

News of the Profession

Reports

Studying Politics in Washington

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Imagine a tour of the offices of *The Washington Post*: meeting a news editor who discussed relations between the presidency and the press, looking at the press room and the layout room, visiting the now-famous news room, and to cap it all, getting 17 people stuck for 45

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Leonard Williams (left) of Manchester College talks with John Salzberg, executive director of the William Penn House in Washington, D.C.

minutes in an elevator just above the lobby. This was only one of the many elevating experiences my Manchester College students had on a trip to Washington, DC, arranged by the William Penn House.

William Penn House is a Quaker seminar and hospitality center located at 515 E. Capitol Street, Washington, DC 20003 (Phone: (202) 543-5560). I had heard about its activities from fellow Quakers, and when my original plans for a month-long stay at another facility had to be cancelled due to its expense, I was anxious to find a place for my students to stay. To my surprise, I found that William Penn House not only provided housing and breakfast but also scheduled a series of meetings and tours for the extremely low cost of \$18 per day per student.

John Salzberg, executive director, described how Penn House usually operated. For the most part, it focused on organizing seminars on issues of concern to its Quaker constituency. However, I explained my desire to develop a seminar to fit the topic of my January term course at Manchester College—the presidency. I wanted a series of meetings with people both within and outside of government who could offer diverse perspectives on the presidency and policymaking. The theme of my course was that the president's exercise of power is constrained by a variety of groups and institutions, each with its own goals and interests. In addition to looking at the president as policymaker, I also wanted to examine the issues that would be high on the administration's second term agenda—namely, arms control, U.S./USSR relations, and the budget.

John and I then talked about the overall shape of the seminar trip. He asked about any special needs my students might have. I mentioned that attending a

Supreme Court session was chief among those needs, since many of my students were interested in going to law school. Also, I desired some blocks of free time for class visits to museum exhibits, monuments, and the like. John (a political scientist, former staff member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and former State Department official) understood my needs and promised a suitable program, and he delivered.

The class prepared for the trip to Washington through a few days of lectures and readings on the presidency. Our week in Washington began as we met with congressional aides who described the budget process timetable as well as the political realities that underlie budgetary decisions. For instance, we discussed presidential involvement in the budgetary process, the importance of presidential credibility to congressional acceptance of the budget, and the flexibility of the timetable itself. A meeting with a lobbyist for the Friends Committee on National Legislation also provided the perspective of an interest group attempting to shape budget debates and outcomes.

Visits to the Department of State and the Department of Defense provided insights into the arms control process and the likely results of the recent Shultz-Gromyko talks (which had occurred just a week before we arrived). We also conferred with people who had opposing viewpoints on arms control. For instance, we met with a policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation who echoed the administration's skepticism about agreements that come too quickly and with a lobbyist for the Council for a Livable World who expressed relief that the U.S. and USSR had begun talking to one another again.

At the end of the week, we discussed a variety of issues—from arms control and Central America to student aid and the economy—with a staff member of the White House Office of Public Liaison. (This last meeting took place in the Cordell Hull Conference Room in the Old Executive Office Building, the site of many presidential briefings by the National Security Council.)

William Penn House also arranged for

many entertaining and interesting tours of Washington sights. In addition to the tour of the offices of *The Washington Post*, Penn House arranged for our group to have reserved seating at the Supreme Court, where we witnessed oral argument in the case of *Oklahoma City Board of Education v. National Gay Task Force*, a case in which Harvard law professor Lawrence Tribe argued for the respondents. (Student evaluations almost universally noted the visit to the Supreme Court as a high point of the time we spent in Washington.) We also had official tours of the Pentagon and the Capitol building, as well as time for viewing the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials and the election campaigns exhibit at the Smithsonian.

The staff at Penn House were very courteous and helpful. They provided for our needs as guests and directed us to nearby restaurants, Metro (subway) stations, and other Washington attractions. Our accommodations were very comfortable—good food, warmth in the midst of one of Washington's coldest winters, and pleasant conversation with other guests at the house.

One of my aims was to introduce students to the complexity of the policy-making process. Our meetings with people in various cabinet departments and interest groups highlighted the vast numbers of people involved in making policy. Those meetings also illustrated the importance of institutional loyalties in making opponents out of people in government who otherwise share ideological perspectives. The final lesson learned was that the president constantly needs to maintain credibility with the public, the media, and especially the Congress, in order to have his policy preferences enacted.

Our week-long experience in Washington had a great impact upon my students. They liked our stay at William Penn House and especially the briefings that John Salzberg arranged for us. One student said that he appreciated the candor and the diversity of the officials we met. Another enjoyed the rare opportunity to meet government officials and to challenge their views. One more student said that she was grateful for the balance be-

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tween pro- and anti-Reagan speakers. All of them liked the chance to get an insider's perspective on politics and not merely an academic one. You can bet that next year I will be back with another eager group of Manchester students. But next year, we intend to use the stairs.

Programs of the Bureau of Justice Statistics

Steven R. Schlesinger

Director

Editor's Note: This paper is extracted from an address delivered to the American Society of Criminology, November 8, 1984.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is mandated by Congress to collect, analyze, publish, and disseminate statistics on crime, victims of crime, criminal offenders, and the operations of justice systems at all levels of government throughout the United States. Since its creation in 1979, the Bureau has developed new programs as well as continued the earlier statistical programs of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

Because it is a relatively new agency and many potential users of BJS data are unaware of data bases that are available, the Bureau has developed an "outreach" program. This program includes:

- *How to Gain Access to BJS Data*, a brochure describing the Bureau of Justice Statistics, its programs, and how to obtain BJS data and reports;
- A brochure that identifies BJS staff (and their telephone numbers) who are knowledgeable about the statistical data on various criminal justice topics;
- A catalog (to be published shortly) of all BJS data series giving detailed information on the variables included, the methodology used, the publica-

tions produced, the availability of data tapes, how to obtain the various products, and who to contact for assistance in using the data sets; and

- The Justice Statistics Clearinghouse with a toll-free telephone line at the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). The clearinghouse responds to statistical inquiries on a variety of criminal justice topics; NCJRS distributes copies of BJS reports.¹

Most of the BJS data series produce machine-readable data sets which are stored at and disseminated through the criminal justice data archive BJS sponsors at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. These data sets are disseminated via magnetic tapes compatible with the user's computing facility.² Unless otherwise noted, the BJS data bases described in this paper have produced (or are producing) data tapes that can be obtained through the archive.

Data on the Commission of Crime

The Bureau's largest statistical series is the *National Crime Survey* (NCS), the nation's only systematic measurement of victimization rates that collects data through national household surveys. The survey, which began in 1973, measures the amount of rape, robbery, assault, personal larceny, household burglary and larceny, and motor vehicle theft experienced by a random sample of the U.S. population. It also provides detailed information about the characteristics of victims, victim-offender relationships, the victims' perceptions of offender characteristics, and the criminal incident, in-

¹Single copies of publications can be obtained free of charge from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850. The telephone number is (301) 251-5500. The BJS clearinghouse can be reached at (800) 732-3277.

²Data tapes are made available on a cost-reimbursement basis. For more information contact the Criminal Justice Data Archive at P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. The telephone number is (313) 763-5010.

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