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Cal Class of 2018

As a proud Californian, navigating through Washington, D.C. has been one of the most challenging and inspiring things I have experienced in my life. My first experience there was before my time at UCDC. I was there for the Korean American Grassroots Conference where nonprofit leaders came together to discuss a strategy to increase the influence of the Korean American community. To be completely honest, it was not the best experience for me, because there was so much discord between the organizations competing to be better than each other, the overwhelming summer heat and humidity, and the fact that the conference was held in Virginia, not D.C. The theme of the grassroots conference was essentially on expanding Korean American political power through democratic engagement, but there was an essentially missing component of civility among community leaders—instead of working to come together as a community, there was little consensus on who was to lead and how. I told myself that I would never come back this glorified swamp that they call Washington D.C., especially during the summer, but I also learned the valuable experience on the importance of civility when it came to civic participation and engagement.

My decision to apply for the UCDC program was something that I had been contemplating since I transferred to UC Berkeley. As transfer student, I knew that there were more opportunities than I could keep track of at Cal, especially because I only had the faintest idea of what I wanted to do in the future. I wanted to look for opportunities that would help me explore my passions, not get me stuck on a path that would not give me enough flexibility. In fact, I abandoned the idea that I needed to graduate in two years, and took a third year to allow

myself more time to narrow down my options for my post-graduate life. For my last semester at Cal, I had originally planned to study abroad in Beijing, People's Republic of China. I even studied Mandarin and applied for the program, but I decided against it mainly because I knew that I would need to start from square one when I came back to the states looking for jobs.

UCDC offered a different opportunity. It did not offer me a different country, nor did it offer me amazing Chinese (and other "ethnic") cuisine, but it definitely offered me, a person with a political science and Asian studies degree, a lot of room to explore. The options that I had in the Bay Area or my hometown, were Los Angeles, simply not comparable to the opportunities that D.C seemed to offer. Not only that, I was offered both need-based, and merit-based scholarships (through Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement (CCDE)) which covered all of the cost for the program. However, my UCDC experience turned out to be a bigger challenge than anticipated. The first reason was simply because during the Spring 2018 semester, D.C. had some of the coldest weather. I felt like I was one of the soldiers freezing to death while rowing George Washington crossing the Delaware. The weather seemed to freeze everything except the angry drivers on the streets. There were many events, but they were usually indoors and they were frankly lacking the energy that I expected D.C. to have.

The most challenging aspect was that I was not given fulfilling or meaningful work at my internship, despite trying to work with the two scholars whose works I still respect. However, in the end, I made amazing friends and mentors that I have kept in touch with, and the length of the program allowed me to plan my future by giving me the time to apply for fellowships and other programs. I eventually was accepted into the Council of Korean Americans Public Service Internship Program, which is currently funding me through the entire duration of the summer.

Although UCDC was a challenge, through the help of CCDE and Goldman School of Public Policy, friends, family, and mentors, I was able to ground myself through the harsh winters, and return to D.C. once more.

I currently intern at the National Council of Asian Pacific Islanders (NCAPA), a nonprofit coalition group dedicated to collective advocating for the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in civic engagement, immigration, education, healthcare, and more. I have had the chance to connect with the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, through various joint statements, coalition meetings, networking sessions, and receptions. I even had the chance to participate in a congressional reception exclusively for AAPI staffers and interns. I introduced Congressman Ted Lieu (CA – 33rd district), and tried to make my introduction as nonpartisan as possible, knowing that there were both Democratic and Republican Congress members in the room. I believe I helped set the tone for bipartisan support for increased AAPI participation in government and in civic engagement. All Congress members who spoke after stayed civil and did not steer the conversation left or right. Although I plan on going back to California for graduate school, I have learned amazing lessons through my experience at UCDC, which I will keep throughout my life. Lastly, I know that with the relationships I have and will establish, Washington D.C. will still hold important opportunities for me.