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Liberty student interns live and work in Washington, D.C.

June 25, 2008 | Carrie Barnhouse

The White House, Concerned Women for America headquarters and the U.S. District Attorney's Office were just a few of the places Liberty University interns spent the spring 2008 semester in Washington, D.C.

Considered full-time residential students at LU, they earned internship credit while working full time in the nation's capital.

But for the few dozen students, it was much more than class credit.

"I never thought this experience would be as big as it was. It has helped develop my skills and abilities, as well as opened doors for future opportunities," said Jose Interiano, an intern at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, what he calls a "think tank" for Latin American economics and politics.

The 2008 graduate was one of a select few chosen to prepare press releases, conduct research and analyze issues affecting Latin Americans. He wrote a report that was published, earning him a spot on the televised "Voice of America" round-table discussion where he served as a political analyst — and that was just his first month.

Internships like Interiano's are made possible by a partnership between Liberty and the Strategic Policies Institute (SPI). SPI is a non-profit education company. Liberty was SPI's first university client. Dr. Charles Murphy, founder and president of SPI, said the program is based on the conviction to train and equip students to move into decision-making positions in the nation's pipeline.

"If you look around our nation's capital, you'll see the power-brokers are young," he said. "They're making decisions, getting noticed. I wanted my students to have the same opportunity."

Murphy's son, Ron, serves as vice president and manager of day-to-day operations for SPI. "We're teaching them [interns] how to be a Christian in the professional world, while helping them build a life plan to make the transition from the college learning environment to the work environment," he said.

After four successful semesters of students interning in the capital, SPI reported 50 percent of their students being offered jobs or other internships in D.C., and 40 percent of students had come back to work full time in the area.

"Offices are now calling us and specifically asking for LU students — places like the Virginia State Congressman Eric Cantor's office, Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) and the U.S. Business and Industrial Council. These students stand out — their character and work ethic is being seen and requested," Ron said.

The program allows students to maintain full-time status at LU by taking six credits of internship and six credits through Distance Learning courses. In addition to their classwork, the focus of the semester is the 36 hours each week at their internship sites.

Government major Marquita Cozart, who interned with the D.C. Attorney General's Office, plans to attend law school and become an attorney in D.C.

"I was looking for hands-on experience to make sure this was what I wanted to do," she said. "It has helped solidify where I'm headed in my career."

With the proven success of what students have come to know as "The Washington Semester," SPI will reach another goal with the launch of "The Richmond Semester" during fall 2008.

"We want to take the program to state capitals around the country and Richmond seemed like the best place to start," Ron Murphy said. "With hundreds of business locations, state government offices and an international port, the city is full of opportunity."