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# Getting Potomac Fever:

## Increasing Civic Engagement through Experiential Learning Communities

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## Abstract

Drawing upon the literature on experiential learning, learning communities, and the scholarship of civic engagement, this paper assesses the outcomes of the Washington D.C. Summer Study Program developed by the College of St Benedict and St. John's University. We are especially interested in examining the extent to which students who undertake this two month, eight credit internship learning community experience engage with politics and political life. Do students learn more about the US political system, its operation and opportunities? Are they more enthusiastic about public policy and politics? Do they increase their level of trust in government or their feelings of efficacy? In addition to these questions, we examine what the students' experiences mean for them in terms of the integration of past and future course material, and how students use these experiences to examine their career goals, to develop their own career path, and to learn to live and work independently and responsibly in an urban setting. Data gathered from a survey of the program's interns is compared with an initial survey of 200 students who have not yet undertaken internships either inside or outside a learning community model, as well as data from interviews with students, site supervisors, and faculty, and student archival data from the three decades old program. The study demonstrates that while there are numerous tradeoffs and costs, internships embedded within a learning community create unique benefits not available to the more isolated individual internship model.

## Introduction

The College of St Benedict and St. John's University's Washington D.C. Summer Study Program is an eight credit internship program based on a learning community model, and is currently run under the auspices of the Eugene J. McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic Engagement. Each student in the program works for the summer as an intern at a Congressional office, on a committee staff, in a government agency, in a nonprofit organization, or with a public affairs group. Students live together in apartment housing, and faculty moderators live close by. Two members of the CSB-SJU faculty conduct evening seminars, organize visits with congressional offices, and field trips to sites which enhance students understanding of government systems and policy issues, and do site visits at the beginning and end of the program.

The Washington DC Summer Study program is almost three decades old. It was run as a loose form of learning community long before such a concept became common usage

in academia. The program is now on its third set of co-directors, and over the past two decades each subsequent set of directors have worked to reinforce the academic and career development value of the students' work experiences, to encourage a sense of community within these small groups, and to build a coherent set of goals and expectations for both students and faculty within the learning community.

Over time, therefore, the program's directors have consciously adapted it to both the learning community and experiential education paradigms. The co-directors of the program team teach the academic aspect of the course, sharing the development of course goals, organizational responsibilities, seminar planning, and grading. The program has developed a multidisciplinary approach, since students from several disciplines undertake the program. In the most recent cohort of students, Spanish, Peace Studies, and Economics majors joined their Political Science peers in Washington D.C. for the summers of 2007 and 2008. In 2009 we had a Chemistry major participate in the program. In addition, the program encourages students to be conscious of how the theory that they learned in the classroom relates to their practical work experiences.

The learning goals of the program are stated clearly in the program's syllabus, which is provided to all the participants at a seminar at the beginning of the program. They include:

- Thoughtful integration of field experiences with classroom study of U.S. national government;
- Ability to live and work independently and responsibly in an urban setting;
- Application of transferable skills to accomplish political tasks;
- Evaluation of a variety of career goals;
- Acceptance of career development responsibility.

These goals embrace aspects of both experiential education and learning community pedagogy, with an emphasis upon connecting political science theory and practice, civic engagement, and career development.

While the directors have become increasingly conscious of the learning community and experiential learning aspects of the program, we have until now have never consciously focused on the program's ability to increase civic engagement. Since the program is now run under the banner of the McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic

Engagement, the directors have turned their attention to this important aspect of the program. Common sense would suggest that an internship in the nation’s capital would build students’ confidence in their knowledge of the political system as well as their trust in government and rates of participation in civic life but we had no empirical evidence.

Our research seeks to discover whether experiential education within the Washington D.C. Summer Study learning community has advantages for students in terms of increasing their civic engagement and confidence in their political knowledge. Did the students learn more about the political system within the learning community than they did in regular internships? Did they become more enthusiastic about public policy and politics and increase their sense that they can make change—that is, did their civic engagement increase— because of their internship experience? Did they have better career mentoring opportunities because their internship was contextualized within a learning community?

## Literature Review

### Service Learning and Civic Engagement

There are various forms of “experiential education” defined by an extensive literature about the subject. Experiential education includes everything from lab experiences in the natural sciences to student-teaching, undergraduate research, clinical experiences, study abroad, and service learning, including internships.

