

## Panetta Institute student interning on Capitol Hill

The work, she says, puts her at exactly where she wants to be: at the political center of the United States.

"I am excited to be working somewhere that the work has a real, tangible impact on a grand level," she says. "I love that the office I will work in will be crafting legislation that might still be impacting people 250 years from now. Just to play any role in that office, big or small, is incredible."

Vaughan was one of 26 students appointed by college presidents from the California State University system, plus Dominican, Santa Clara University, and St. Mary's College. Their selection was based on exemplary scholastic record, interest in politics, and potential for a public service career.

Dominican has enjoyed a long-term partnership with the Panetta Institute, and many former Panetta interns have continued into careers focused on public service, says Alison Howard, assistant professor and chair of the [Department of Political Science and International Studies](#) in [Dominican's School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#).

"The Panetta experience has been transformational for our students and has inspired many of them to make public service a career at the national, state, and local level."

Former Panetta interns Daniela Leyva ('14) and Sydney Lewis ('13) work for Senator Barbara Boxer in her Oakland and Sacramento offices, respectively. Kat Skiles ('07) has remained in Washington, DC, since graduating from Dominican and is currently working for Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi as a Senior Advisor and Digital Director. Darcel Sanders ('09) is a legislative aide in Sacramento for the chair of the California Senate Education Committee. Juleah Cordi ('10) is the District Manager for the Sutter County Resource Conservation District and remains actively involved in a number of issues that affect her community.

Before traveling to Washington to begin her 11 week internship, Vaughan spent two weeks in an intensive program at the Panetta Institute for Public Policy at CSU Monterey Bay. The program, established by former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, was designed to prepare Vaughan and her fellow interns for work in the nation's capital.

The first week focused on the structural components and history of Californian and American politics. During the second week, the interns studied specific issues, including immigration, health care, aging, the media, education, and consensus building. In all, the interns heard from 39 presenters during the two weeks in Monterey.

"I have been overwhelmed with the quality of these sessions and I just feel so honored to be representing Dominican," says Vaughan.

"I see that they believe in this idea of a social contract--giving back to the community so that they have the tools to live a better life. I often hear it talked about and I always believed in the idea of serving the people and giving back, but I have never seen it demonstrated with such ease and sincerity as I have the last two weeks."

This year's program included a discussion by former Vice President Dan Quayle on politics in the capital, as well as several sessions led by Secretary Panetta.

"As Secretary Panetta is now working from the Institute, we were lucky enough to have him teach two different, three-hour lessons," Vaughan says. "We talked about the structure of Congress, its historical background, and the current polarization crisis during the first lesson. In the second lesson, Secretary Panetta discussed the United States' current approach to foreign policy issues in the Middle East and the structure of both the CIA and Department of Defense."

[CLICK HERE](#) to read more about Secretary Panetta's lecture.

In his talk, former Vice President Quayle discussed America's foreign policy, urging his students to realize how much foreign policy has changed in the past 40+ years.

“Vice President Quayle raised a great point that foreign policy is so much more difficult now than it was during the Cold War because there are no longer any precise enemies,” Vaughan says. “The instability of the entire political world now poses a threat to the United States’ own security.”

Vaughan was inspired by the amount of time Secretary Panetta spent directly working with the interns, as well as his obvious desire to motivate and encourage his students to engage in the political process.

“I feel so fortunate that I have been able to interact with the Secretary as much as I have (I even sat next to him during the dinner at his family ranch), and I feel inspired and motivated to stay optimistic in a political world that is weighted down by great pessimism.”

The experience as a Panetta intern enables her to continue her already impressive commitment to public service. Vaughan has been very involved both on and off campus, spearheading voter registration drives, Constitution Day events, and most recently working with the Congress to Campus program.

“Not only do I want to serve myself by growing from this internship, but I feel genuinely inspired that this myth of living a good, honest, hard-working, and risk-taking life does not have to be a myth. The speakers who visited the institute demonstrated that it takes willingness to compromise so that everyone benefits and it takes a willingness to take risks in order to make sure that the righteousness is prioritized over easiness in legislation.”

Howard, said the internship is a perfect way for Vaughan to begin her senior year at Dominican.

“Ever since Kelsea was a freshman, she has always expressed tremendous interest in public policy and public service. The opportunity for her to go to Washington, DC as a Panetta Intern will allow her to further her interests and explore new possibilities. I have no doubt that she will take advantage of this opportunity and truly excel.”