

# insights

saint martin's university • summer 2015

news for alumni and friends



STEM Stuff Rocks • State Legislative Internship • SMUniverse

# Soar



# ing

by Deanna Partlow

If you must walk before you can run, what must you do **before you fly?**

At first, you stand on the edge of the nest. You hop and your wings spread a little. Then slowly, surely, you spread them further and flap harder, catching the wind. With **practice**, you learn **and soon you are soaring.**

But mastering the skill does take time — 150 days worth, in the case of six young Saint Martin's University students embedded last spring with the Washington State Legislature as interns under the Washington State Legislative Internship Program.

The students — all juniors and seniors, all women — spread their wings in what is considered one of the most demanding and coveted internship experiences in the state. Having a front-row seat to power, government and politics has matured them and, in some cases, altered the trajectory of their lives. They have a clearer understanding of themselves, of how the real world works and where the two might intersect.

“Washington's legislative internship program is probably the most highly regarded nationally and has served as a model for other states,” says Roger Snider, associate professor of history and political science, and Saint Martin's coordinator for the program. “It gives students an opportunity to see their democracy in action and, at some level, be a participant in that process. So, from the standpoint of both a student-scholar and a citizen, it enriches their development.”

The program had its start in the 1950s under prominent University of Washington political scientist Hugh Bone;

Saint Martin's became involved around 1970, Snider says. That Saint Martin's snagged six of the 73 internship spots (four in the senate; two in the House) in 2015 is a school record — and a welcome surprise, since students applied independently of each other.

Since political savvy is not a prerequisite, students from all disciplines apply and find the internship highly relevant and useful, Snider says.

Senior Jaime Rosenberg, a double-major in English and legal studies who plans to study law, agrees. “Up until the internship, I was not all that in touch with politics. But seeing how a bill becomes a law, seeing the law used and seeing it implemented into the system has been a huge learning experience for me.”

Senior Lauren Flynn-Burbage, a House intern, majors in political science. But as she points out, “It's encouraging that interns come from different academic backgrounds because a lot of legislators don't have a social science background. I think it makes for a more effective legislature because they're all specialized in different areas and know what to do to help various agencies.”

Way back in her freshman year, Rosenberg heard Emily McCartan and Paula Rehwaldt, the Senate and House internship coordinators, give a presentation in class. She started planning to apply, and last fall, worked for months on her application with Ann Adams, the University's director of career development. The payoff was landing an internship with Senate Majority Leader Linda Evans Parlette, a Republican for the 12th District, centered in Wenatchee.

## Lifting off ★ ★ ★

Nothing — not even taking political science courses — prepared students for the grueling realities of the internship, itself. The six young women — poised, professionally dressed and confident — make Wonder Woman look like a sissy as they explain what their days were like and how the internship changed the architecture of their lives.

Their internships began with orientation, a three-day crash course that covered everything from how bills become laws to legislative research and ethics, not to mention proper workplace decorum and phone etiquette.

Under the program, interns are assigned to a legislator — sometimes more than one — and they become paid, full-time staff members for the legislative session. They also earn academic credit. Their work in legislative offices is served up with side dishes of seminars, workshops and discussions with public officials, lobbyists and others who

form the political process. Learning opportunities spill over into the evenings and weekends for interns willing and able to take advantage of them. Most try.

Lakewood senior Maria Villalpando-Ramos, a political science major, says, “Coming into it, I felt so dumb. I didn’t understand the whole process, so I just tried to listen and the legislative assistants helped me and gave me lots of advice.”

“The first days, the pace was hectic,” says Rosenberg. “Adjusting and learning to be a help and not a burden was hard. It took about two weeks to figure out the routine. You also have to get the office dynamics and learn how to read your senator.”

Most difficult, though, was balancing competing demands. Like circus jugglers, the six interns had to fit in a thousand responsibilities — legislative and university — each day, never quite certain what the day would bring or when it would end. Several also were finishing senior research papers. One — Rosenberg — was chronicling the experience in a blog ([www.jaimesmu.wordpress.com](http://www.jaimesmu.wordpress.com)).

One of the loneliest items in Nicolle Saucedo’s possession during her time as an intern was her Saint Martin’s dining card. Saucedo, one of the youngest interns at just 19, wanted to use it, but meals just didn’t work out. It was her first year at Saint Martin’s, where, by virtue of Washington’s Running Start Program, she compiled enough college credits during high school to enter the University as a junior.

As an intern, she arrived by 8 a.m. at the domed State Legislative Building, where she worked for state Sen. Bob Hasegawa, D-11th District. If things went smoothly, she was out the door at 5 p.m., in time to reach her 6 p.m. class on campus.