The Association for Experiential Education defines experiential education as:

[A] philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values. (Association for Experiential Education 2007, 1)

Experiential education paradigms are rooted in the educational philosophy of the nineteenth century theorist John Dewey, who developed an entire pedagogical framework upon the notion of “learning by doing” grounded in the notion that students must be presented with real world problems to solve. (Cross 1999, 20) Dewey argued that experience is central to a quality educational experience, and that experience “arouses curiosity, strengthens initiatives” and intensifies “desires and purposes” (Dewey 1966, 31).

Far ahead of his time, most educators today accept the necessity of grounding complex abstractions in real-world examples. Researchers have discovered that when theoretical material “comes to life” students are more likely to learn the “nuts and bolts” content. (Freie 1997) Experiential learning fundamentally enhances student knowledge of the course material.

The other oft-cited theorist in the area of experiential education is David Kolb, who describes four stages of intellectual development:

1. Concrete Experience;
2. Reflective Observation;
3. Abstract Conceptualization; and
4. Active Experimentation .

(cited in Oates and Gaither 2001, 138)

Kolb’s theory starts with concrete experiences and moves to abstract conceptualization, an important (and perhaps a counter-intuitive) notion for those wishing to develop service learning experiences in an academic environment.

Along with greater intellectual development for the individual, experiential education provides support for the important goal of civic engagement – an objective especially important for departments of political science. (Colby 2007, 18) Researchers have found that students are more likely to become life-long active citizens if they have some experiential courses rather than only lecture-based courses. (Markus, King *et al.* 1993; Lindstrom, 2003) More recent studies have confirmed the importance of some form of experiential education in ensuring student civic engagement in political science courses (Oberbauer 2007) and have found that service learning projects increased students’ political knowledge and fostered a sense of civic responsibility. (Hunter and Brisbin 2000; Dudley and Gitelson 2003; and Hunter and Brisbin 2003)

The Washington D.C. Summer Study Program is clearly linked to the service learning mode of experiential education. Service learning is defined as:

[A] form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs [combined] with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. (Jacoby quoted in (Oates and Gaither 2001, 135)

Many researchers have found that service learning encourages civic engagement, providing

a sense of connection to community and the American political system for students. While not all experiential education is politically focused, because many service-learning and internship projects take students into the wider community these projects are positive supports of civic engagement for many students. As the Bonner Foundation, one of the country's leading funders and organizers of civic education, notes: "Civic engagement begins with the decision to participate intentionally as a citizen in the democratic process, actively engaging in public policy and direct service." (Dahl, Hoy, and Meisel 2006, 3)

The extent to which the D.C. Summer Study Program increases student interest in civic engagement is an important question for us as we continue our program assessment. As Syvertsen, Flanagan, and Stout note, "[t]he power of civic education to elicit positive student outcomes has been empirically documented. However, the field is only now beginning to understand the causal processes that bring about these positive changes in young people." (2007, 1-19)

### **Learning Communities and Civic Engagement**

As a type of "cooperative learning," there are various forms of learning community that exist in the literature and in practice. Barbara Smith describes learning communities as "a deliberate restructuring of the curriculum to build a community of learners among students and faculty." (Smith and Hunter 1988, 46) Most of the literature stresses the goal of "increased interaction with faculty and fellow students." (Smith and MacGregor 2000, 18) For our purposes, however, the most useful definition is simply "a curricular form of collaborative learning." (Cross 1999, 18)

Learning communities are seen to be of value because they address some of the most commonly cited problems in undergraduate education; overly large class sizes leading to student isolation, and lack of meaningful connection between classes. (Smith and MacGregor 2000, 19) Learning communities allow, amongst other things, the "active construction of knowledge; learning by direct experience and enquiry; focused interaction with faculty; active, interactive, and cooperative involvement among students; ... development of abilities to communicate with diverse people; [and] a sense of belonging and community." (Smith and MacGregor 2000, 78) There is also widespread agreement that at least in principle (albeit not always in practice) that learning communities tend to

support Chickering and Gamson's *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Higher Education*:

1. Encourages student-faculty contact,
2. Encourages cooperation among students,
3. Encourages active learning,
4. Gives prompt feedback,
5. Emphasizes time on task,
6. Communicates high expectations,
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

