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EAP student — 2013-2014 academic year

I am truly thankful to the Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement for supporting my time in Washington, D.C. Through the UCDC experience, I gained exposure to the D.C. culture, was presented with wonderful career development opportunities, and was able to pursue my academic and professional interests to the fullest.

From January to April, I interned with the Carmen Group, a medium-sized lobbying firm representing bi-partisan clients over a wide range of policy issues. Brought in to work primarily on defense contracts, I also gained intimate exposure to other crucial policy areas, such as health care, transportation and education. The experience allowed me to take away critical insights about the lobbying industry, led me to a better understanding of current political debates and taught me how to navigate interactions between the public and private sectors. Working for the Carmen Group was especially enriching, as the firm’s business model aligned with certain important goals of the Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement.

Indeed, I found that the Carmen Group engaged people of diverse backgrounds, viewpoints and political identities, thus ensuring more productive and enduring solutions to policy issues. Perhaps more importantly, I was interested to see that the Homeland Security Practice, which I was assigned to, acted in some cases more as a mediator between the private sector and the federal government than as a traditional lobbying organization. Thus, rather than lobbying on behalf of any client or organized interest, the Practice looked for gaps in the government’s defense capabilities and set out to bridge these gaps by matching government agencies with private companies capable of providing corresponding services.

 My time in D.C. also provided me with an opportunity to pursue policy research in an incredibly interesting and complex environment. An elective on campaigns and elections led me to explore a completely new and fascinating dimension of public policy, and the general research seminar allowed me to conduct policy research relevant to both my degree and interests. Making use of my time to reflect on civility and democratic engagement, I studied reactions to domestic terrorism in both the United States and Israel, showing that while political calculations can certainly be responsible for counter-productive policies, honest engagement motivated by skewed notions can be just as destructive.

 As I think back on my experience in Washington D.C., I am ever more convinced that commitment to democratic engagement by students and future leaders is of paramount importance to building a functioning, fair and productive civil society. I hope to contribute to the shaping of such a society through my own civility, engagement and sense of democracy.