“My senator is on the Rules Committee and the Ways and Means Committee, and he’s the ranking minority party member on the Commerce and Labor Committee. So, because of all the extra committee assignments, I stayed late when I could,” she says.

As a Saint Martin’s Benedictine Scholar and member of the Norcia Leadership Community, Saucedo had other obligations during the week at the University. Then, there’s her weekend job as a barista.

Despite the craziness, Saucedo laughs. She wouldn’t have traded the internship for anything, notwithstanding the fact she dislikes politics, she says.

“I have no clue how this internship is going to fit into my career plan but I love helping people,” she says. “I love working with children and migrants. I’m thinking about a master’s degree in public administration — something that I can use directly helping people. But the internship is still an amazing opportunity and I’m glad I did it. I’ll understand how things work a lot more because I’ve learned it hands-on.”

## Darting ★ ★ ★

Villalpando-Ramos found the pace exhilarating — once she adjusted to it.

“I think it is one of those environments where you learn by being uncomfortable. At the same time, you get a lot of support. The legislative assistants are there to explain the processes and help you.”

She and Flynn-Burbage each worked for two House members. In March, when interns from schools with a quarterly system went home, Flynn-Burbage was assigned a third one. Legislators all have their distinctive office procedures and Flynn-Burbage became a master at multitasking.

No matter whose office they were in, though, the job was demanding. All six interns learned to track bills, track constituent opinion on bills and respond to constituents. They researched bills and policies, and attended meetings, hearings and functions. It is detail-oriented and sometimes tedious work.

“I had 300 topics on a constituent-tracking Excel spreadsheet,” Saucedo explains. “Whenever someone emailed or phoned or came in, I tracked whether they were for or against the issues and I replied to them.”

Jeaqualyn Borgonia, a Port Orchard junior who is majoring in political science and planning a legal career, says she organized lots of meetings. When her legislator was unavailable, she met with various groups, herself, to hear their concerns.

So, while the work demands thoroughness, Flynn-Burbage and Borgonia say it is relevant and important because it guides their legislators’ decisions for the people they serve. It also has helped them see the direct ramifications of issues on people and hear opinions from different perspectives.

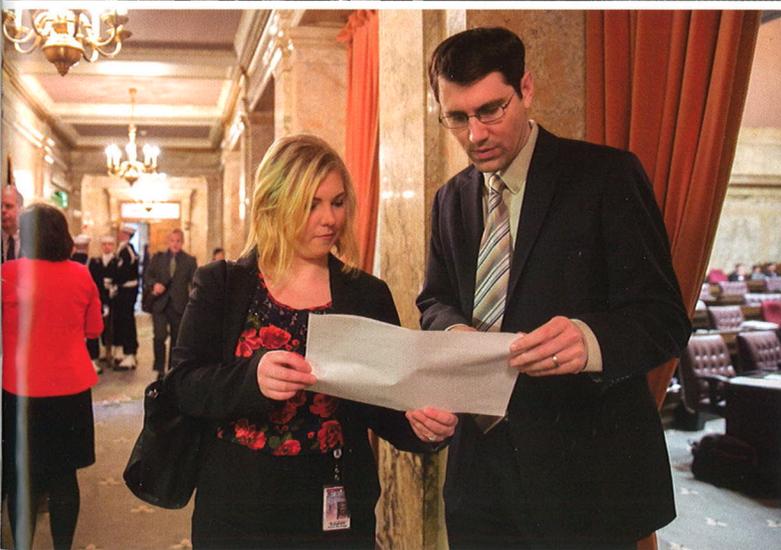
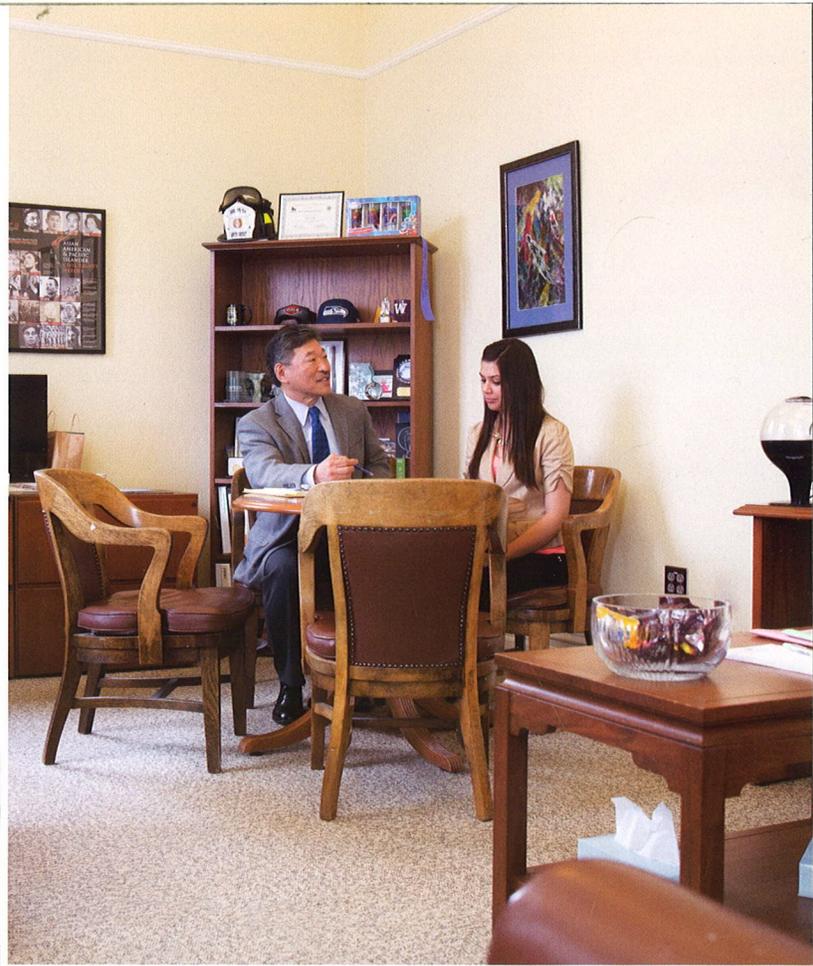
## Hovering ★ ★ ★

It comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with Saint Martin’s students that a favorite activity of all six interns was helping constituents solve problems, a skill they’ll carry with them forever.

“Casework” — troubleshooting problems for people — was a large part of Flynn-Burbage’s workload. Pursuing solutions means researching and talking with people at various state agencies. It has been gratifying to learn where to turn to help unsnarl a predicament, she says.

She was able to help one woman who needed a stair-lift in order to stay in her home which the woman could neither pay for it nor find benefits to cover the costs. Flynn-Burbage started placing phone calls and finally found funding for her. “It can be the best part of your day,” she says.

Borgonia says, “It can also be the saddest part of your day, especially if you want to help someone and you exhaust all options and have to tell them, ‘Sorry, I can’t help you’.”



Saint Martin's six legislative interns, left to right: Maria Villalpando-Ramos, Jaime Rosenberg, Jeaqualyn Borgonia, Lauren Flynn-Burbage, Nicolle Saucedo and Clarissa Strayer

## Aloft ★ ★ ★

The internship has provided a gift in the form of developing strong professional and personal networks, which promise to be priceless as the interns begin careers or grad school.

Rosenberg experienced this gift first-hand when the connections she made during her legislative internship in Washington state helped her land a summer internship in Washington, D.C., working for Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler, the Republican U.S. representative for Washington's 3rd Congressional District.

"The chief of staff for the Majority Coalition Caucus in Washington state, Jim Troyer, who also happens to work in the office right next to mine, called Congresswoman Beutler's office chief of staff after I called their office to see if anything was available," says Rosenberg. "I was scheduled for a phone interview the next day and received my acceptance email the following morning. I'm really excited!"

The interns also speak of a sense of camaraderie, of co-workers who seem to value them despite their youth and inexperience — people who have guided them, supported them and welcomed them as part of the team.

