

Students climb high in careers following internships on the Hill

— by Dottie Barnes

Living and working in Washington, D.C., as a Henry Fellow means hard work and rubbing elbows with some high-profile lawmakers. The experience has also helped many Grand Valley graduates find quick success in a variety of careers.

Grand Valley's Department of Political Science manages the Paul B. Henry Congressional Internship competition, named in honor of the late Congressman Paul Henry of Grand Rapids, who served Michigan as a state representative, state senator and U.S. congressman. Henry Hall on the Allendale Campus is named in his honor.

The internship places a Grand Valley student in the Washington, D.C., offices of one of Michigan's U.S. representatives or senators during the spring/summer academic session.

"The Henry Fellows complement their quality education at Grand Valley with a real-world experience that connects them with the nation's most prominent leaders," said Kevin R. den Dulk, associate professor of political science and internship director. "Grand Valley gets a base of extraordinary alumni who have been launched into leadership roles in politics, business, nonprofit work and education."

Den Dulk said applications are reviewed by a faculty committee. He noted that all are top-notch students, with grade point averages near or above 3.75.

Individual Attention

Competition for the scholarship is steep, but David Johnson earned the title of Henry Fellow in the summer of 2004. The international relations major from Three Rivers worked for U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Holland. Grand Valley's Allendale and Holland campuses are located in Hoekstra's district, and he regularly hosts Henry Fellows.

Johnson, 26, had just graduated from Grand Valley when his internship began. "The internship helped me learn how to work with people and in a team," Johnson said. "It was helpful to work in a fast-paced environment where quality work was expected in a short amount of time. Learning how to give individual care to constituent requests helped me with my current job."

Johnson has worked for HMI Worldwide in Wyoming for four years. The international business firm specializes in erosion control and insulation materials made from recycled products. As director of international projects, he has traveled to 32 countries including China, Korea, Egypt, India and Guatemala, serving customers. Johnson said the fellowship helped him learn how

photo courtesy of David Johnson

David Johnson, left, stands next to U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra outside the Capitol. Johnson earned a Henry Fellow scholarship in 2004.

to correspond with and give individual care to constituents. “It’s a real parallel with my career. I see the importance in giving individual attention to our customers,” he said.

Johnson said one highlight of his internship was meeting Detroit Shock coach Bill Lambeer at a Rose Garden ceremony hosted by President George W. Bush to honor the basketball team for winning the 2004 WNBA championship. He also attended an address by the Afghanistan president to a joint session of Congress.

Three current students are on the Hill for the summer. Former Student Senate President Frank Foster is working for Hoekstra; Jason Puscas, former senate vice president, is in the office of U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg (R-Bloomfield Hills); and Ryan Rogowski received the Henry Fellowship to work for Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich).

How Change Really Happens

Scott Rumpsa thrived on being “in the middle of all the action” when he served as a Henry Fellow for Levin. Rumpsa, 29, is currently a contract administrator in the Community Development Department for the City of Grand Rapids. The history

major and Grand Rapids native spent the summer of 2007 in Washington, D.C., learning what it takes to make real change happen.

“I loved the fast-paced atmosphere,” said Rumpsa. “I learned a lot about research and policy. I would spend weeks researching an issue for someone to have a 10-minute briefing with the senator. I learned how to write policy and how change really happens.”

Rumpsa said he also learned a lot from attending hearings, seminars and forums at the Capitol that allowed him to see and hear from U.S. Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama.

Rumpsa is using the skills he learned in a second job he holds with the Aqua Clara Foundation, a nonprofit company that operates water filtration systems. His job has taken him to Kenya, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru. “My goal in life is to have the ability to influence policy for the better; to help people through political action,” he said.

Discovering Policy Solutions

Melissa Harris discovered her career path after serving as a Henry Fellow, and before completing a master’s degree in public policy from the



photo by Amanda Pitts

A portrait of Paul Henry hangs in Henry Hall on the Allendale Campus.

University of Maryland-Baltimore County.

Harris, 25 and from Cadillac, graduated from Grand Valley in 2006 and spent the summer in Levin’s office. Harris was a quick study, conducting research, answering mail and giving tours for constituents.

“The experience helped me to learn how to synthesize information and my writing into real-world content,” said Harris. “I learned how to be an effective communicator and decided that I wanted to focus my career on becoming a research analyst of policy — coming up with policy solutions.”

Harris said it was fascinating to experience what happens behind the scenes in a senate office. She said it was eye-opening to measure the amount of work prepared, compared to what actually made it to the senate floor. “It was exciting to sit in the senate gallery, watch hearings and listen to speeches,” she said. “Better than watching C-SPAN.”

Harris said one of the highlights of being a Henry Fellow was attending a lecture series planned just for interns. “It sounds funny but politicians are like celebrities to me,” she said. “I was able to hear and meet Ralph Nader and Dennis Kucinich.”

Henry’s Legacy Continues

The Henry Fellowship was the brainchild of Stephen Ward, Grand Valley’s former news media manager who had once worked as press secretary for Henry; and Matt McLogan, vice president for University Relations and a personal friend of the late congressman.

“Paul was a special public servant who, as a former college professor, had a passion for students,” McLogan said. “We thought the fellowship would be a great fit at Grand Valley and make Paul’s legacy an honored part of our political science program. We are grateful that the Henry family gave us this special privilege.”

Henry Fellows receive a stipend and academic credit for their work, and Grand Valley’s Alumni Association’s D.C. Chapter adds a special dimension to the program through mentorship and support of interns while they work in the nation’s capital.

The program is funded in part by annual gifts to Grand Valley from the Paul B. Henry Foundation. Henry’s widow, Karen Henry Stokes, is president of the Foundation and served on the university’s Board of Trustees from 1997-2005. She is now a trustee of the Grand Valley University Foundation.



photo courtesy of Melissa Harris

Melissa Harris completed her fellowship before earning a master’s degree from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County.



photo courtesy of Scott Rumpsa

Scott Rumpsa, right, served as a Henry Fellow for U.S. Sen. Carl Levin.