

## Alexandra Morales

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Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement Fellow - Spring 2016

Policy Fellow - City of Los Angeles Mayor's DC Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

Undergraduate Senior - Social Welfare

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During Spring 2016, I had the opportunity to wrap up my undergraduate journey in Washington, D.C., through the UCDC program. Through this experience, I was able to be part of federal affairs efforts that support my hometown of Los Angeles, take courses that gave me a better understanding of democratic engagement, and be exposed to real-life environments of differing opinions and beliefs.

I had the unique opportunity to be a Policy Fellow for the City of Los Angeles' Mayor's DC Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. My supervisor was the City's Federal Liaison. As part of this office, I was able to support and attend events such as the annual U.S. Mayor's Conference. This year, City of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and First Lady Michelle Obama served as key-note speakers. Both advocated for more support to military veterans who are homeless and urged cities to be prime leaders in initiating city measures significantly decreasing homelessness in the U.S by 2020.

Through this fellowship, I was also able to support and learn about social issues that impact residents of the City of Los Angeles and the state of California. Some of these top issues include homelessness, fair labor wages, the water drought, and transportation. Most importantly I witnessed multiple city representatives and U.S. stakeholders come together to testify before our government institutions about how these social issues are reflected in their respective area as local social issues are also our nation's social issues.

The UCDC program served as a structural academic support to understanding

democratic processes and democratic engagement. My research seminar, Media and Contemporary Politics, shone light on the power media platforms have for constituents to share their thoughts on issues or policies. It also exposed us to how media can be a method for representatives to reach out to hundreds of readers or listeners whom they represent. I was exposed not only to my instructor, a longtime reporter for the McClatchy Newspapers, but also to Senator Feinstein's Press Relations Director and National Security Reporter for BuzzFeed. The course curriculum also directly applied what we learned by pushing us to think critically and assess the role media has played in national events such as the Ferguson shooting of an unarmed minor, the September 11 terrorist attack, and the protests in Egypt in demand for a more democratic government.

My Election and Campaigns class took a more statistical approach to maximizing constituent turnout and securing an election. This class focused on understanding the factors that make up an election; however, it was disappointing to discuss how to maximize active votes without also discussing what can be done to activate not-so active votes of those not civically engaged.

All in all, my experience at UCDC as a Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement Fellow and a Policy Fellow for the City of Los Angeles Mayor's DC Office of Intergovernmental Affairs was a once in a lifetime experience. As a result of my fellowship, academic courses, and the UCDC and Washington, D.C. environment, I have gained invaluable insight into different types of democracy at different levels locally, federally and globally.