

PROGRAM OVERVIEW: THE FLAGSHIP WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

The Washington High School Program (WHSP) provides students hands-on opportunities to interact with government, interest groups and individual citizens. Students will engage with policymakers and experts through seminars, meetings with Congressional offices and observations of Congress in action. Key institutions and historic sites will be used as classrooms to help students explore the links between history and contemporary policy issues. Emphasis will be placed on how the actions of ordinary citizens can directly affect public policy making.

Program Goals

The Washington High School Program (WHSP) aims to build students' sense of political efficacy. Specifically, the WHSP helps students develop knowledge and practical understanding of the basic concepts and processes of democratic government and citizenship, as well as the concrete skills that make that knowledge meaningful. Students will gain greater understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a participatory democracy and will develop skills and dispositions to carry out those rights and responsibilities.

Basic Program Structure and Design

- Students attend the Washington High School Program for a weeklong session (Sunday arrival through Friday departure)
- Typically, 150 to 200 students are based at one hotel for the program week. (High school programs will typically run in 1 to 4 hotels each week throughout the program season.)
- Students are assigned to "workshop" groups of approximately 20 to 25 students. The workshop stays together throughout the week and encounters most of the week's program components together; each workshop has one instructor who works with those students throughout the week. Two workshops combine to make a bus group of approximately 40 to 50 students; bus groups work together on a number of components throughout the program week.
- Each student receives a *Student Notebook* which serves as a journal and study guide for a variety of activities throughout the week.
- Students who elect to are eligible to earn college credit from the American University based on their participation in the Washington High School Program.

Descriptions of Major Program Components

Sunday Introductory Activities: The week begins with personal and group goal setting in a set of Sunday night activities that engage students in a preview of and preparation for the week. Each workshop also establishes rules to govern its community and self-evaluate their own level of political efficacy.

Domestic Issues Debate: In a large-group setting, students explore a variety of current controversial domestic issues and engage in a question-and-answer session with two professionals from the political arena representing a liberal and a conservative perspective.

Thematic Memorial and Monument Study Visits: During Instructor-led study visits to the major monuments and memorials of the city, students in workshop groups explore major themes and ongoing developments in the political history of the United States.

- *Three Faces of Democracy Series* (Jefferson, FDR and MLK Memorials): Students examine quotations and the historical contexts of the two presidencies as the basis for discussing the tension between Constitutional commitments to limited government versus the emerging government obligations of a modern society. Then, while visiting the memorial to America's best known citizen activist, students will examine different forms of political engagement and the role citizens have played and can play in pushing the government towards the smaller (Jeffersonian/Protective) ideal of government or the more expansive (Roosevelt/Progressive) ideal.
- *The War Memorials* (Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, Korean War Memorial, WWII Memorial, and the Lincoln Memorial): Students examine the architectural elements, symbolic imagery, and engraved quotations to compare and contrast various views on the uses, causes, and justifications of military power. Other War Memorials study topics include: the symbolism and impacts of public art in war memorials and the proper application of Just War Theory.
- *The 9/11 Memorial at the Pentagon:* Students will discuss the appropriate balance between security and liberty and debate whether the specter of terrorism raised by the September 11th attacks should continue to influence our foreign and domestic policy today.

Enduring Questions of Democracy Workshops: Students explore an enduring question of American democracy using multiple current issues as examples and case studies. Workshop topics include: federalism and the balance of power between state and national government; standards of judicial interpretation; the level of protection offered for the First Amendment and; the limits of youth rights.

Current Issues in Public Policy: Using selected news accounts, and diverse commentary and opinion articles, students will examine current policy concerns and controversies, such as the NSA surveillance program, nuclear negotiations with Iran, U.S. immigration policy, the War on Drugs and drone warfare. Students will deliberate upon available policy options and consider how the government should weigh and act on competing priorities.

Comprehensive Capitol Hill Study Series: Three major program components comprise the students' study of Congress and the legislative process.

- *Walking Workshop on Capitol Hill:* On the day prior to Capitol Hill Day, Instructors lead students on a walking workshop around the offices and sites of the Hill guiding discussions on the legislative process, current action on the Hill and orienting students to the geography and institutions of congressional offices, committees, and hearing rooms.
- *Capitol Hill Preparation and Simulation:* On the evening prior to Capitol Hill Day, Instructors lead students through a preparatory activity looking at mock legislative bills on current policy controversies and issues. The Instructor-led Legislative Large-Group Activity allows students to take on various roles in the legislative process as they simulate a session of the House of Representatives. Following the simulation, students prepare questions and presentations for their Member-meetings on Capitol Hill the following day.
- *Capitol Hill Day:* Students, accompanied by their teachers, spend the day on Capitol Hill meeting with the offices of their Congressional delegation. Students use independent time between meetings to visit other sites on Capitol Hill.