(cited in Shapiro and Laufgraben 1999, 115)

Learning communities allow students to engage more fully with the academic material in an intellectually more complex environment. (Gabelnick 1990, 65) With the addition of a service-learning component, a learning community becomes an integrated process “in which the learner constructs knowledge, skills, and values from direct experience. (Oates and Gaither 2001, 139) The literature also points to benefits for students’ career development, which is enhanced by learning community programs because they “contribute to the development of connections beyond the college, and help prepare students for the challenge of leadership.” (Matthews 1994, 180)

The literature surrounding the systematic assessment of learning communities and experiential education—specifically internships in the context of political science—remains relatively thin on the ground, although there have been several very valuable attempts at assessing existing programs (Hedlund 1973) as well as several very useful instructional guides on the subject. (see Oates and Gaither 2001) As Oates and Gaither point out, “[w]ithout experiential education, the learning community remains untransformed in any meaningful way. Instead, an integrated structure allows the progression through a process in which the learner constructs knowledge, skills, and values from direct experience.” (2001, 139)

The combination of the experiential education and learning community models provides another level of complexity to the assessment task. This literature explores the problems of assessing a complex process involving three integrated components: a learning community component, a service-learning component, and a content component. (Oates and Gaither 2001, 139) As the current co-directors improve the direct assessment of student learning, isolating the over-lapping ingredients of learning communities will be of utmost importance.



## Data

Our review of the D.C. Program’s archival data and the assessment information from the CSB-SJU internship office found a marginal amount of indirect assessment of civic engagement; in general the survey did little robust direct measurement. Beginning in 2010, therefore, the co-directors implemented a pre-test designed to assess civic engagement, interest, and activity (see Appendix I). The questionnaire includes:

- 1) General background questions, including the student’s year in school, majors and minors, whether or not they had completed an internship or participated in a service learning program, and whether they had voted in the last election and anticipated voting in the next election;
- 2) Six questions adapted from the National Election Study survey instrument regarding political efficacy and trust;
- 3) The Bonner civic engagement questionnaire. This survey instrument was developed and implemented nationally by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and measures civic engagement factors including community problem solving, electoral indicators, and indicators of political voice (CIRCLE 2006). Because this is a nationally fielded survey, we will be able to compare civic engagement trends of College of St Benedict and St John’s University students, including those applying to the D.C. Program.

Students who applied to the program for 2010 were given this survey instrument as a pre-test. The same questionnaire, along with the student course evaluation survey, will be administered as a post-test at the end of the program in August of 2010. The questionnaire was also administered to 200 other students to give us a baseline from which to measure D.C. Program students.

Our study also utilizes qualitative data garnered from surveys of alumni of the Washington D.C. Summer Study Program. A course evaluation survey for the Washington D.C. Summer Study Program was developed based upon the final evaluation survey completed by “regular interns” connected with the College of St Benedict and St John’s University internship office, and includes some of the political efficacy and trust measures

included in the American National Elections Study Questionnaire (see Appendix II). Surveys were sent to 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 alumnae of the Washington D.C. Summer Study Program. At the time of this paper's completion, the response rate was roughly 75%.

Although we have already put parts of our survey instrument into the field this study remains exploratory. The D.C. Program graduates only ten to thirteen students per summer, thus quantitative analysis is difficult. Expanding the use of the pre- and post-test to the CSB-SJU "regular" interns may help us unpick some details, but at this time complex statistical analysis or firm conclusions are impossible. Qualitative analysis, supported by some limited descriptive statistics, remains the most useful path.

## **Analysis: Increasing Civic Engagement and Political Knowledge**

Part of the problem with measuring civic engagement was a bias in our sample. The Washington D.C. Program has traditionally attracted junior political science majors who were ready to spend an entire summer interning around the Hill, which meant that our students were *already* highly civically engaged. Several students interviewed for the study, however, indicated that being on the program increased their civic engagement, and one or two even pointed that their experience had increased the civic engagement of their family and friends. The students' correspondence from Washington D.C. with their peers, as well as with family members, increased the awareness of the legislative process and of particular policy alternatives.

Most of the students quickly caught "Potomac Fever." The CSB-SJU campus is rural, and most students' come from a typical Midwestern suburban home life. The experience of living in a global urban environment causes some degree of culture shock.

