Two UCEAP Scottish Parliament Internship Testimonials, Fall 2013

1 - Hannah Forrest (UCSC)

“On my first day in Parliament, with no idea of what to expect, my assigned Member of Scottish Parliament, or MSP, and his staff welcomed me warmly as a new member of the team. My MSP made sure I was doing important and relevant tasks and that I did a variety of different tasks while at Parliament in order to get a full experience. The most common task assigned to me was writing press releases. Along with writing press releases and making sure they included a quote from my MSP, I had to send it out in an email to our press release contact list, post it to the main website, and link it to his Twitter and on his Facebook page. We would sometimes get emails back from press contacts so it would be my job to be up-to-date on the information relating to the press release and make sure I could answer any questions from the press contacts.

If my MSP attended any events, I would go along and try to take pictures to be able to post on his social media pages. I also did many briefings for my assigned MSP for any debates he took part in. The best part about these projects was watching the debates happen and hearing my MSP use information that I had specifically found for him.

Writing press releases, attending conferences or business meetings and writing briefings were normal tasks assigned to me. However, I did occasionally do some constituency work. Most of the constituency work I did involved writing congratulatory or thank-you letters and motions to pass through Parliament.

The interns also had the great opportunity to visit London in November. We started our day off by visiting the Scotland Office in London. We had the amazing opportunity to meet with three different policy researchers who were all very knowledgeable. What I found the most interesting was listening to the lady who researched policy relating to the independence referendum, as working for the SNP the referendum is something we work very closely with. After our visit to the Scotland office, we moved onto Westminster and the Houses of Parliament. Right away I noticed how different the UK parliament is to the Scottish Parliament. We were able to sit in the House of Commons and see the Prime Minster answer questions about the recent disaster in the Philippines. After my visit to London, I’ve found that nothing compares to the open, amiable environment at the Scottish Parliament and the opportunity to get to know so many MSPs so personally.
The main skill I feel I’ve learned from this internship is truly how to research. Whether researching something simple like how to contact press contacts at Vogue in the UK or to research exactly what train stations are being improved and what improvements they are receiving, it’s a skill I have definitely improved in. Whether I follow a career in politics, veer off down the law path, or chose a completely unrelated career, this internship will help me in my future studies and career. It gave me work experience in a very crucial environment, one filled with top political officials and news reporters following all actions of the Scottish Parliament and Government.

I looked forward to waking up for work every day and was ready for whatever challenges were going to come my way. I’m so glad I decided to apply for this program and that I got accepted. I couldn’t have asked for a better four months of studying abroad!”

2 - Megan Sabbah (UCD)

“What most drew me to the programme was the prospect of working in a parliamentary system. I have been interested in studying either admiralty law or international law, and I am currently studying comparative government so the internship seemed to be a perfect fit for me academically.

Something I had not realised prior to beginning the internship is that because interns are placed with different MSPs, our experiences would be fairly unique to us. While some interns worked consistently on one or two projects and others focused on day-to-day tasks, my MSP wanted me to try “something of everything”. As a result, I rarely performed the same task more than twice. I never expected to be completing such a wide array of activities, some of which required a serious amount of trust on the part of my MSP. I am so thankful for the freedom that he allowed me in my work.

My time in the Scottish Parliament has been my first experience in a foreign parliament. As a political science major with an emphasis on comparative government, this internship has been invaluable. I have learned first-hand about how a parliamentary system works within the context of democracy. Working in the parliament has taught me a great deal about voting behaviour and the election process as well as what devolution means and how such a system functions. Additionally, the ability to compare what I know about a presidential system to what I have been learning about parliamentary systems has helped me to think more critically about the variations of democracy around the world. It is often easy to be critical or cynical of the democratic process, however, working in parliament has given me the opportunity to see government work for the people. Though not my own country, seeing debates taking place each day, votes, First Minister’s Questions, etc. all have made me think much more critically about how something as abstract as a bill becomes law and then affects the people. This internship has had, and will continue to have, an enormous impact on my life both academically and practically. I am very grateful and privileged to have had such an experience.”
Below are small samples of Megan’s weekly journal entries highlighting some of her duties:

‘This week I began and nearly completed a website for my MSP. In my research for the content of the website, I learned a bit about his constituency and I found out more about surgeries, the geographic characteristics of the land, the demographics of the people, etc.’

‘This week, the Scottish Government was set to have a debate on Thursday on Carbon Capture and Storage and my MSP was to be the second speaker and asked me to write a speech for the debate. I spent most of my time in the early parts of the week conducting research. I was worried because I had no idea as to what exactly I should be writing about. After finishing the speech, I handed it over to my MSP. Watching the debate at my desk in the office was a very gratifying end to the work week for me.’

‘During the Parliament recess, I began and finished a leaflet to be sent to my MSP’s constituents in January. Though this seems like a small task it was exciting for me. I have spent a large portion of my time folding leaflets and packing them into envelopes. Every month my MSP has a new leaflet to go out. I have never had anything to do with the production of these leaflets until now. I will now be folding my work!’

Photos from the Internship

View of the Scottish Parliament and Calton Hill from Arthur’s Seat, Edinburgh
UCEAP Interns with First Minister of Scotland, Alexander Salmond.

Interns with Study Centre Manager Hilary Noyce in London.