

Spotlight on ILA Institutional Members

ILA Members are doing amazing leadership work around the world, from starting new degree programs to nurturing young people who make a difference, from running innovative workshops and seminars to fostering organizational change. We are pleased to shine an ILA spotlight on the programs of our members. If you would like to nominate yourself or another ILA institutional member to be featured on these pages, please contact ILA at ila@ila-net.org.

Spotlight on The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars

Leadership and Tradition: The National Political Convention Programs

Civic engagement by young people has been a major source of concern in recent years. Discussions within school systems, public political arenas, and local neighborhoods have raised the question of what exactly it takes to open students' eyes to the world as it operates on so many different levels. Some believe such a task takes a lifetime, some believe it takes decades of guidance and education, and some believe it cannot always be done. But the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars proposes a different timeline in a rather nontraditional classroom: two weeks and a major political convention.

Recognizing the educational and leadership opportunities that national political conventions can provide to participants, The Washington Center has organized national academic programs at each of the major party conventions since 1984.

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The programs are two weeks in length, starting the week before the national convention and ending the Friday after the convention. It is an exceptional opportunity for students to see what goes on behind the scenes. It also gives them insight into the grassroots nature of political

activism and civic participation in a way that has been shown to inspire students to pursue careers in public service and related endeavors.

Next year's conventions promise to uphold the vigor, intensity, and excitement of years past. In fact, in 2008, we will have the first presidential election since 1952 when neither a sitting president nor vice president will be on the ticket (Eisenhower vs. Stevenson). Before that, we have to go all the way back to 1928 when Herbert Hoover ran against Al Smith. So the election of 2008 is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for citizens to become involved in what is turning out to be a highly competitive (and expensive) presidential campaign. (Students interested in the 2008 conventions can still apply! See Sidebar for more information.)

Transformation in two weeks is no easy process. It requires immersing students in an event in which they can be both observers and participants. Students are assigned field-work placements and spend time behind the scenes, learning how conventions are organized to deliver a particular campaign image and message.

Today conventions are often dismissed as dinosaurs of another era



Balloon Dropping at Democratic National Convention

with limited value other than the official launching of a candidate's campaign. But students who work behind the scenes and who mingle with the delegates, media representatives, public officials, city officials, and even the protesters see something different—and they see something more. They see the workings of democracy in action—the only time in four years that we have the gathering of a national political party.

For more information about participating in the 2008 convention seminars, email the staff at C2008@twc.edu or visit their Web site later this summer to download an application: www.twc.edu

Conventions have a unifying objective for the party while fulfilling another function—raising money for increasingly expensive campaigns. Students assigned to work in the skyboxes and hospitality suites; the multitude of receptions, breakfasts and dinners; and other special events see that campaign contributors are well treated. They learn that many contributors are not necessarily looking for favoritism when it comes to public policymaking. Many simply want access and to be able to tell their friends who they were with when the presidential nominee gave the acceptance speech. A ticket to the presidential inaugural balls wouldn't hurt either!

Students keep a journal that reflects upon their daily activities, the speakers we present to them, and the interviews they are required to conduct. Having access to politicians from the grassroots level to the state and national level is an extraordinary opportunity to see how democracy works. Senators and congressmen walk unaccompanied throughout the city, eat at local restaurants and cafes, and stop to talk to complete strangers on the street who greet them after seeing them give an address from the convention podium the night before.

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Students in the program have met the local precinct captain and rubbed shoulders with a U.S. Senator or governor of the state. They are often taken under wing and mentored. Some are even offered jobs simply because they exercised the leadership skill to participate in such a program. This program can have a long term impact on a student's academic and professional goals.

Ultimately, students are given a hands-on view of a world they otherwise see only through second-hand media coverage. By the end of the two weeks, the students are literally transformed. They may have met the next President of the

United State or the next wunderkind of American politics. They are inspired because they realize that these politicians are real people. But perhaps most importantly, they certainly have learned what they need to know to operate within a political world. That is a lesson in leadership that will last a lifetime.

-- Eugene Alpert is senior vice president at The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars. He has lead The Washington Center's national convention programs since 1984 and will be attending his 13th and 14th national conventions in Denver (DNC) and the Twin Cities (RNC) next summer.



**Mark Russell, Political Humorist,
Speaks to Students**

Welcome New Members: March 2007

* Associated with an
Institutional Membership

Gloria Abe
University of Phoenix

Judi Biggs Garbuio
University of Southern California

Michelle Clayton
University of Calgary

Mary-Clare DiGiacomo
University of Georgia

Sherry Early*
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Ayman El Tarabishy
George Washington University

Mark Ellis
The Ellis Group

Ross Emmett
Michigan State University

Chris Francovich*
Gonzaga University

Peter Jennings
Arizona State University

Carolyn Lengh
University School of
Milwaukee

Anna Lloyd*
University of Minnesota

Brigitte Lossing
Saint Mary's College of California

Kenneth Moss
Strategic Leadership Development
Group

Erone Newman
St Michael's Hospital

Cynthia Roberts
Purdue North Central

Joseph Thomas*
Marine Corps University

continued on page 16...