Seminars and Onsite Study Visits: Students hear from and ask questions of public officials, journalists, and other players involved in making, shaping, and influencing public policy. Some

sessions (Onsite Study Visits) are conducted on-location—such as at foreign embassies, the State Department, or a policy advocacy organization’s headquarters. Students participate in 1-2 Seminar/Onsite sessions lasting 60 minutes each.

Neighborhood Study Visits: During the week, Neighborhood Study Visits allow students to see the living city beyond the monuments. The experiences of D.C.’s neighborhoods and residents in responding to and advocating for public policies help students assess the relationship between social conditions and public policy. Some examples include:

- *Dealing with Diversity:* Students will visit Washington, DC’s Adams Morgan neighborhood to examine how residents there have embraced the benefits and challenges that come from existing in a diverse community. One example students will study is the Latino Liaison Unit, a unit in the DC Police Department that is meant to coordinate with and provide services for the neighborhood’s Hispanic residents. The visit will examine the interactions between residents, the local government, the police force and businesses to overcome diversity and create a flourishing neighborhood.
- *Filling the Urban Grocery Gap:* Students will visit DC’s historic Eastern Market neighborhood, which sits in the shadow of the Capitol building. There, students will debate whether access to affordable, nutritious foods is a right and what the proper role for government is in protecting that right.

Hidden Gems of Washington: Students will visit the less-known monuments and memorials that enliven and enrich DC’s architectural and cultural history. On these visits, students will engage with the text of the sites, the stories and lives they represent and the role individuals and groups can play in shaping public policy. Some examples include:

- *Theodore Roosevelt Island:* Students will visit an island whose austere beauty, set apart from the hustle and bustle of Georgetown by the Potomac River, is the perfect setting for the nation’s memorial to its first conservationist president, Theodore Roosevelt. There, students will learn about progressivism, the Gilded Age, the Robber Barons, and Roosevelt’s role as a trustbuster. Students will debate the proper role of government in regulating businesses and will discuss whether there should be a policy to address businesses that are deemed too big or too influential to fail.
- *African American Civil War Memorial and Malcolm X Park:* Students will visit Malcolm X Park and the African American Civil War Memorial, two sites nestled in Washington, DC’s vibrant and historic African American neighborhood of U Street, also referred to as Black Broadway. While there, they will learn about the places, people, stories and struggles of the Civil Rights movements. Students will also debate the efficacy and appropriateness of various methods of direct action as a form of political engagement.

On Display at the Smithsonian: Politics and Policy: Selected exhibits at the Smithsonian Museums are used to highlight and discuss issues that bear the policies, politics and public life of the nation. Study visit topics include: *Owning our Ideas: The Costs and Benefits of Protecting Intellectual Property Rights* (American History Museum, Invention at Play exhibit); *Sitting Down Against Injustice: Study of a Protest Movement* (American History, Woolworth’s Lunch Counter exhibit); *Evolution and Creation: Teaching Natural Origins* (Museum of Natural History’s Hall of Human Origins and Evolution Trail); *Spacemen: The Politics and Policy Choices of Manned Versus Unmanned Space Exploration* (Air & Space Museum, Explore the Universe, Moving Beyond Earth, and Space Race exhibits); *Seduced by the beauty of our weapons?: Drones, wars and video games* (Air & Space Museum, Military Unmanned Aerial Vehicles Exhibit)

Thursday – Citizenship in Focus: After a close examination of American democracy on the national level, including an opportunity to meet with members of their Congressional delegation, students will turn their attention to the skills, values, dispositions and actions necessary to foster and sustain both local and national democracies.

- *Sustaining Democracy Workshop*: Students will consider the types of service, sacrifice and commitments to communities and the nation that are necessary to maintain a healthy democracy.
- *Arlington National Cemetery*: Students will examine the service and sacrifices to the nation memorialized at the cemetery.
- *Lunch and Neighborhood Study Visits*: Students will consider the actions of groups and individuals that have shaped and continue to shape the local communities of the nation's capital.
- *Seminar or Onsite with Advocacy Organization*: Students will learn about the work of advocacy organizations operating at the local and national level to 'form a more perfect union.' Students will reflect on the work of these organizations and their relationship to a vital democracy.
- *National Portrait Gallery Study Visit*: Students will examine the lives and works of individuals who had a significant impact on U.S. history in order to consider what attributes contribute to American democracy.
- *White House Study Visit*: Students will examine various protests that have occurred at the White House during its history and will consider the relationship between government limits on protest and democratic vitality.

Thursday Evening Reflection Activities: Thursday night activities promote reflection on the week's experiences and inspire students to "take Close Up home" by developing personal and group agendas and tools for continued action and engagement in political and policy issues beyond the end of the Close Up week.