, Lowey-Ball explains, "I thought Holmes was a fascinating character, and D.C. was a great place to do research on a Supreme Court justice." Holmes was famous for his unpredictable case decisions; he had a reputation for being a progressive judge one day and a conservative the next. With her paper, Lowey-Ball sought to explain Holmes's contradictory rulings. She came to the conclusion that "Holmes was a soldier, and he used the philosophy of someone who had fought through a war to make his court decisions."

Teitelbaum saw the CIW research project as an opportunity to explore his interest in social inequality. He investigated how income inequality affects the achievement levels of school children. After reading several studies on income inequality and analyzing data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Teitelbaum found that the larger the gap between rich and poor students, the greater the disparity in academic performance.

He concluded that income inequality is associated with low achievement and that middle-class school districts boast the highest graduation rates. Teitelbaum is thinking about pursuing this topic in future research projects, as he feels it is an issue that deserves attention: "Education is very important to me, and income inequality is something that I see as an underlying cause of a lot of educational and societal problems."

While Teitelbaum and Lowey-Ball value their externships and research projects, their most memorable Washington moments happened outside of the workplace and classroom, often thanks to the directors of CIW. Every semester, the directors schedule special outings to show students parts of D.C. they might not get to see on their own. Baseball games, trolley tours, and theatre tickets are some of the treats program participants enjoy.

One of last spring's events was a visit to the rare books collection of the Library of Congress. Lowey-Ball recalls her amazement at seeing some of the centuries-old texts and manuscripts: "I saw an original copy of the Constitution, the Guttenberg Bible, illuminated manuscripts, and early Americana. It was fascinating—they just hand the documents to you, and you could look through them."

After a semester of city living, the majority of CIW students leave as Washingtonians, with a fondness for D.C. and all it has to offer. Teitelbaum and Lowey-Ball certainly see themselves returning to the nation's capital in the future. Lowey-Ball admits that she's been bitten by the "Capitol bug," and pictures herself back on Capitol Hill pursuing a political career in a few years. Teitelbaum shares a similar vision. With plans to return to D.C. for law school or to work on the Hill, he declares, "I definitely see myself sticking around here for a while."

So does CIW. As the program heads into its 25th year, it is attracting more students than ever. It looks like Cornellians will be flocking to D.C. for a long time to come.

Sheila Yasmin Marikar '05

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For more information:



sl332@cornell.edu
jat49@cornell.edu