My semester as a participant in the UCDC program was an incredible time of professional, educational and personal growth. While I had always received positive feedback regarding the Berkeley Washington Program, my experience surpassed even the highest of my expectations.

During the semester, I had the privilege to intern at the law firm Cuneo, Gilbert & LaDuca (CGL). CGL represents individuals and businesses in complex and class action cases regarding antitrust violations, securities fraud and government regulation. In my role as a Legal Intern, I supported the firm’s attorneys by assisting with legal research, litigation strategy, document review and evidence analysis. Such engaging and enriching work enabled me to gain exposure to the law and to better understand the demands and rewards of working in a firm environment.

Beyond my professional education at CGL, I also participated in a research seminar course on the history and current practices of the U.S. Congress. My research throughout this seminar was focused on the Voting Rights Act (VRA), particularly Congressional response to the Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013). It was truly inspiring to study in the heart of the nation’s capital, with access to some of the greatest libraries and most prominent scholars. Additionally, my UCDC professors brought a wealth of experience from the field and the professional world that provided an enhanced perspective to our academic studies.

My research on voting rights, voter suppression and electoral behavior highlighted the dire necessity for strong democratic engagement. In today’s political word of hardened party lines and grudging compromise, the right to vote - the most fundamental tool of democracy - has been critically undermined. Congresses’ inability to enact a new statute to replace the gutted section of the VRA is due to partisan reasons and party infighting. A most precious civil liberty is thus crippled by the heavy hand of politics.

While in Washington and through professional and academic opportunities, I therefore began to realize and appreciate the necessity of an involved and informed citizenry. Whether it is a question of government regulation or voter suppression, democracy only thrives when citizens take ownership of the civic process. Indeed, our government of, for and by the people amounts to very little without an active and thriving body politic. As the future leaders of this country, it is the responsibility of young people to bring together our various backgrounds and experiences as we address today’s and tomorrow’s most pressing societal issues.

This summer, I will continue my exploration into the world of law and policy through an internship at the Office of the Solicitor General at the Department of Justice in Washington. The UCDC program has thus strengthened my commitment to a career in public service and advocacy. I am sincerely grateful for the support of Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement. I look forward to carrying the Berkeley education, spirit, and values with me as I continue in Washington and work toward a meaningful career!