Phoebe Caudill finds her way in Washington D.C.

The UC Irvine undergraduate defines her future as a UCDC intern.

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Caudill stands on the steps of the U.S. Capitol alongside Congressman Mike Levin of California's 49th district.

Picture Credit:
Phoebe Caudill

Earlier this year, undergraduate Phoebe Caudill completed a three-month internship as part of the University of California’s Washington, D.C. Center (UCDC) internship program. The program helps students from across the UC system land internships in government and government-related agencies and organizations in the Nation’s capital.

When Caudill moved to Washington, D.C. from Orange County earlier this year, she had trouble finding an internship that aligned with her interests.

Caudill, who’s double majoring in Environmental Science and Policy and Political Science at UC Irvine, started out working at the Guatemalan Human Rights Campaign. But it was not the right fit for her, so she left and, after help from UCDC staff, landed another internship in the offices of Congressman Mike Levin.

It was a serendipitous match, because Levin, Caudill explained, is known for his work championing environmental issues. “He’s one of the top environmental advocates in Congress,” said Caudill. “He serves on multiple committees on natural resources.”

Caudill credits her time as a learning assistant working under Professor Julie Ferguson in the UC Irvine Department of Earth System Science with helping her show Levin’s office she could be an asset to their team.

“My time as a learning assistant was proof of me working in a collaborative environment,” said Caudill, who, while working for Levin, helped his office on environmental legislation and on memos for bills Levin co-sponsored, including the Grocery, Farm and Food Worker Stabilization Act – an act aimed at protecting frontline works in times of emergency like the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Caudill thinks she excelled in Levin’s office thanks to her double major. “I use a lot of environmental references in my political science classes and vice versa,” she said, describing a perspective that came in handy when considering how to interweave science with the sometimes-competing demands of policymaking.

Her time in D.C. was a defining time that helped her better understand who she is, what she’s capable of facing and what she wants to do with her career. That, and she has hard-won wisdom to share with students considering the UCDC program.

Caudill urges interested UCDC students to dive in headfirst and work through any fears of making mistakes as you pursue your interests. “If you could just push yourself a little for those other opportunities, great things might happen,” she said. “After UCDC, I feel much more mature now, and I feel a lot more confident in my abilities and what I can do.”

Pushing herself at UCDC helped Caudill discover she wants to one day go to graduate school. “I didn’t realize how much of our government relies on policy experts, like the ones that come from grad school programs,” said Caudill. “I want to make a difference in environmental policy and politics, but I can't do that without having the necessary knowledge, so grad school it is – if I get in, that is. I also love being a student and the process of learning, and I want to return to D.C. eventually after becoming a master of my field.”

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