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# Guided by Alumni, Students Make Career Discoveries in Nation's Capital

March 28, 2017

During the Hart Career Center's 2017 Career Immersion Excursion spring break trip, 19 students and five Illinois Wesleyan staff members visited Washington, D.C. for four days of employer site visits, panel sessions, alumni socials and professional networking with more than two dozen IWU alumni.

Students learned first-hand about working in government, public policy/advocacy, the nonprofit sector, law, healthcare administration, and the intersections of government and business. The Career Immersion Excursion program is made possible with generous support from the Carswell family and from kind contributions from participating alumni and employers.

Students returned from the trip bursting with newfound confidence, appreciation for Titan alumni encouragement, and relief that their career journeys will be both personal and successful. Some excerpts from their evaluation forms follow:

## Why IWU alumni are awesome:

"I was amazed with the opportunities to talk with and ask the alums questions. I was also happily surprised with how willing they were to help us and how they encouraged us to get in contact with them....It was a humbling experience to see how far most of the alums have come, yet they are really grounded....I was very impressed with the quality and the number of alums who helped. I think they were very helpful and had a lot of advice to offer."

## Figuring out a very personal career path:

"This trip helped me narrow my focus on what I'm passionate about, and it helped me figure out the career moves I need to make now....I am now thinking of taking a gap year or applying to AmeriCorps or Teach for America. ....I have set my sights higher and am very motivated to achieve those higher goals."

## IWU alumni are really nice, too:

"The Alumni Reception was my favorite. Networking is not something that I am very confident about, but this event made me much more comfortable....I enjoyed the small group dinner because it was a nice way to get to know the host in a more personal way. He was very open about everything and we had a really good time. This made it more comfortable to talk to him and I feel like I can reach out to him at any time....The panels were all great. The alumni speaking were incredible and very kind."

## First-person reflection:

Political science major Veronica Torres Luna '19 wrote this short reflection about her experience:

"The Career Immersion Excursion poster was taped onto the walls of Memorial Center among a sea of other



Students pose in front of the White House during their Career Immersion Excursion to Washington, D.C.

## Student Reactions

*"Regardless of your major, career plans or personality, you need to get a glimpse of the 'real world.' CIE does precisely that and helps you get your sails out and compass pointing in a direction."* –

**Hamzah Khan '19, physics major in pre-engineering**

*"It's difficult to know exactly what path you want to pursue. This experience was valuable in exposing me to career options I was not previously aware of. It also reassured me that it's OK to not know what I want to do with my future right now."* – **Veena Hamill '18, chemistry major on the pre-med track**

*"The CIE will help you develop professionally, provide you with tremendous opportunities that can't be obtained normally, and make it fun the entire time."*

– **Kurt Meyer '18, economics and financial services double major**

*"The IWU alumni network is extensive and so helpful and until you meet and talk with alumni, you cannot appreciate this or start to utilize it."* – **Josie Blumberg '19, International Studies and economics double major**

*"I have never felt more confident about my ability to succeed and find a career than I did when I was on this trip."* – **Molly Johnson '17, political science and International Studies double major**



advertisements and notices, both old and new. I was not sure if I should apply or not. What if I didn't get in? What if there were other more qualified students than me? I was worried about the cost of the trip and how competitive would be to get in.

Soon, however, I found myself sitting in the Welcome Center at the Pre-Trip Workshops, learning about networking, the alumni we would meet, the places we would visit, and that the cost of the trip was almost completely covered.

From our arrival on Sunday afternoon to our departure on Wednesday evening, I felt I was exposed to a world of opportunities! From education and healthcare policy to international litigation to nonprofits, the panelists working in these fields were informative and gave sound advice on life and careers. The one I remember, best, however, was from Mark Israel '91. He told us, "Don't try to figure out what you're going to do forever. Figure out what you're going to do next."

After he said this, I looked around and could see that the other faces, especially the seniors, turned from yellow to a flesh color. Every alum we met told us the same thing, and that's when I realized the value of this program, at least for me.

I used to see Washington, D.C. through the eyes of a scared young lady because it was a formal place full of successful people. Now, I know that there are so many alumni out there willing to help me succeed. I love the atmosphere of a city with young people. I now thank myself for applying to this program."

### Photo Gallery



### Alumni Reactions

*"[Kyle Serafico and Gina Blaskie] were impressive students, very friendly, asked great questions, and were delights as dinner dates. So glad IWU is doing programs like this."* – Elizabeth McMahon '96, small group dinner host; Scientific Communications Manager, Office of the Director, National Heart Lung and Blood Institute

*"The three students [Molly Johnson '17, Preslav Mantchev '17, and Jake Robbins '18] who went with me to dinner were intelligent, thoughtful, and well spoken – and a LOT of fun to talk to! The enthusiasm of this entire group rubbed off on me and has really brightened my week! Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this outstanding program. I am so energized to think of all the future opportunities for engaging IWU's great alumni all over the country."* – Scott Huch '86, small group dinner host; President Elect, Alumni Association Board of Directors; President, The Delta Group, Inc.

### Staff Reactions

*"The Career Immersion Excursion has allowed us to accomplish one of the most important goals of career services...successfully connecting current students with successful alumni. This not only allows students to learn from accomplished professionals, it also engages our alumni in meaningful ways, thereby connecting them back to the university."* – Warren Kistner, Hart Career Center Director

*"I returned from the trip dazzled once again with the generosity of Illinois Wesleyan alumni! They care about our students and are willing to share their time, stories and advice - what a wonderful gift."* – Laurie Diekhoff, Associate Director for Career Engagement, Hart Career Center