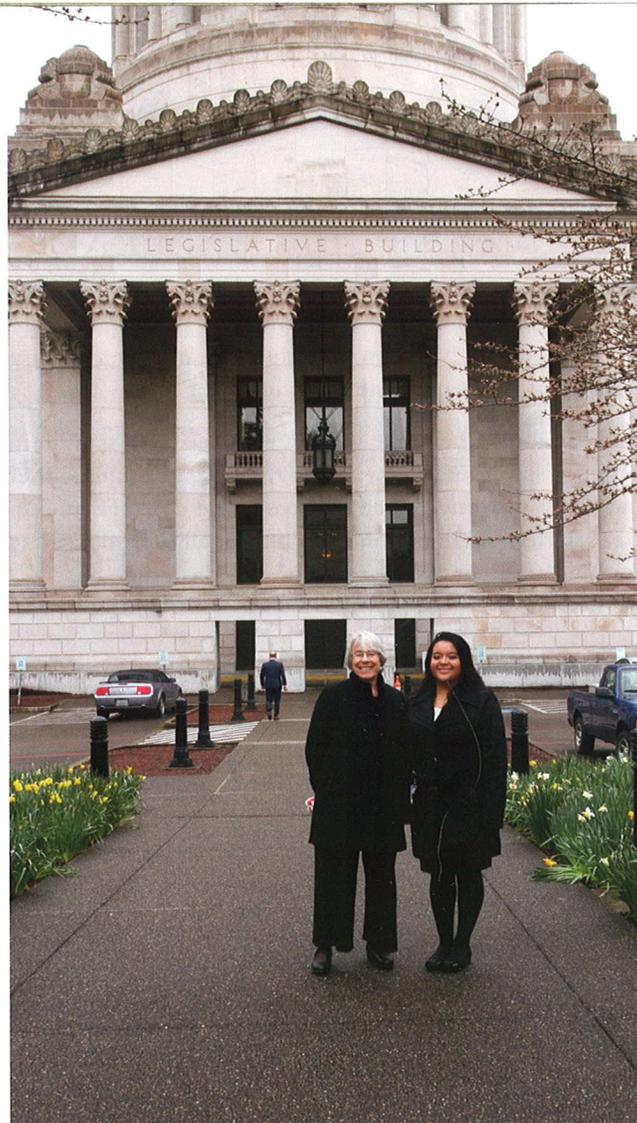
Villalpando-Ramos, who ultimately "would love to be a Supreme Court judge," says a landmark occasion for her was meeting and talking informally with justices of the Washington Supreme Court at a reception.

"It was a bonding time and definitely one of the most memorable experiences," she says. "All these networking opportunities come up in the after-hours. It's like magic — everyone gives you business cards. I have a whole stack of them."

A highlight for everyone was a mock debate on the Senate floor. The interns assumed the role of legislators, sitting at their desks and speaking for constituents of the districts they "represented" on a bill that had previously been scuttled by the real legislature.

Up front stood Lt. Gov. Brad Owens, the Senate president, controlling the debate, offering advice and warning of possible ethics violations. (Maybe he took note when someone hauled in cupcakes as bribes for vote-switchers.)

The simulation was the last step in a procedure that had included researching bills, holding mock committee hearings and listening to advocates, party leadership and policy wonks — all the usual legislative trappings. Students drafted amendments, huddled in whispered negotiations and tried to do the bidding of both their constituents and party leadership before the final vote.



*Legislative intern Maria Villalpando-Ramos, right, takes time out of a busy day for a photo with State Rep. Ruth Kagi, D-32nd Legislative District.*

While Rosenberg is a left-leaning Democrat from the even left-leaning state of Hawaii, she chose to represent the views of right-leaning constituents in an Eastern Washington district, an exercise that stretched her mind and put her in touch with other viewpoints.

"I've always thought about running for office," Rosenberg says. "But I've seen the impact a single vote has on a lot of people, and when you can see both sides, you think, 'Oh my gosh, I'm changing someone's life' — that's scary for me. It's definitely a power thing."

Says Borgonia, "Some people learn differently ... here, you get to not only read about it, but also see how it is going through the process. It gives you a lot more insight than books can give you. Meeting people, getting immersed in a professional atmosphere and networking is a good thing. I think the connections you make are great." ◆



“Clarissa has an abiding commitment to improving the environment, enhancing the practice of citizenship and the creation of a more open and just society. She thinks about the future and the welfare of others, especially those with less resources and power.”

— Roger Snider  
Associate professor of  
history/political science

## The Significance of Internships — On the road to becoming a person of value

Leave it to a genius to sum things up. “Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value,” Albert Einstein said.

Senior Clarissa Strayer is working on it. One of six Saint Martin’s University women who completed an internship with the Washington State Legislature this spring, she uses these adjectives to describe herself: “high energy,” “interested,” “lucky.”

Her professors – her mentors – describe her with adjectives of their own: bright, articulate, hardworking and caring. They are proud of her; they say she gives them hope for the future.

She is lucky number 7 on the women’s soccer team — also team captain. She is managing editor of the University’s

newspaper, The Belltower, a Norcia Leadership mentor and lots of other things at Saint Martin’s. But while she loves these activities, she yearns for knowledge the way other people crave chocolate; she wants to improve the world as much as an overworked muscle wants a massage.

As she approaches graduation with a major in political science, she is also altering her life’s course, the upshot of two “invaluable” internships.

Strayer, from Bothell, was clear about her future when she entered Saint Martin’s. She wanted to become a lawyer, maybe a death row defense attorney. In preparation, she interned with a municipal court prosecutor and assistant city attorney in nearby Des Moines after graduating high school.

