

We Were There! ODU's Political Science Legislative Interns 2015

By Taniesha 'Tanny' Simmons

Four ODU undergraduates were on the floor of the 2015 Virginia General Assembly session, working as interns for members of the Virginia House of Delegates and Senate. They were paired with Democratic and Republican legislators who represent the Hampton Roads area. Three of their sponsoring legislators are Old Dominion alumni: Senator Kenny Alexander of Norfolk, Senator John A. Cosgrove of Chesapeake, and Delegate Ron Villanueva of Virginia Beach.

While in Richmond, Old Dominion's interns were tasked with the full range of legislative and staff assignments, from daily office operations and meeting with concerned constituents, to attending events with or on behalf of their legislator, and writing articles for their respective district newsletters.



Attorney General Mark Herring with ODU interns Robbie Bradshaw and Matt Leonard

Matthew Leonard: I am a Political Science minor with one semester left at ODU before I graduate with a BA in Psychology. After I graduate I plan on working on a few campaigns. Beyond that I hope that I can use what I've learned at ODU to become a public servant to my community.

Political Science has taught me a lot about government and how it works in the modern era.

I've taken classes such as State and Local Government, Congress, Elections, and others that have been extremely beneficial. What I've learned in State and Local Government was directly applied when I worked for the General Assembly as an intern. Things I learned several semesters ago have stuck with me thanks to the professionals within the Political Science program. Were it not for Political Science, I would not be down the path of success I am currently on and I would encourage all students to look into taking some Political Science classes for starters. You may find something about politics you truly like, but you will definitely leave class feeling enriched and more knowledgeable.



Delegate Lionell Spruill (second from the left) with intern Robbie Bradshaw and Old Dominion Students

Robert Bradshaw: Most kids go into college without any certainty of what they want to major in, but for me that was not the case. I wanted to major in Political Science before my senior year in high school. I was planning on becoming a lawyer, and once President Obama ran for re-election, I became fascinated with politics. I knew then that politics was a road that I was willing to go down. I chose Political Science, because, having a background in the "science of politics" would certainly benefit me. I want to help people, and I feel as though being a politician makes that job a little bit easier.

Politicians have the ability to make the lives of their constituents better. The people that we see struggle, the ones that we feel sorry for, need our help, and politicians have the ability to help those people.



Senator John A. Cosgrove with ODU intern Tanny Simmons

Tanny Simmons: When I began attending Old Dominion University, I had every intention of becoming a lawyer. However, I didn't want to get stuck on a pre-law track, so I chose Political Science. Undoubtedly, it is the best decision I have ever made. It has opened up unimaginable doors both academically and professionally. Not only have I been able to attend classes with amazing faculty members (many of whom are of the top of their fields), I have been able to get hands on experience in Political Science.

This past semester, I interned at the Virginia General Assembly, and as a result, I will be graduating with a job in my degree field. What's it like? My General Assembly days began not later than 7 am. After a quick workout or breakfast, I'd accompany my fellow interns on the uphill trek from the Commonwealth Park Suites to the General Assembly building. After flashing our swanky access badges, we'd report to our respective offices.



Governor Terry McAuliffe with ODU intern Robbie Bradshaw

I had the pleasure of working for Senator John A. Cosgrove and Delegate James 'Jay' Leftwich, Republicans representing the city of Chesapeake. No day was typical, as I was constantly faced with new challenges and an ever expanding list of responsibilities. Some of my tasks included, managing my legislator's calendar, updating the 'bill book' (tracking their legislation and keeping up to date records, recording constituent comments about legislation in the IHOD database, and meeting with constituents/lobbyists.

Perhaps, my favorite perk of the job was the ability to roam. My bosses wanted me to get all that I could out of internship and allowed me to explore with my extra time. I took the opportunity to sit in on committee meetings, watch public hearings, and visit a few House of Delegates sessions (which were never boring).

Ironically, the only thing I didn't do as an intern was get coffee. That came courtesy of our Keurig.

Richmond nights were reserved for networking. After hours events allowed Capitol Hill workers to discard their blazers, loosen their ties, and celebrate the session. Elected officials and their aides, lobbyists, and interns, alike, would pack reception halls and banquet ballrooms, for an evening of mingling. I, along with dozens of interns from across the Commonwealth, would shamelessly vie for possible post-graduation

jobs. On nights where there were no planned events, the legislative aides from my offices, Christie and Karen, would allow me to tag along for a night on the town. They took me to the best restaurants in Richmond like Bookbinders, the Boathouse, Max's on Broad and Terrant's Café, all be on their list of "must have" experiences.

Luckily for me, the nights of casual conversation turned into a discussion of who would find me a job after my graduation.



ODU interns with Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim (center left), Senator Kenny Alexander (center right) and members of ODU's Student Government Association.