*"The actual experience of living [in D.C.] was as beneficial as working there, if not more. Whether it was cultural or social, there were so many things to do! I learned a lot about U. S. history... from visiting monuments and museums [CS02]."*

Most of the students also became addicted to the culture and the political discourse that pervades the District. They begin to identify with a policy issue, transforming themselves into policy wonks overnight. One student commented that, although she was a committed Democrat, after living in D.C. she "would rather talk with a smart Republican who knew something about policy than a stupid Democrat who didn't!"

*I was initially skeptical of D.C. and thought I would tire of public policy and lobbying, but I found it to be an incredibly satisfying and stimulating atmosphere that was enjoyable, difficult, and academic at the same time. [09DC2]*

*I became convinced that the fast-paced political environment of Washington D.C. and the Hill –where policy making depends on the creativity of stakeholders to gain access, support, or influence—match my professional preferences and particular set of skills. [09DC8]*

Students on the program are quick to differentiate themselves from “tourists” and resist carrying maps or guidebooks, and are surprisingly apt to become antagonistic to those tourists who stand on the left when riding on escalators.

The other aspect of civic engagement was whether students feel knowledgeable about, and whether they feel they can act effectively within, the political system. Certainly the students who have taken part in the program tend to feel that they are more knowledgeable about U.S. politics than students who have not taken part in the program. As Table I shows, the vast majority of D.C. Program alumnae, 76%, felt that they had “a lot” or “a great deal” of knowledge about the U.S. Political System. Only 16.1% of the wider sample of CSB-SJU students who had not participated in the program felt the same.

**Table I: Increase in Self Reported Political Knowledge**

	DC Program Frequency	DC Program % Freq	No Program Frequency	No Program % Freq	Total	Total
Almost Nothing		0.00%	1	0.58%	1	0.44%
Little	1	4.76%	11	6.36%	12	5.26%
Less than Average	1	4.76%	20	11.56%	23	10.09%
Average		0.00%	54	31.21%	66	28.95%
More than Average	3	14.29%	59	34.10%	76	33.33%
A Lot	11	52.38%	25	14.45%	42	18.42%
A Great Deal	5	23.81%	3	1.73%	8	3.51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

In the pre-test of students who have been accepted to the program in 2010, not one student claimed that they knew “a great deal” although two thirds thought they knew “more than average” or “a lot.” While this appears impressive on first glance, our sample sizes are

remarkably small, and thus any firm conclusions are impossible.

Qualitative research on program outcomes, however, does support the idea that students feel more politically knowledgeable. In the qualitative interviews with program alumnae, students reported that their political knowledge became more nuanced after their summer in D.C.; that they understood the political system in a wider context:

*Living and interning in DC taught me more about the U.S. Political System than I could have ever learned in the classroom. My classroom knowledge certainly supplements the working knowledge I now have, but I believe my understanding of the U.S. Political System is now greater than my peers who have not participated in the program. [09DC13]*

*Without a doubt it helped broaden my understanding of the many roles there are behind the scenes. [09DC5]*

*I took Congress class after I spent the summer in D.C.. I realized I could put more things into context and read between the lines of the texts than other students. [07DC2]*

*I think the program helps participants understand the applications of what they're learning in the classroom. ... [I]t provides an important look at the web of activity and organizations surrounding the government. In the classroom, the spotlight is on the government institutions; on the internship the spotlight is on outside organizations affecting government. [09DC1]*

Almost all of the students provided similar statements regarding the value of their experience for their knowledge of the political system. Of course, these are self-reported estimations of their political knowledge, and are thus a better measure of their confidence in their own political efficacy, rather than an empirical measure of academic and intellectual growth. As we move forward with the 2010 program, we are attempting to use other assessment instruments so that we have an empirical measure of gains in civic knowledge.

