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## American Studies Institute Washington D.C. Trip

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**HARDING**  
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## **American Studies Institute Trip to Washington, D.C.**

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**By: Meghan McElroy**

Twenty Harding students led by Dr. John Richard Duke and nominated by professors, were able to experience our nation's capital on the American Studies Institute trip from February 23-26 of this year. The students came from a variety of groups on campus including American Studies Institute leadership and the History and Political Science Department. In four rich days, the group explored Washington D.C. in historical, political, and business-oriented lenses while meeting with a plethora of distinguished Harding alumni living and working in the area.

Several funding sources made this trip extremely affordable. The cost of the trip paid for three days on the metro, plane tickets, meals, and hotels for the students. We are grateful to the following donors: Clifton L. Ganus, Jr. Endowed Chair for History and Political Science, American Studies Institute, students, and one anonymous donor.

On the first day, the group had an opportunity to spend a few hours at the National Museum of African American History and Culture as well as tour the capitol building with Senator Boozman's office. In addition, during the students' free day of the

trip, students took the time to visit more of the Smithsonian museums, the Library of Congress, the national monuments, Arlington cemetery, among other historical sites.

The exploration of politics throughout the trip was aided by Harding alumni who work in powerful positions in our nation's capital. Two such alumni included Ashley Shelton, legislative director for Arkansas House Representative Rick Crawford, and Matt Blue, who works for the Department of Justice. Ashley shared how she made her way to D.C. and secured her position, detailed what her job entails, as well as fielded student questions. Matt Blue also shared his journey to Washington in addition to showing students around the Department of Justice.

The group ventured out to Fairfax, Virginia, to engage in medical economics at the Inova Fairfax Medical Campus. Students were able to meet with the sports medicine staff, physical therapy department, and imaging center. Throughout the day, staff explained how each department functioned and described their business and medical philosophies. After touring the facilities, executives provided a medical economics presentation and allowed students to ask further questions.

While the immersion into the historical, political, and business aspects of Washington, D.C. provided students with a priceless experience, the networking and fellowship with Harding

graduates in the area was arguably even more important. On Friday night, the ASI group met with available Harding graduates in one of the churches in the area. Approximately twenty alumni attended the event, and throughout the night, students and alumni exchanged Harding stories. Alumni shared more about D.C and offered information, advice, and opportunities. It was a gratifying and eye-opening experience to fellowship with alumni, see how their faith flourishes in a place like Washington, D.C., and to recognize the weight of a Harding University education.

Ashley Shelton described the significance of the ASI trip and touched upon the power of the alumni relations on the trip: “Exposure to the nation’s capital is critical to bolster appreciation of the U.S. government and to introduce career opportunities. As a student at Harding, it never occurred to me that God would want me to serve Him in Washington, D.C. Some very special professors at Harding showed me such opportunities and my relationships with them enabled me to trust that I could do it. It’s such a blessing to now have opportunities to speak with students about my journey to this place and to encourage them that they, too, are capable of serving here, or anywhere that may seem big or intimidating.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ashley Shelton, “Harding University ASI Trip Write-Up,” [ashley.shelton.ar@gmail.com](mailto:ashley.shelton.ar@gmail.com), 2023.

The interactions with alumni were certainly not all business but instead encompassed much more. One of the highlights of the trip was the opportunity to worship alongside Ashley Shelton at the Church of Christ in Falls Church before the group journeyed back to Searcy.

Overall, the experience provided by the ASI Washington, D.C. trip and Dr. J.R. Duke is something that students will not forget. In addition to hands-on learning of the historical, political, and business aspects of our nation, students left with different perspectives and new relationships. The trip left high-powered careers in the nation's capital feeling attainable with a community of believers there to support you.



The group tours the United States Capitol with Senator Boozman's office



Students pose on the steps of the United States Supreme Court