

Internship Report-Office of Congressman Scott Desjarlais

This summer, I had the opportunity to spend a month in the office of Congressman Scott Desjarlais, who represents Tennessee's Fourth District. Congressman Desjarlais is one of 435 Congressmen in the United States Congress and has offices around his district and in Washington DC. I had the chance to work for the Congressman's Washington office where I performed a number of tasks for the Congressman and his staff. A typical day would include answering calls from constituents or helping address their questions and concerns through mail. On certain days I got to attend presentations by certain interest groups and write a report about their stances on issues and how it affects Tennessee's Fourth District. The office also allowed me to attend lectures given throughout my internship by various Senators, Secretary of State Colin Powell and David Brooks.

The most valuable part of the experience was being able to enhance my political communication skills. As a political science major at Sewanee, I have developed an academic writing style meant for review by my professors and peers. However, political communication is designed to be more conversational and reaches a far broader audience than my work at Sewanee. In Congress, offices send documents called 499s which are distributed to 499 constituents in the district of any given Congressman. These reports touch on an important issue being debated in congress, a particular stance of the Congressman, or something that constituents have called and inquired about. Writing 499s for a broad audience taught me a different style of writing than I had learned at Sewanee. This style of writing will be helpful in effectively communicating my ideas once I graduate from Sewanee. By the end of my internship, I had improved on this style of writing and some of the 499s I had helped draft were sent out to constituents across the Congressman's district.

My summer in DC and in Congressman Desjarlais' office had made me strongly consider applying for jobs in the area after graduation. While I am still evaluating law school as a possible goal, I am now heavily weighing that choice against trying to work in politics. I highly recommend this opportunity to anyone, even if you are not interested in politics, as the skills you develop working for Congressman Desjarlais will serve you well in any field.