Our previous assessment of the program showed that students were well aware of the academic value of their internships. In this series of evaluations, students similarly expressed their appreciation of the learning community aspect of the program, in which professors provide an academic background to their experiential learning, and also their appreciation of how that learning transferred back into their last year or two of academic work. The following comment is typical of the statements of most alumni in post-internship surveys:

*I think it is incredibly valuable to get a tangible experience that puts classroom work into perspective. I also think the group meetings and the paper at the end helped me to synthesize my experiences into valuable academic knowledge. [A]05]*

*While this experience is supposed to prepare students for their future careers, I think that it also gave me the opportunity to reflect on my course work in school, and helped me understand the importance of the things I found to be insignificant at the time I was learning about them. For example, I was always more interested in learning about how central governments around the world operate and I always neglected the significance of local politics. I’ve learned how different local and state governments are from the federal government in the way they operate, principles they are founded on, and issues that they deal with. From now on I will try to learn more about micro politics in order to get a complete view of the political system in general. [DT 04]*

Many of the students commented that they had used their experiences as a focus for their senior thesis.

The survey results indicated that other civic engagement indicators were also strong. Students who have interned on the D.C. Program are more likely to feel that they have an influence on government. As Table II shows, almost 62% of the D.C. Program graduates agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “there are many legal ways to successfully influence what the government does” while only 25% of the larger student sample felt the same way.

**Table II: Many Ways for Citizens to Influence Government**

	DC Program Frequency	DC Program % Freq	No Program Frequency	No Program % Freq	Total	Total
Strongly Disagree		0.00%		0.00%	1	0.44%
Disagree	1	4.76%	3	1.73%	4	1.75%
Somewhat Disagree		0.00%	20	11.56%	26	11.40%
Neither Agree nor Disagree		0.00%	19	10.98%	23	10.09%
Somewhat Agree	7	33.33%	87	50.29%	107	46.93%
Agree	11	52.38%	42	24.28%	60	26.32%
Strongly Agree	2	9.52%	2	1.16%	7	3.07%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The results shown in Table III reinforce the impression that D.C. Program graduates have a higher degree of trust in the U.S. political system and a high degree of political knowledge and political efficacy than their fellow students who had not spent a summer in the nation’s capital. Encouragingly, these students were more likely to believe that “the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office.” Almost 43% of D.C. students agreed or somewhat agreed with this statement, while only 14% of the other students felt this empowered. Students who had spent the summer in Washington D.C. were thus less cynical about government power than their peers – certainly a hopeful sign.

**Table III: “The People Have the Final Say”**

	DC Program Frequency	DC Program % Freq	No Program Frequency	No Program % Freq	Total	Total
Strongly Disagree		0.00%	7	4.05%	8	3.51%
Disagree	3	14.29%	45	26.01%	54	23.68%
Somewhat Disagree	6	28.57%	62	35.84%	83	36.40%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	14.29%	27	15.61%	35	15.35%
Somewhat Agree	6	28.57%	24	13.87%	36	15.79%
Agree	3	14.29%	7	4.05%	11	4.82%
Strongly Agree		0.00%	1	0.58%	1	0.44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The qualitative data supports this view of the D.C. alumni as less cynical. Interviews with students after the program indicated that the students who had worked for interest groups had a far more positive view of those organizations than they had originally, and saw them as organizations through which citizens could influence policy.

*It definitely helped me in understanding the lobbying industry in America and their critical role in sustaining the American democracy. Primary research and work in this area leads one to a very different, more optimistic reading of advocacy and interest groups in the United States. [09DC8]*

*I learned a great deal, especially about unions, and the experience changed the way I view certain important issues. [09DC14]*

The learning community enhanced these positive impressions of mediating institutions, since students could share their experiences within these institutions and their role in the political system.

Students who had completed the program were also more likely to disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement that, “in this country, a few have all the political power, and the rest of us are not given any say about how the government runs things.” Table IV shows that while 67% of program alumni disagreed with this statement, only 58% of the students who had not completed an internship disagreed.

**Table IV: “A Few Have All the Power”**

	DC Program Frequency	DC Program % Freq	No Program Frequency	No Program % Freq	Total	Total
Strongly Disagree		0.00%	4	2.31%	5	2.19%
Disagree	8	38.10%	44	25.43%	62	27.19%
Somewhat Disagree	6	28.57%	52	30.06%	71	31.14%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	9.52%	23	13.29%	29	12.72%
Somewhat Agree	4	19.05%	43	24.86%	52	22.81%
Agree	1	4.76%	6	3.47%	8	3.51%
Strongly Agree		0.00%	1	0.58%	1	0.44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Despite this clear improvement in civic trust, it is difficult to give credit entirely to the D.C. Program. These are all very small sample sizes, and a simple consideration of motives might indicate that a student would not go to Washington D.C. to work as an intern if he or she did not believe that there was some chance of entering those halls of power.

