Throughout my college career, I have gained a fierce passion for the American political system, inspiring me to one day become an elected official and advocate for the people. Accordingly, I dreamed of visiting Washington D.C., the epicenter of our political process and home of many important actors. However, as a transfer student, I assumed that I did not have the time or financial means necessary to participate in the UCDC program. However, after discussing the matter with advisors, family, and friends, I realized I could take an extra semester after my expected graduation date to join the Fall 2019 cohort. When I received the joyful news that I was accepted into UCDC and soon thereafter as a CCDE fellow, I was ready to embark on this exciting new journey.

During the UCDC program, I served as a Legislative Intern for U.S. Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer. As I had already completed all of my graduation requirements, my goal for the semester was to immerse myself in the workings of the federal government and discover whether or not this was a suitable lifetime career. As an intern, I had a variety of responsibilities that taught me how important public service is to maintaining America's democracy. In my view, the core of a democratic society is that the governed have their voice heard by the representatives they have given their consent to rule. With this, those representatives then utilize their constituents' opinions from to make progress on important topics through deliberation and policymaking.

As an intern, I was responsible for maintaining communication with constituents via telephone – regardless of political views, I listened to their commentary and recorded it for Senator Schumer to hear later on. These calls helped me to understand the wide variety of
problems Americans face – individuals are not solely concerned about major issues like immigration, gun control, and election security, but also issues such as reducing the number of robocalls or prescription drug prices. Additionally, I was responsible for attending congressional hearings and briefings on important issues to New Yorkers and create memoranda for staffers. Although I came to D.C. with a desire to focus on immigration policies, I had the opportunity to gain interest in rural broadband access, the proliferation of electric vehicles, and social media violence. Through this, I assisted in the creation of policy proposals that were designed to address the concerns of constituents and make their lives better through legislation, while also enlightening me to the various facets of our society that need to be addressed. My time as an intern also taught me about the necessity of civility in our society and the need for bipartisan consensus.

Unfortunately, there were quite a few callers that would be aggressive in their tone and choice of words. Although they were mean-spirited, I understood I had to remain civil as I was an accessible means for them to have their comments reach the Senator. I was so grateful when I could end an initially aggressive call on a note of civility, regardless of disagreement. Additionally, I had the opportunity to witness committee hearings where Senators from both sides of the aisle emphasized the importance of bipartisanship and fervently collaborated to get important bills on the Senate floor. However, impeachment proceedings brought about fierce partisanship in Congress, with members refusing to sign or even debate legislation endorsed by the opposing party. Regardless, my time in Washington engrained a deep appreciation for bipartisanship and partnership that I will keep with me for the rest of my life.

My classes were another great enjoyment during my UCDC experience. My elective was The Politics of Theatre and the Theatre of Politics, where Professor Ari Roth took our class to
different theatrical productions around the city which focused on topics such as women’s rights, colorism, racism, the struggle of black excellence, and the importance of civility between opposing political views. This course allowed me the opportunity to witness how theater can be intertwined with importance discussions about our democracy - both its successes and its failures. For my seminar, I took The American Presidency with Professor Gabriel Nuñez, which examined the institutional facets of the position while connecting it to the modern-day figure. This class was probably one of the best I have taken throughout my college career, and I wish I could have been a part of it for more than one semester. My favorite part was a debate activity our professor facilitated, where half of the class argued that President Trump would lose in the 2020 elections and the other half argued that he would win. It taught me the importance of articulating one’s own beliefs while also taking a second to civilly acknowledge the other viewpoint without antagonism.

I am so grateful that I had the once in a lifetime opportunity to live and work in Washington D.C. As an intern for the Minority Leader, I had the unique opportunity to spend a large portion of my time within the Capitol Building (rather than the Senate offices) and explore hidden corridors and hallways that are far from any tour route. I will never forget the awe I experienced everytime I witnessed the ceiling of the rotunda and can still remember the cool feeling of the marble underneath my fingers. I also had quite a few conversations with many Senators - even chatting with Senator Klobuchar about her debate performance, discussing Senator Barrasso’s choice in cowboy boots, and joking about quick lunch with Senator Schumer himself. Outside of the Hill, I was able to visit the National Zoo, tour every major monument, see originals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, walk beside Julia Child’s Kitchen, go kayaking in the Potomac, and walk in the steps of President Obama in the White
House. Although I am happy to be a newly minted college graduate at home with my family, I cannot wait until the day I am back in Washington D.C. continuing to promote our democracy and represent the wishes of all diverse Americans.

Thank you to the CCDE for believing in me and giving me the assistance to afford this experience. I will forever hold their values close to my heart and continue to implement them throughout my future career as a private individual and (hopefully) figure in our political system. I hope every member and supporter of the Center realizes how much this fellowship meant to me.