



The Panetta Institute for Public Policy

Congressional Internship Program Description

The Panetta Institute extends its mission of service through its *Congressional Internship Program*. This program is open to undergraduate students in their junior or senior year with an interest in public service within any academic discipline from the twenty-three California State Universities and three private colleges and universities. This internship provides the opportunity to work and live within the rich cultural, historical and political heritage of our nation's capital. As interns with Congress, students gain firsthand exposure to the American political process while attaining professional learning experience that offers meaningful, practical work experience and provides an opportunity for career exploration and development.

The sponsor and donors of the Panetta Institute make it possible to offer this opportunity without regard to a student's financial background. Since the Panetta Institute pays all expenses, any qualified student can participate regardless of family income. Student selection is based on exemplary scholastic record, potential for a public service career and interest in politics.

Two-Week Orientation

A fundamental part of the *Congressional Internship Program* academic curriculum is the two-week orientation designed to supplement the intern's experience through attending and participating in the class sessions, and then completing reflective, substantive session reviews. Experts in their respective fields' present seminars during this orientation. During the first week of the orientation, seminars concentrate on: United States Congress, the legislative process of regular order, House of Representatives parliamentary rules and procedures, budget and appropriations process, congressional committees and structure, elections, congressional-presidential relations, federal and state relations, American jurisprudence as lead by the U.S. Supreme Court and the role of a free press in a democracy.

Guest Speakers

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in a democracy. Added to the program, students participated in a budget reconciliation exercise and a focused three-part consensus building exercise as well as receive targeted lessons on communication skills in a Congressional office and policy writing.

During the orientation, the Panetta Institute provides students with guidance for the congressional office placement process. Included in the program are special one-to-one meetings that are solely dedicated to prepare interns for interviews with the congressional offices. These sessions emphasize good interviewing techniques and aim to improve student awareness of any speech or behavioral mannerisms that might detract from a successful interview. The Panetta Institute then arranges interviews with Congressional staff members and secures each student's appointment to intern for a congressional office.

In 2025, the orientation classes began on Saturday, August 9 and were the first part of the thirteen-week hands-on learning experience for accomplished, civic-minded young people. Noted experts from the East and West Coast, along with national, state and local elected representatives speak directly with the interns and provide them with a strong foundation for their work in different Representative's offices.

Secretary Panetta taught classes on the founding and creation of the American Republic and the role of a member of Congress. Additional policy issues to be covered during this orientation included: national security; foreign policy; the impact of the press and media on politics; fiscal and monetary policy; economic and the budget; health policy and economics; wealth and income inequality; access to health and education resources; election reform; criminal justice reform; immigration; climate change; education; and cyber security.

Below is a list of the speakers and topics during the 2025 orientation course:

John Arquilla, Ph.D., distinguished professor emeritus, Defense Analysis Department, Naval Postgraduate School on cyber security and national security.

Dan Balz, chief correspondent, The Washington Post and Carla Marinucci of Politico on the impact of the press and media on politics.

Sonia Banks, Esq., LL.M., Panetta Institute professor on congressional organization and the committee structure.

The Hon. Kim Barber, City Council Member, City of Monterey will present with The Hon. Kathy Biala, City Council Member, City of Marina and The Hon. Tyler Williamson, Mayor, City of Monterey on serving local constituencies and urban policy.

Jeremy Bash, Esq., national security analyst for NBC Nightly News, chief of staff to the Secretary of Defense (2011-2013) and chief of staff to the Director of the CIA (2009-2011) on the role and responsibility of the intelligence community.

Theresa Cardinal Brown, senior advisor, immigration and border policy, Bipartisan Policy Center on immigration policy.

Paulette Cha, Ph.D., research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California on income social policy interpretation in health and education.

The Hon. Ming Chin, former associate justice of the Supreme Court of California discussed recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court and the role of the Judiciary Branch.

Chris Christie, 55th governor of the State of New Jersey discussed presidential elections and their impact on policy outcomes and the direction of the nation.

Ryan Coonerty, former 3rd District supervisor, Santa Cruz County on election reform and how to secure our democracy.

James Copeland, former White House deputy assistant to President Jimmy Carter and Les Francis, former deputy chief of staff to President Jimmy Carter, addressed relations between the executive and legislative branches.

Jim Cunneen, former assemblyman, 24th District, California State Assembly and Fred Keeley, Mayor of Santa Cruz presented as part of a special three part exercise on consensus building.

Ambassador Rahm Emanuel former mayor of Chicago and chief of staff for President Barack Obama on a course on the Executive Branch.

Sam Farr, former United States representative, 17th/20th District, California, discussed the role or a member of Congress and the challenge of simultaneous serving your constituency and your country.

Kristen Fletcher, Esq., LL.M. faculty associate at the Naval Postgraduate School presented on energy security and resilience.

Hector Flores, M.D., founding member and co-director of the White Memorial Medical Center Family Residency Program on healthcare.

Michèle Flournoy, former under-secretary of defense for policy on global flash points including Russia and China.

Heather Harris, Ph.D., research fellow, Public Policy Institute of California discussed reforms in the criminal justice system.

Jeffrey Horwitt, partner, Hart Research Associates, covered the findings of the 2025 Panetta Institute Youth Civic Engagement Survey.

Richard Kezirian, Ph.D., Panetta Institute professor taught the history of the U.S. Congress.

The Hon. John Laird, senator, 17th District, State of California Senate California and former secretary of California natural resources on the importance of protecting California's natural resources.

Stephanie Leonard, director of research at Next 10 led the students in an interactive exercise on the state budget.