Furthermore, student responses to other questions which attempt to measure the strength of civic trust and sense of efficacy showed almost no difference between graduates of the program and other CSB-SJU students. When asked if they thought they could trust the government, 57% of DC alumni responded that they could “most of the time” compared with 56% of other students in the sample, while 5% of each group thought they could trust the government “just about always.” Thus there is almost no difference between our two

subsets of CSB-SJU students, although both of these scores compare surprisingly well to respondents in the 2004 National Election Study, only 46% of whom felt they could trust their government “most of the time.” Either our students are displaying the high degree of social capital and civic engagement in Minnesota, or, as the old saw goes, they’re not angry because they’re not paying close enough attention.

Student responses to the program do indicate that the program helps students investigate career paths which will allow them to *remain* engaged in politics and policy. Alumni of the program understand that a wide variety of careers in Washington D.C. are accessible to them.

*[The program] opened up the prospect of working and living in Washington D.C. for me as a legitimate goal in life, as well as giving me the opportunity to do so for a short period of time. [09DC3]*

*Generally I feel a sense of relief knowing that there are jobs out there that you’ve never heard of, that are invisible to the average person, but they are there. My goals have become more focused. Not just “I want to work in education policy” but “I want to work for a group that supports teachers, and does not support charter schools.” [09DC14]*

*I didn’t have clear career goals before going on the program; now I have lots of possibilities. The program opened my eyes to many of the potential careers I could end up in, and helped provide a path to getting there. [09DC6]*

As a measure of political efficacy, the seeking of a career in public service is a very good one. While students who chose to do the program may in fact be more inclined to a career in public service before they start the application process, there is no doubt that these are also enabled by the program in many ways.

Almost universally, students recognized the importance of networking for their future careers and the value of the seminars which were organized by the directors of the program for their networking. Several comments illustrate the value of these alumni networks for CSB-SJU graduates of the program:

*In one seminar, we met a CSB alum who worked on the Hill. She and I became friends and are still friends today. I consider her a great mentor of mine. We also met alum from the lobbying and foreign service community – it was great to see the wide array of jobs that past POLS majors had in the D.C. area. [MT05]*



*It built connections that could help me obtain a future job, and demonstrated the great diversity of potential jobs available. [DC091]*

*[The program] focused my goals and I was able to establish a huge network of friends and colleagues that has helped me immensely since graduation. [AM06]*

The connection to Washington D.C. and the political system as a whole lasts long after students have returned to campus. One 2007 alumnae interviewed for this survey claimed:

*The program gave me direct engagement with the U.S. Political System ... To me, the U.S. Political System is not a distant establishment. I know that I can be a part of it and relate to it no matter where I am working. [07DC1]*

Indeed, the strength of this engagement is evident when we consider the subsequent careers of students who have taken the program over the past few years. Many former students in the program have returned to Washington D.C. to work on the Hill. Of the six 2006 Program alumni, four are currently in Washington D.C. working within the bureaucracy or government affairs firms; one is working on the White House Staff. Of the 2007 alums, one is currently interning in the White House while two others work for state legislatures, and two are working for volunteer programs. The 2008 alums have a similar pattern of public service in state legislatures, human rights campaigns, and voluntary organizations such as Teach for America. Two students in the past two years have been recruited by their internship site and are currently working in a congressional committee. Dozens of other program alumni have returned to work in D.C. throughout the past twenty-five years. All of the CSB-SJU alumni or alumnae currently working on the Hill itself are former Washington D.C. Program interns. Nevertheless, we do have to consider that correlation is not causation, and the D.C. Program is not necessarily the origin of these students' careers in public service.

## Conclusions

This second attempt at evaluating the Washington D.C. Summer Study learning community provides us with several important insights, even if most of them are not statistically significant. The learning community aspect of the program remains an important means of providing academic and mentorship benefits over regular internships,

and ensuring an increasing level of civic engagement. The learning community model was nearly universally endorsed by students as personally and professionally supportive. For many CSB-SJU students, this is their first experience living and working away from home in a large metropolitan area so the group aspect was even more important.

