

# on the Hill



## Political science students go inside the Beltway to visit with Canisius alumni

Maeve E. Huggins '08 is fascinated by government and politics. But it wasn't until last Columbus Day weekend that she set foot in our nation's capital for the first time. The political science major boarded a plane (also a first for her) with classmates Daniel R. Aikin '08, Daniel N. Hurley '07 and Amanda L. Slauson '07 and Political Science Professor Michael V. Haselswerdt, PhD, to meet with young alumni who live and work in the Washington, D.C. area. While Huggins had high hopes for the trip, she never anticipated the influence one weekend would have on her future.

"My outlook and career goals have completely changed," says Huggins. "Before the trip, I planned to attend law school after graduation. Law school is still in my future but now I want to move to Washington, D.C. to get a few years of experience first, preferably in a job on Capitol Hill."

Erin K. Baker '06 is one young alumna with whom Huggins instantly related. A political science/ criminal justice major, Baker also put her initial plans for law school on hold to work on Capitol Hill as a staff assistant for Rep. Thomas M. Reynolds (R-NY).

"As a student, I was basically sheltered," recalls Baker. "I lived at home and commuted to Canisius. When I moved to D.C. after graduation, I grew up fast

and became totally independent. Now I have this great experience and it has been fantastic since day one."

Haselswerdt, who initiated the annual trip in 1998, says Washington, D.C. is a great place for young people to live and work as they determine their future goals. He adds, "Sometimes when students become aware of the opportunities in D.C., they decide that a few years of work experience will ultimately make law school more productive for them down the road."



(l-r) Maeve E. Huggins '08, Daniel R. Aikin '08, Amanda L. Slauson '07 and Daniel N. Hurley '07 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.



student spotlight

STORY BY: KRISTIN E. ETU '91

(Below) The Korean War Veterans Memorial and the D.C. World War I Memorial (right) were among the national monuments Canisius students visited during their trip.



**Wendy A. Eichorst '04** (left) invited Canisius students **Daniel R. Aikin '08**, **Maeve E. Huggins '08**, **Daniel N. Hurley '07** and **Amanda L. Slauson '07** (missing from photo) to tour Lewis-Burke & Associates, where she works as a lobbyist.

During their three-day trip, students also met with **Andrew P. Szalay '02**, legislative assistant to Congressman Reynolds and **Kathleen T. Feroletto '06**, congressional assistant to Rep. Brian Higgins (D – NY). The group visited alumni who are employed at other government agencies, lobby and research firms, and media companies, as well. But Haselswerdt believes some of the most valuable information is exchanged when the students meet with alumni over dinner.

“I say to our alumni, ‘Tell us your story: how you came here, what you do and what your advice is for someone who wants to come down here.’ ”

Typically, alumni talk about how they cope with day-to-day issues of life in Washington, D.C., such as the high cost of living. For example, the rent for a two-bedroom apartment can run anywhere between \$1,500-\$2,000, which is nearly three to four times the cost of a similar place in Buffalo. Furthermore, because starting salaries for young professionals tend to be low,

often four or five roommates share housing expenses.

“During my first month here, I was miserable,” recalls **Wendy A. Eichorst '04**. When Eichorst made the D.C. trip in 2002, she was so inspired by the experience that she told Haselswerdt “someday he would bring students to visit me.” Eichorst’s prediction was realized four years later when she welcomed Haselswerdt’s students to Lewis-Burke & Associates, where she now works as a lobbyist. “I told the students they have to resist the urge to run back to their safety nets. I stuck it out and life in D.C. has been very worthwhile.”

That little bit of reassurance has a significant impression on students, who relate best to young alumni.

“The distance between what the students are doing in class and me, as a young professional, is not that large,” notes **Lucian D. Sikorskyj '04**. An intelligence analyst for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Sikorskyj assists with weapons of mass destruction and domestic terrorism investigations. In the course of his duties, he has briefed FBI Director Robert Mueller, U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and other members of the President’s Cabinet. “By sharing my





(Left) The New York State pillar of the World War II Memorial, which opened to the public in April 2004. The memorial is at the east end of the Reflecting Pool between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument.

(Below) Historic Union Station in Washington, D.C., is a transportation hub for train and bus travel, as well as one of the city's most dynamic destinations to shop and dine.



story and the road I took to get here, I can be a resource to students in terms of everything from job interviews to what it's really like to live and work down here. I can be a friend to someone who is going through a transition."

That was encouraging news for Daniel Aikin. Last spring, the political science major considered a summer internship in Washington, D.C. but apprehension about moving to a large city kept him back. After this journey to D.C., he is ready to make the commitment.

"I learned there are many Canisius alumni in D.C. who are more than willing to help you through the transition," says Aikin. "The alumni we met gave us their business cards and told us to call or E-mail anytime. It was an excellent networking opportunity."

But it's not just the Canisius students who benefit. The Washington, D.C. trip also presents an excellent opportunity for the area's 74 alumni to stay connected to Canisius, adds Haselswerdt. "They contribute something to our students that really matters. They share their experiences and it makes them feel like they are giving back to *alma mater*."

Daniel Hurley's sister, **Erin E. Hurley '02**, values the opportunity to advise current Canisius students. A project officer for the Department of Defense, she was among the first of Haselswerdt's students to take the D.C. trip. She first moved to D.C. right after graduation and then again in 2005 after she earned a graduate degree from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

"I appreciate being in the role of mentor because I know that for young people, Washington can be a difficult place to find good work," says Hurley. "But I also know that ambition and hard work are eventually rewarded."

Haselswerdt is proud to see his former students do so well

early in their careers. And in a dynamic town like D.C., a job change every few years actually looks good on a résumé.

"It is a very competitive environment," says Eichorst. "D.C. is full of young people, who are smart, ambitious and driven."

But Aikin is up for the challenge.

"This is probably one of the few times in my life where I have the flexibility to explore what I really want to do," adds Aikin.

Although Huggins ultimately plans to return to the Buffalo area, she believes the roadmap, for her first few years after graduation, points southeast.

"Years from now I will look back on this weekend and say it was a turning point in my life. The trip gave me direction. It cleared my uncertainty about moving to D.C. The experience will serve as the stepping stone for the rest of my career and the rest of my life." ■



Canisius students and young alumni dine together to share experiences and offer advice. Left row: **Daniel N. Hurley '07**, **Erin K. Baker '06**, **Daniel R. Aikin '08**, **Maeve E. Huggins '08** and **Michael V. Haselswerdt, PhD**, professor of political science. Right row: **Michael L. Culotta '02**, **Damien A. LaManna '02**, **Amanda L. Slauson '07**, **Stacey L. Budzinski '06** and **Daniel B. Moar '04**.

**Damien A. LaManna '02** (pictured center with laptop), shows Canisius students some of the politically-related Web site work he does as media director for Rightclick Strategies. Also pictured are (l-r) **Maeve E. Huggins '08**, **Amanda L. Slauson '07**, **Daniel N. Hurley '07** and **Daniel R. Aikin '08**.