

Isabel Agtural

Center of Civility & Democratic Engagement Fellow, Fall 2018

During the Fall 2018 semester, I had the wonderful opportunity to partake in the University of California in Washington, D.C., internship program. While in D.C., I interned at the United States Attorney's Office with the Victim Witness Assistance Unit (VWAU) and took two courses which focused on political journalism and the Supreme Court of the United States. My experience in this always bustling city was an extremely formative part of my time as an undergraduate student because I felt like I was in the center of democracy in action. UCDC allowed me to explore a city filled with some of America's most notable monuments, interact with government professionals who fueled my inquisitive nature, and inspired me to further participate in democratic and social responsibility.

One of the most memorable parts of my adventure was being in D.C. during midterm elections. I could feel the excitement in the air, and while I mailed in my absentee ballot and cast my vote, I knew I was part of a critical decision making process. I also observed the justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. To listen to oral arguments, hear the justices presenting queries to the attorneys, and listen to their quick, but well prepared responses was a once in a lifetime experience and worth the ten-hour wait outside the Court in cold that Berkeley has never felt. In addition, I participated in peaceful protests in front of Congress and the Court, seeing firsthand how free speech is an integral part of democracy.

During my internship with the U.S. Attorney's Office, the VWAU and the Sex Offense and Domestic Violence Unit opened a hotline and email service for survivors of child sexual abuse by clergy within the district. I translated the information that would be put on the website from English into Spanish to make it accessible to a broader population. I researched state crime compensation programs within the U.S. and assembled a chart with information for advocates to

share with survivors who report abuse to the hotline where the abuse occurred in a different jurisdiction. It was a humbling experience working with individuals who are genuine in their intention to be of service to others and who strive to see justice is served. I was inspired by the dedication of these public servants, who in their everyday life, take part in ensuring the community around them is represented and afforded the rights and protections of our legal system.

Interning and living in D.C. was a dream of mine. And with the help of the Center of Civility & Democratic Engagement, I was able to turn this dream into a reality. I am beyond grateful for the invaluable opportunity I was given. To be able to live in such a vibrant city during this unique time in our country's history allowed me to absorb many real life lessons by participating, witnessing and discussing contemporary issues relating to democracy. As the crowd of people chanted "Tell me what democracy looks like!" while marching to the Capitol before the Kavanaugh hearings, I proudly responded in unison with my fellow protestors, "This is what democracy looks like!"