While these initial results indicate that the D.C. Program does indeed encourage civic engagement, expanding our sample is a priority as we move forward. The pre- and post-test that we have most recently developed is the clearest means of achieving this end. The pre-test has already been put into the field, and the program will begin using the post-test for the summer of 2010. We hope to implement both pre- and post- tests for students doing singular internships separate from the D.C. program. Not only do we look forward to comparing these two distinct groups of students, we will also contrast these two groups with the national data provided by the University of Maryland's CIRCLE.

Another important step is to determine whether the students' self-reported increase in political knowledge is real. Starting in 2010, students on the program will be given a pre- and post-test of basic civic knowledge. This test is being developed by CSB-SJU political science department faculty as part of our program review and self-study.

The Washington D.C. Summer Study Program is working with the CSB-SJU internship office to field our survey instrument as a pre- and post-test. It is hoped that this will provide useable data for assessment purposes, and indicate what sort of internships are valuable for students in terms of increasing the engagement with their communities as well as their political knowledge and efficacy. Although the internship office does have an assessment instrument that it already uses, the current survey's multiple open-ended questions do not enable statistical analysis without coding and the extensive work hours that that entails. Modifying the existing instrument will enable more rigorous analysis of outcomes in various areas.

Despite the lack of statistically significant data, the initial round of limited quantitative data, along with the deeper qualitative data gleaned from student surveys and interviews, does indicate increased civic engagement from experiential learning embedded within a learning community. Knowledge of these professional and personal benefits will be helpful as the co-directors shape the direction of the CSB-SJU Washington D.C. Summer Study Program.

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## Appendix I: General Survey Instrument

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### General Questions

1. **Institutional affiliation**  CSB  SJU
  
2. **Are you a US Citizen?**  Yes  No
  
3. **What is your expected graduation date?**  
 2010  2011  2012  2013  Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. **What is your major(s) and minor(s) if any?**  
 Major(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. **Have you ever participated in an internship?**  
 Yes  No  Currently
  
6. **Have you ever participated in any of the following programs? (check all that apply)**  
 Washington DC Summer Study Program  
 Jackson Fellows Program  
 Brandl Scholars Program  
 ILCP
  
7. **Did you vote in the 2008 Presidential Election?**  
 Yes  No  Not Eligible  Don't Know
  
8. **Do you anticipate voting in the 2010 Mid-Term Elections?**  
 Yes  No  Not Eligible  Don't Know
  
9. **Do you think you know a lot or a little about the US political system and US politics?**  
 Almost Nothing  Little  Less than Average  About Average  More than Average  A Lot  A Great Deal

**Efficacy and Trust**

**10. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?**

( )                      ( )                      ( )  
 just about always      most of the time      only some of the time

**11. There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does.**

( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )  
 Strongly      Disagree      Somewhat      Neither      Somewhat      Agree      Strongly  
 Disagree                              Disagree                              Agree nor                              Agree                              Agree

**12. In this country, a few people have all the political power and the rest of us are not given any say about how the government runs things.**

( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )  
 Strongly      Disagree      Somewhat      Neither      Somewhat      Agree      Strongly  
 Disagree                              Disagree                              Agree nor                              Agree                              Agree

**13. Voting is an effective way for people to have a say about what the government does.**

( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )  
 Strongly      Disagree      Somewhat      Neither      Somewhat      Agree      Strongly  
 Disagree                              Disagree                              Agree nor                              Agree                              Agree

**14. Under our form of government, the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office.**

( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )  
 Strongly      Disagree      Somewhat      Neither      Somewhat      Agree      Strongly  
 Disagree                              Disagree                              Agree nor                              Agree                              Agree

**15. If public officials are not interested in hearing what the people think, there is really no way to make them listen.**

( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )              ( )  
 Strongly      Disagree      Somewhat      Neither      Somewhat      Agree      Strongly  
 Disagree                              Disagree                              Agree nor                              Agree                              Agree

**Bonner Survey - Community Problem Solving**

**1. Have you ever worked together with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live?**

(    )	(    )	(    )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**2. Have you volunteered or done any voluntary community service for no pay?**

(    )	(    )	(    )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**Indicate whether you have volunteered with any of the following types of organizations or groups:**

