



2-3-2010

White House Internship Inspires Student

Rachel Hatch

Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Hatch, Rachel, "White House Internship Inspires Student" (2010). *News and Events*. 1342.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/1342>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

White House Internship Inspires Student

February 3, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – The White House Office of Correspondence serves the lofty purpose of keeping one of the most powerful people on the planet in touch with everyday Americans. It is a purpose with which Illinois Wesleyan University senior Jessica Kong became intimately acquainted.

Kong, a native of Lake Forest, Ill., spent last summer as an intern at the Office of Correspondence. “The Office is really a bridge between the President and the American people,” said Kong, who was one of nearly 100 interns serving at the White House.

According to the [Office’s Web site](#), the White House receives more than 165,000 letters, e-mails and faxes each week. Members of the staff and interns for the Office of Correspondence go through each message received. Kong said she saw messages to President Obama that ran the gamut. “You would hear the most heartfelt and horrific stories of people losing their homes or jobs, and then you would hear these wonderful messages of thanks or congratulations,” she said. “The whole experience definitely opened my mind to see what is happening in the nation.”

Kong said she admired the fact that the President reads 10 letters each day from citizens that arrive at the Office of Correspondence. The 10 letters are chosen based upon if they represent the mail coming into the Office, represent something timely in the news, and are compelling messages. “It amazes me that he makes the time to read those letters,” she said.

Internships at the White House are more than just office duties, said Kong. Though she was assigned to the Office of Correspondence, she and other interns were asked to carry on duties throughout the White House. Flexibility was a necessity, she said, noting she might be making copies one day, and then assisting with the Medal of Freedom ceremony the next. “You could never plan what your day would hold, but you know what you are doing is actually helping society in some way,” Kong said. “I gained such a respect for all that people in government do.”

The interns also had the chance to hear speakers from White House Senior Advisor David Axelrod to First Lady Michelle Obama, and even President Barak Obama. “There was not one day I was not inspired and motivated, even when things were stressful,” said Kong, who added she took away a new love of volunteering. “After my experience in D.C., I discovered a great passion for public service,” she said. “I had always believed in the idea of volunteering, but now it seems to me more of a real way of life.”

Kong said all interns were encouraged to live the message of the President’s Initiative, which kept interns active in the Washington, D.C. community, and with not-for-profits worldwide. “Several of the interns and I held a book drive to collect books for area women’s shelters, day care centers and for Operative Give, which sends books to schools in Africa,” she said.

When asked if she recommended the internship to other students, she nodded emphatically. “It is an incredible experience,” she said. Kong’s internship application was chosen from more than

7,000 applications received for the nearly 100 positions at the White House. “Hearing I was one of the ones chosen was an unbelievable phone call to receive,” she said.

Kong attributes her courage to submit the application to her family – both the one at home and her second family of friends and faculty at Illinois Wesleyan. “It was my sister who told me about the internship, and my mother supported me all the way,” she said. Kong added she was also inspired by the memory of her father, who died her sophomore year at Illinois Wesleyan. “My father was sick with cancer for 10 years, but if you knew him, you knew he always looked to the positive side of any situation,” she said. It was that positive nature and encouragement Kong said she found at Illinois Wesleyan as a double major in accounting and economics. “People like [Associate Professor of Accounting David] Willis, and [Robert S. Eckley Distinguished Professor of Economics Michael] Seeborg who always have positive words and support for me.”

Contact: Rachel Hatch, (309) 556-3960