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“I just want to get a taste of everything,” says Strayer.  
“I want to take advantage of every opportunity here.”

But last summer, Strayer interned with the King County Council working for Councilmember Joe McDermott, an experience that presented fresh possibilities. Her legislative internship has continued to open doors that beckon.

“I’ve shifted from law to politics as a result of them. It’s not a loss of interest, but a shift of direction, and who knows if that would have occurred if I hadn’t done these internships.”

Since her internships, she’s aiming for a job in public policy or with a non-profit in environment, labor, domestic violence or women’s rights, areas she says she feels passionately about.

“I see a master’s degree in public administration, or maybe urban planning,” she says of her future. “But I have to be open to the possibilities because I’m 21 and just graduating.”

Assistant Professor of history Aaron Goings, Ph.D., a Saint Martin’s graduate and former legislative intern himself, says, “She is committed toward working for the public good and on issues of social justice.” He and his colleagues are excited to read her thesis, which she has spent two years researching.

The thesis, “Promoting Green Collar Jobs in the 21st Century: An Analysis of Labor and Environmental Coalitions,” delves into organizations that “allow for respectful, productive dialogue to take place between labor and environmental interests, while taking action to combat climate change,” she explains.

Last spring, Strayer received the Father Jerome Toner, O.S.B., Award for outstanding contributions to the theory and practice of social justice and labor issues.

“Clarissa has an abiding commitment to improving the environment, enhancing the practice of citizenship and the creation of a more open and just society,” says Roger Snider, associate professor of history/political science. “She thinks about the future and the welfare of others, especially those with less resources and power.”

In her legislative internship, she has discovered new tools for doing just that. “I love what I’m doing here. I love the energy of this place,” she says.

“This place” is the state legislative building, and the energy is supplied by a parade of state legislators, lobbyists, analysts, journalists and others who are hashing out the state’s future direction at the legislative session.

Strayer landed an internship in the office of Sen. Karen Fraser, D-Thurston County, the Democratic Caucus chair, a development Strayer considers “lucky” because the office fairly seethes with activity.

Among her favorite duties is responding to concerns of constituents, which often means answering their questions by researching or contacting sources at state agencies who may have relevant information. Staff members often can point her in the right direction, but Strayer makes the calls, gathers the facts and contacts the constituent with a response.

“I’ve been really lucky because Sen. Fraser lets me be so involved,” she says. “I get to call anyone. I’m learning as I go, through trial and error, and asking questions constantly.”

“I’m included in meetings with constituent groups like those working on housing issues and labor issues, and I’ve learned so much from all these people. Sen. Fraser jokes that I learn at least 50 new things a day. I think that part of it has been really valuable for me — I’ve been really lucky.”

She quickly learned that politics bears little resemblance to the game it appears to be in books, movies and TV shows; it’s a responsibility. At the heart of it all are real people with real lives that are affected by the outcome of what happens in the legislature’s marbled halls and hearing rooms, Strayer says.

Evening and weekend activities? They offer invaluable opportunities to learn. “I like to have a lot on my plate so I can just power through. I’ve never been someone capable of relaxing,” she says.

In early March, she traveled with other interns to Victoria, B.C., to observe a parliamentary session and how it works. She and other interns also took part in a mock senate debate. She also attended a forum on human trafficking, where she learned about the issue from the perspective of prosecutors, human rights advocates, a former congresswoman and victims themselves.



All those stories and ideas coming together “were incredible,” she says. “Being here, you’re the first to know about this,” she says. “It was phenomenal, inspirational — there wasn’t a dry eye in the room.”

She calls the internship a crash course for “whatever you want to pursue or think you want to pursue in life. Sometimes if you’re researching a topic in a book, you just see the positive aspects and the highlights. You don’t get a full picture. Here, you learn from everyone, and I think you begin to see the intricacies of whatever organization or process you’re in.”

Strayer says some of the talented, dedicated people she’s met at the legislature and in government are already becoming part of the network that will help her move forward as she begins a career. An unexpected windfall is the relationships she has had with other interns.

United by their interest in the political process and making change happen, the 73 interns share a lot in common, regardless of their major or whether they are conservative, liberal or elsewhere on the spectrum. They are learning from each other and growing together, Strayer says.

“A lot of us are good friends. You have a high level of respect and regard for these people after two months —they’re all so smart, so driven.”

The internship has been a highlight in her life — changed her life — and she’s totally open to the possibilities.

“I just want to get a taste of everything. I want to take advantage of every opportunity here.” ♦