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Panetta Institute Intern Fulfills Dominican Dream in D.C.

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Panetta Institute Intern Fulfills Dominican Dream in D.C.

Leyva worked last semester in the office of Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui, monitoring and updating the U.S. Representative's social media outlets and website with her press secretary, handling faxes and telephone calls from her constituents from the Sixth Congressional District in Sacramento and helping create a video montage for her with Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, minority leader of the U.S. House of Representatives. Leyva also helped draft an op-ed editorial for Congresswoman Matsui, wrote letters to her constituents, researched legislation, sifted through newspaper articles from across the country, and, when she had time, led tours on Capitol Hill.

This was an ideal scenario for Leyva to learn.

"I like to connect with people," she says.

The most memorable moment of Leyva's Washington, DC experience involved a lot of people. She was able to sit in and observe the House committee hearing when Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius testified about fixing the so-called Obamacare website.

"I felt like I was in the heart of the experience of being in Congress," Leyva says. "I was listening to discussion between Secretary Sebelius and members of Congress with the media taking photos and notes. I witnessed the reactions of the audience. It was a very exciting time for me and something I will never forget."

Leyva was one of 26 Panetta scholars nominated earlier this year by presidents of 23 California State University campuses as well as Dominican and Santa Clara University. It is the 15th year that Dominican has participated in the Leon & Sylvia Panetta Congressional Internship Program and Leyva discovered that carries some clout.

When she met U.S. Representative Matsui for the first time one-on-one, Leyva noted how impressed the Congresswoman was that she was a product of the Panetta Institute.

"I don't feel like just an intern. I feel like I'm representing a lot more. I'm representing Dominican and the Panetta Institute," Leyva says.

Since her freshman year, Leyva had longed for the chance to be a Panetta Institute intern and prepared accordingly for the opportunity.

As a sophomore, Leyva was selected as a World Affairs Council Marin Chapter intern and served as a liaison between [Dominican's Service-Learning program](#) and Canal Alliance. She was chosen to facilitate weekly conference meetings for St. Vincent de Paul to help prevent homelessness, and, in keeping with her Political Science major, she was a member of Marin's Election Advisory Committee providing assistance and educational outreach to members of the community so that they would know how to exercise their voting rights.

Last spring, as a junior, Leyva was selected along with [Dominican Occupational Therapy](#) major Jocelle Flores to be the first cohort of 20 students from 10 campuses to participate in California Campus Compact's Community Engagement Student Fellowship program. It is a statewide program designed to support student leaders advancing service-learning and community

engagement at California colleges and universities. Leyva and Flores were liaisons in a two-semester leadership development workshop at Dominican called Education Dedicated to Justice and Equity.

Leyva, supported by the volume and intensity of her work, applied for a Panetta Institute internship.

“It just worked out that my extra-curricular activities matched up with what the Institute wanted,” she says.

“I was very pleased when Daniela was selected as the 2013 Panetta intern,” says Alison Howard, chair of [Dominican’s Department of Political Science and International Studies](#). “One thing is for certain, Daniela makes the most of any opportunity she is given. Daniela is a conscientious, respectful, and wise young woman who truly represents the best of Dominican. The chance to apply what she has been learning and have a first-hand experience working in a congressional office will compliment her already impressive accomplishments.”

It was Leyva’s first trip to D.C. and, as a history buff, she naturally sought out its monuments, structures and sculptures. She visited the Lincoln Memorial at night and spent days in the Newseum, and the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

“Those three brought me to tears,” Leyva says.

With all the recent debate and protests about Syria and government shutdowns surrounding her, Leyva was in touch with today’s issues and relished the challenges it presented.

“Being the middle of it, I do get fired up,” she says.

In the meantime, Leyva is working on her senior thesis about Congress and how it uses and utilizes social media. She was in an ideal environment for that, as she was constantly keeping an eye on Congresswoman Matsui’s Facebook and Twitter pages and the messages sent and comments received.

Leyva returned to Dominican this month and will resume her busy schedule on and off campus. The 2 ½-month internship brought clarity to her future goals. She is considering graduate school, perhaps law school inspired by a recommendation Sylvia Panetta made during the two-week Panetta Institute training course in August in Monterey. Leyva also would like to work in local government and establish a close connection and relationship with her constituents. “I have learned that creating legislation is a complicated process,” she says. “What we see on the news and hear on the radio is only the shell of a complicated issue. Working in Congress gives you the perspective of what is really said and what people really mean.”

Leyva believes she distinguished herself in her latest adventure. Being in Washington, DC and working for a member of Congress as a Panetta Institute intern evoked lots of energy and many emotions for her.

“I feel more grateful than anything,” Leyva says. “I like knowing I worked my hardest to get there.”

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