



My name is Ryan Conroy and I am originally from Ballan, a small country town near Ballarat, as far as you can imagine from University in the city and even further from Congress. So to travel to the other side of the world, to exchange sunny beaches for a snow covered city and paid summer work for voluntary public service, was bit of change.

I am currently half way through my combined Arts / Law degree, and have squeezed an incredible amount into these two and a half years. In my time at Deakin, I have competed in mooting championships around Australia, organised social functions and have debated higher education policy on a national level. However, these achievements are eclipsed by my internship in the office of Congressman Sam Farr.

This internship programme, formally known as the Uni-Capitol Washington Internship Programme, or UCWIP, is characteristic of the opportunities which Deakin provides to its students. Deakin is one of only seven Australian universities to be given the privilege of participating in this programme, and is one of only two in Victoria. It is offered to students undertaking majors in International Relations, History, Politics or Australian Studies.

In short, the UCWIP involves a cultural, academic and professional exchange between Australia and the US. This programme enables 12 young Australian students to work in the world's most powerful legislative body, the US Congress. It is also one hell of a lot of fun.

The experiences of Interns on the hill are many and varied. The experiences change dramatically from those working House offices to Senate offices, a distinction even more defined between Republican and Democratic offices. I interned for Congressman Sam Farr, a Democrat in the 17th district of California, a small office with a focus on the environment and international stewardship. There are pros and cons for each office on the hill and it would be unfair for me to compare my experience with others. But I will anyway.

Being in a small, rather than a large office, I immediately felt that I was a necessary member of the office, rather than just a mere intern. Instead of fetching coffees and spending hours in front of a photocopier, I was given the responsibility of drafting constituent updates on behalf of the Congressman, writing official entries in the Congressional Record and I attended many Congressional briefings on the Hill.

At the time of my Internship, the United Nations was in the midst of some much needed reform. My office is a staunch supporter of the UN and so I was placed with the Legislative Assistant of Foreign Affairs to monitor these developments. In this capacity, I was asked to produce a research paper on the reform measures that had been implemented and those likely to occur in the near future. This report took me over three weeks to complete with regular updates to the Legislative Assistant. While completing this report I attended briefings with members of the UN, I researched information with the US Department of State and was given access to a myriad of resources. Depending on the future direction of the UN, my report may become the basis for a resolution introduced on the House floor.

Being in a small office, I also had a lot of contact with the Congressman. For many, the offices on the hill are little more than a shrine to the Congressman, but working with Sam was a different story. Most mornings, Sam and I would sit together and discuss anything from the high politics of the possibility of Australian wildlife doubling as public transport.

The Uni-Capitol Washington Internship Programme is more than 8 hours a day in a Congressional office. This programme allowed me to travel to New York, Philadelphia, Gettysburg and Boston; to meet some of the most intelligent and imaginative people from around the world; and learn a little more about myself. The overall experience of living and working in another country, being involved and learning about their political system has instilled me with the confidence to view the world from a much larger scale, and perspective to appreciate the nuances of a different culture.

This programme is a unique opportunity for 12 University students to work abroad and learn things that can never be written in textbooks, and try as I may, can never be fully explained. This programme enables participants to develop academically, professionally and personally. And so I can say without hesitation, that this programme was the most enriching experience of my life, and I highly recommend it.

- Ryan Conroy, Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Laws, Deakin University