Marina Lesse, faculty associate at the Naval Postgraduate School addressed the Interconnectedness of Energy, Climate, and Environmental Policy.

Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget presented on the nation's fiscal challenges, the budget, deficit and national debt.

Joe Minarik, Ph.D., former chief economist of the Office of Management and Budget and senior vice president and director of research for the Committee for Economic Development, taught two courses: one on the economy and the budget of the United States, and the other on trade policy.

Admiral Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed defense and emerging threats around the globe.

The Hon. Janet Napolitano, former president of the University of California, former secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and former governor of Arizona discussed the challenges facing higher education.

Stephen Palumbi, Ph.D. professor of Marine Biology at Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station taught on environmental policy.

The Hon. Jimmy Panetta, United States representative, 19th District, California, discussed Congress and the power of the purse, the Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees.

Simón Salinas, former 3rd District supervisor, Monterey County and former assemblyman, 28th District, California State Assembly, taught on the relationship between state and local governments.

Jason Smith, J.D., parliamentarian, United States House of Representatives, instructed the interns on parliamentary procedure and the institutions and traditions of the House.

Matt Spence, Ph.D., J.D., former deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East covered Middle East politics, relations and current affairs.

Fernando Torres-Gil, Ph.D., former United States assistant secretary on aging and professor of social welfare and public policy, University of California, Los Angeles, taught on the politics and challenges of aging and diversity in the 21st century.

Tess Thorman, senior research associate at The Public Policy Institute of California discussed wealth and income disparity.

During their two weeks at the Panetta Institute, students were invited to attend three social events hosted by members of the Panetta Institute Board of Directors.

Congressional Internship in Washington D.C.

During the orientation, the Panetta Institute conducts intensive phone interview training sessions with each student to prepare them for their phone interview with a Congressional office within the California delegation in Washington, D.C. The Panetta Institute then arranges interviews with Congressional staff members and secures each student's appointment to intern for a congressional office.

Following the two-week orientation at the Panetta Institute, interns begin their two and one-half months internships for a member of the California congressional delegation on Capitol Hill.

Washington D.C. Seminars

Another unique feature of the *Congressional Internship Program* is the scope and quality of experts the Panetta Institute invites to teach seminars on policy issues that interns attend while working on Capitol Hill. The purpose of the D.C. seminars comes from the vision of Secretary Leon E. Panetta and CEO Sylvia M. Panetta to expand students' understanding of the application of politics and policy by professionals who are actually working at the top levels within their fields in the nation's capital and to further expose students to the importance of reaching consensus and compromise in order to discover possible paths of bipartisanship.

In 2025, the interns attended the following seminars in D.C.:

- **U.S. Supreme Court** – tour and lecture with Jamil N. Jaffer, Esq., Founder, National Security Institute, Adjunct Professor of Law on *Significant U.S. Supreme Court cases and the Judicial Branch*
- **U.S. Department of the Treasury** – tour and lecture with Yasmeeen Wanees, Policy Advisor for Committee on Foreign Investments on *Foreign Investments and Tariffs*
- **Pentagon** – tour and lecture with Christian Gilbert, Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Director, Foreign Materiel Program on *National Security*
- **U.S. Department of State** with Mia Gilstrap, Policy Advisor for the Middle East on *Foreign Policy*
- **Floor of the U.S. House of Representatives** – tour and lecture with Parliamentarian Jason Smith on *House Rules*
- **U.S. Capitol** – tour and lecture with Kristen Donahue, Public Relations Officer for the U.S. House of Representatives on *History, Purpose and Organization of the U.S. Capitol*
- **Meeting with Secretary Leon Panetta** on *Working in a Congressional Office*
- **Seminar with Jeff Horwitt** of Hart Research Associations on *Review of Current Polling and Insights into Polling Methodology*
- **Watergate Building** – tour and lecture with Pat Griffin on *A Lobbyist's viewpoint on How Washington Works*
- **FBI Headquarters** – tour and lecture with Mathew Kowalewski, Public Relations Director on *The Justice Department and How the FBI Works*
- **With Honor** – all day seminar on *Foreign Policy*
- **Congressional Hispanic Caucus** with Congressmembers The Hon. Pete Aguilar, The Hon. Nanette Diaz Barragan and The Hon. Jimmy Gomez
- **Annual Meeting and Dinner of the Committee for Responsible Federal Budget** with Maya MacGuinness
- **Axios/One Decision Forum** with Secretary Panetta and Reporter Colin Demarest on *Global Affairs and Key Insights*

- **Library of Congress** with Jerry Mansfield on *Purpose, History and Congressional Research Service*
- **Seminar with the Hon. Tom Daschle** on *Politics in Washington*
- **Seminar with Congressman Sam Liccardo (D)** on *Insights of a First-Term Member*
- **Seminar with Congressman Ken Calvert (R)** on *The U.S. House Committee on Appropriations*
- **Migration Policy Center** – tour and lecture with Doris Meissner, Senior Fellow and Director of U.S. Immigration Policy Program, on *Comprehensive Immigration Reform*
- **Seminar with Chris Peckham** on *Self-Care and Well-Being*
- **International Spy Museum** – tour with exhibitions featuring Secretary Panetta
- **National Archives** – tour and lecture on *U.S. History and the U.S. Constitution*

Academic Work and Credits

The *Congressional Internship Program* is uniquely designed to have an academic focus together with an experiential learning component. **Students receive academic credit for each of the five component parts of the program for a total of twenty academic units.** Students must research and write a twenty-page comprehensive research policy paper. Students are also responsible for writing and submitting a twenty-page academic reflective journal that is a polished compendium of the student’s internship experience. Students are further graded on their internship job performance through congressional staff reviews.