2.A) Religious Group

(    )	(    )	(    )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

2.B) Environmental Organization

(    )	(    )	(    )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

2.C) Civic or community organization involved in health or social services

(    )	(    )	(    )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

2.D) An organization for youth, children, or education

(    )	(    )	(    )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

2.E) Any other group (describe the group) \_\_\_\_\_

(    )	(    )	(    )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**3. A) Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations either locally or nationally such as charities, labor unions, professional associations, political or social groups, sports or your groups, and so on?**

( ) Yes      ( ) No

**3. B) Are you an active member of this group, a member but not active, or have you given money only?**

( )	( )	( )	( )
Active member of at least one group	Member, but not Active in at least one group	Given Money only	No

**4. Have you personally walked, ran, or bicycled for a charitable cause – this is separate from sponsoring or giving money for this type of event?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes, Within the last 12 Months	Yes, but not with the last 12 Months	No, Never

**5. Besides donating money, have you ever done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes, Within the last 12 Months	Yes, but not with the last 12 Months	No, Never

**Electoral Indicators**

**6. A) Many people are not registered to vote because they are too busy or move around often. Are you currently registered in your election district or not?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes, Definitely	I think so	No

**6. B) We know that most people don't vote in all elections. Do you vote in both national and local elections?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes, Always	Yes, Usually	No

**7. Have you volunteered for a political organization or candidate running for office?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes, Within the last 12 Months	Yes, but not with the last 12 Months	No, Never



**8. When there is an election taking place, do you try to convince people to vote for or against one of the parties or candidates, or not?**

(    )  
Yes,  
Always

(    )  
Yes,  
Usually

(    )  
No

**9. Do you wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign in front of your house?**

(    )  
Yes,  
Always

(    )  
Yes,  
Usually

(    )  
No

**10. Have you given money to a candidate, political party, or organization that supported candidates?**

(    )  
Yes,  
Within the last  
12 Months

(    )  
Yes,  
but not with the  
last 12 Months

(    )  
No,  
Never

### Indicators of Political Voice

*Have you done any of the following to express your views?*

**11. Contacted or visited a public official at any level of government – to express your opinion?**

(    )  
Yes,  
Within the last  
12 Months

(    )  
Yes,  
but not with the  
last 12 Months

(    )  
No,  
Never

**12. Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue?**

(    )  
Yes,  
Within the last  
12 Months

(    )  
Yes,  
but not with the  
last 12 Months

(    )  
No,  
Never

**13. Called in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you did not get on the air?**

(    )  
Yes,  
Within the last  
12 Months

(    )  
Yes,  
but not with the  
last 12 Months

(    )  
No,  
Never

**14. Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**15. Signed an email petition about a social or political issue?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**16. Signed a written petition about a social or political issue?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**17. Have you ever BOYCOTTED (not bought) something from a certain company because you disagree with the social or political values of the company that produces it?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**18. Have you ever BUYCOTTED -- bought something because you like with the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

**19. Have you worked as a CANVASSER – going door to door for a political or social group or candidate?**

( )	( )	( )
Yes,	Yes,	No,
Within the last	but not with the	Never
12 Months	last 12 Months	

## Appendix II: Open-Ended Questions for Alumni Only

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*Please click and type your response below each question.*

16. In relationship to your DC internship experience, what do you judge to be the strong point of your total CSB/SJU education (in and out of the classroom)? What were the weak points?
17. Did the internship correspond with your original expectations? Why or why not?
18. Was it socially beneficial to live together in a “learning community” with other students on the program? Why or why not?
19. Was it beneficial for your work experience to live together in a “learning community” with other students on the program? Why or why not?
20. Was it academically beneficial to live together in a “learning community” with other students on the program? Why or why not?
21. Was it academically beneficial to have professors on the program? Why or why not?
22. Were the seminars beneficial? If so, which ones were beneficial and why? If not, why were they not helpful?
23. Do you think you had an average, above average, or below average knowledge of the US Political system before you did the program?
24. Do you think the program taught you more about the US Political System than you could have learned through class work? Do you know more than your peers who have not done the program?
25. Did the DC Program help you academically at all?
  - a. Did it help you put past academic work in context?
  - b. Did it help you in subsequent academic work?
26. Do you think the program allowed you to focus on your career goals? In what ways was it helpful or not helpful?
27. Did the DC Program change your career goals in any way?