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Hometown: Glencoe, Illinois

Office of U.S. Representative  
Adam Kinzinger:  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

In the Congressman’s office, I assisted staff in a wide variety of tasks. My main responsibilities included researching legislation for congressional staffers, helping prepare staffers for hearings and briefings, drafting posts for the Congressman’s Twitter and Facebook, and communicating with constituents. In terms of constituent correspondence, I answered phones and took note of their concerns. In response, I wrote letters that explained a piece of legislation, as well as the Congressman’s stance on the issue. Finally, I gave tours of the Capitol building. One of the highlights of my summer was receiving a positive Trip Advisor review which earned me personal congratulations from the Congressman!

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

This internship provided me with my first in-depth experience in a professional setting. As such, I improved my professionalism and communication skills. Towards the beginning of the summer, a staffer explained to the interns the effects of positive language, especially in terms of communicating with constituents. For example, if I needed to place a person on hold, the staffer told me that saying “Just a moment, please” sounds better than “Just give me a second” because the first phrase is more professional and sounds more positive. After that conversation, I made it a goal for every individual I spoke with on the phone to know that I was happy to be talking to an engaged citizen. It was important for constituents to understand that their concerns were highly valued by myself and the Congressman. I felt that I played a part in helping constituents understand that their voice is heard, which is a fundamental value of our democracy.
Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

When conducting research, I frequently faced the issue of presenting too much information in a disorganized manner. To solve this problem, I still conducted in-depth research, but I would include a summary to make the document more readable. I’ve used this technique when preparing for content-heavy exams at Sewanee. Once I understand the framework, the details are more meaningful.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

The Congressman’s office had 8 employees and 4 interns. The interns shared many responsibilities, so I had to strengthen my communication skills to make sure our work was completed. To increase efficiency, we assigned our daily tasks to a certain desk and then rotated desks every day. Whenever a staffer assigned me a large task, I learned to divide up the project into parts and then assign them to the other interns. I feared that delegating work to other interns overstepped boundaries, but I learned teamwork includes taking leadership to accomplish overall goals.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

Before starting my internship, I planned to work in public health policy after completing the necessary education requirements. My internship reinvigorated this plan. I appreciate the ever-changing political climate of Capitol Hill and the impact of non-elected officials, such as staffers. I also recognize policy areas that need strengthened. Having gained this knowledge through my experience this summer, I am even more eager to work towards my goals.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons’ perspectives?

Congressmen and women represent approximately 700,000 constituents. As an intern, I served on the front lines of facilitating messages from constituents to the Congressman. As such, I spoke with people of all different races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and political beliefs. Many individuals had a personal story to share that influenced their opinions on legislation. I learned to communicate effectively with diverse groups by listening to their comments, concerns, and experiences. Then, I used their comments to educate myself and others. For example, if a constituent called and told me a story about how a piece of legislation might affect them, I would research that piece of legislation and learn about its consequences, both positive and negative. By having a more wholesome view of an issue, I empathized with constituents, even if I, personally, didn’t agree with their comments.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

This may sound like a small detail, but don’t bring a car to a big city! Parking is expensive and public transportation is almost always faster.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

To my internship funding donor: thank you for making my dream of experiencing Capitol Hill a reality! Your donation made my personal and professional growth possible. I had a rewarding and educational experience that supplemented the valuable knowledge I am gaining at Sewanee.