



Monday, June 24, 2002

OU student helps raise political awareness

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University junior Gena Hintz sees a problem among young American adults.

"Voter apathy and the lack of an informed public on political issues drives me nuts," said Hintz, a secondary education student majoring in history and minoring in political science. "This is one of many issues that high school government teachers are trying to combat, but there's only so much a teacher can do in a classroom."

As part of her Introduction to Secondary Education class this past winter semester, Hintz logged 30 hours of classroom observation at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. To help raise political awareness in high school students, Hintz traveled with two teachers and 10 students from Chippewa Valley and Dakota high schools to Washington, D.C., last May to participate in a program sponsored by the **Close Up Foundation**, a nonprofit, nonpartisan citizen education organization.

"It was an unbelievable trip," said Hintz, who also works as a student assistant in the Division of Student Affairs. "The whole purpose is to inspire high school students and young adults to learn about their government. Their philosophy is to show students how government processes work utilizing workshops, topical speakers and study visits in Washington. It was awesome in every respect."

The Close Up Foundation programs were divided into separate segments for the students and teachers. The student program consisted of a workshop discussion on the Bill of Rights, speakers on international relations and domestic issues, and debates on Supreme Court cases. Some of the students were able to participate in a C-SPAN taping on U.S relations with Muslim countries. They also learned about Washington, D.C., neighborhoods and visited several monuments. The teacher program included topical speakers, study visits and group discussions on a variety of issues such as domestic policy and student rights. Independent time also was scheduled for exploring the city.

The highlight of the week, Hintz said, was Capitol Hill Day. The students and teachers met as a group with staff from Senator Carl Levin's office; sat in on a press conference honoring Senator Debbie Stabenow, which included Senator Hillary Clinton; and met with Congressman and gubernatorial candidate David Bonior in his office. The students then attended different committee meetings and looked through historic documents at the Library of Congress.

"The program was very strenuous with events and activities planned from 7:30 in the morning until 10 at night," Hintz said. "I learned something new every day, got to socialize and network with other teachers from across the nation, and gathered many new ideas that I'm itching to implement in a classroom environment. If you want to be a teacher and connect with kids and practice some hands-on learning in a great environment, this is a great program to participate in."

Hintz said she hopes to organize a Close Up Foundation trip next year with a group of Oakland University students from political science and the secondary education program.

"I greatly appreciated the contributions I received from the **Political Science Department, School of Education and Human Services, Division of Student Affairs** and other individuals," Hintz said. "For a trip next year, I hope to enlist a corporate sponsor and organize some fund-raising events to help offset the cost of the students who wish to attend."

"The trip is not exclusive to those in the teaching profession. Anyone who has not been to Washington or is interested in how government works should take this trip. It's a wonderful way to explore the nation's capitol and learn about the different functions of the government."

For more information on citizen education programs on the democratic process, visit the **Close Up Foundation** Web site. For information on organizational activities for future foundation trips for OU students, contact Gena Hintz at gehintz@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

As part of her Introduction to Secondary Education class, OU junior Gena Hintz traveled with 10 high school students to Washington, D.C., to help raise political awareness in those students. Hintz hopes to organize a similar trip next year with a group of OU students.

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