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Reilly Kasprak
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Student Interns for Member of Scottish Parliament

April 26, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— [Political science](#) and [economics](#) double major Olivia Heffernan '18 was determined to intern during her study abroad experience.

At IWU's [study abroad](#) fairs, Heffernan scoured programs combining internship opportunities with study abroad. On the recommendation of her advisor, Associate Professor of Political Science Kathleen Montgomery, Heffernan selected the Arcadia program in Scotland with the opportunity to intern with the Scottish Parliament.

"I wanted an internship that was more than busy work and where I actually felt involved in the day-to-day business of my member of Parliament," said Heffernan.

This semester Heffernan interned for Oliver Mundell MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament) for

Dumfriesshire. Her responsibilities vary each day, an

aspect she loves. She has drafted responses to constituents, organized and entered public opinion data, and attended surgeries, a uniquely British term for meetings with constituents.

Her program with the University of Edinburgh also requires a research project. Heffernan has prepared a detailed briefing on Policing 2026, an initiative from the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland to investigate emerging and projected needs over the next decade. Heffernan is researching the initiative's implications and challenges in the Dumfries and Galloway council area. "Hopefully the briefing articulates the differing demands of policing for small, rural communities in Scotland," Heffernan said.

Heffernan said the courses she took in the first five weeks of her study abroad semester helped her gain a better understanding of Scotland's place in the United Kingdom, but working in the Parliament on a daily basis has provided true insight in political workings.

"You really feel like you are watching politics happen right in front of you, especially with the continual changes happening in Scotland and the U.K.," Heffernan observed. "I don't think I would want to do this type of work for the rest of my life, but it would be hard to turn down a shorter-term job working in a politician's office just because of the insight you gain."

Heffernan said she's also learned the importance of writing highly informative, concise briefs. "One of my teachers emphasized that for most of us, our future work won't be writing essays because they're too time consuming to read," she said. "Learning to write briefs will become a very valuable skill for the future."

As her internship draws to a close, Heffernan said returning to the United States will be a bit of a cultural adjustment. "When I go back home, it will be hard to have conversations with people about Scottish politics because they don't have all the background information I've gained from working here," said Heffernan, a native of Fisher, Ill. "This internship offered the high level of involvement every intern is looking for."



Olivia Heffernan '18 in Scotland.