

Reinstating the Washington, D.C., Program at Lewis & Clark College

INTRODUCTION

Lewis & Clark College in Portland has a proud tradition of offering its students the opportunity to spend a semester studying away from campus. Current offerings include locations as diverse as Australia, China, Senegal, and New York, to name just a few. Missing from this list is the capital of the United States. It has not always been this way. Hundreds of alumni fondly recall participating in the Washington, D.C., program while attending Lewis & Clark.

We on the Board of Alumni propose reinstating Washington, D.C., as an offering for off-campus study. This document will lay out recommendations for a Washington program redesigned for the 21st century. It will cover the program's leadership, curriculum, internship requirement, student costs, housing logistics, and extracurricular activities. In addition, this proposal will acknowledge challenges in reinstating the program and delve into generating interest among students.

ROTATING TRIP LEADERSHIP

A member of Lewis & Clark's faculty will lead each Washington program. The trip leader will be responsible for teaching one of the program's courses, coordinating extracurricular activities, and acting as a liaison between the college and program participants. Rotating this duty among academic departments will help ensure that each program has a unique character, and that no faculty member becomes overburdened.

CURRICULUM

Participants in the Washington program would be required to complete 12 academic credits. The cornerstone of study will be a Department of Political Science course on federal policymaking. This course, a holdover from the previous program, will ground students in the business of Washington and its key players. It will provide key context for the participants' experience.

In addition, students would take one of the following new courses, taught by faculty at George Washington University, and a course created by each the trip leader.

- **Racial Justice in America, Department of Sociology:** The syllabus will cover past and current efforts to address the legacy of slavery, segregation, and inequity in the United States. Students will complete a final assignment focused on an organization involved in contemporary policy efforts on the subject.
- **Dissent in Modern U.S. History, Department of History:** Readings and assignments will trace this tradition from the beginnings of the American revolution to the rise of anti-government militia movements during the 2020 presidential election.

Taken together, these three courses would blend the contemporary with the historical. They would engage students in timely debate and discussion over values, traditions, and opportunities in the United

States following the Trump presidency. The board believes that this relevant coursework would go a long way toward sustaining interest in the Washington program.

INTERNSHIPS

In addition to the courses, participants will complete an internship with an organization in the greater Washington area. Students will combine what they are learning in the classroom with practical experience in the policymaking milieu. The internship component will thus address Lewis & Clark students' concerns over a lack of career support from the college.

The Board of Alumni is aware of the trouble some students have in securing viable internships. In response, the board will engage its membership to help identify internship leads.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The program will complement the coursework and internships with weekend activities, taking advantage of Washington's proximity to historically relevant locations. A list of suggested destinations might include:

- Antietam National Battlefield
- Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park
- Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park
- George Washington's Mount Vernon
- Colonial Williamsburg
- Thomas Jefferson's Monticello
- The University of Virginia
- New York City
- Philadelphia

Transportation to and from these sites will be provided by chartered coaches. Overnight accommodations will be arranged for the longer excursions.

HOUSING

In the past students have stayed at hotels for the duration of the Washington program. While researching for this proposal, the board explored alternatives. The board reached out to American University and George Washington University to inquire about leasing space from these institutions. However, the universities were unable to guarantee sufficient capacity to accommodate Lewis & Clark's needs year after year.

The board concluded that hotels continue to offer the most practical solution to housing program participants. The board contacted four hotels to inquire about working with the college and prospective costs should the Washington program be reinstated.

The management of all four hotels expressed willingness to house students for the program. But only the general manager of the State Plaza Hotel in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood, where students have stayed in the past, said she could offer discounted rates for long-term boarding. The discounted rates would be contingent on students boarding two per room and the length of occupancy being no less than 10 weeks. For reference, the weekly cost per student for 2021 would be \$560, according to the State Plaza Hotel.

The board recommends contracting with the State Plaza because of this competitive pricing, in addition to the hotel's central location and its past relationship with the college.

STUDENT COSTS

The college's Student and Departmental Account Services lists a semester of off-campus study at \$34,884 for the 2020-21 academic year. That figure includes tuition of \$27,416 and a program fee of \$7,468. Included in the program fee are housing, a weekly meal stipend, extracurricular activities, administrative fees, and supplemental health insurance. Not included are airfare, primary insurance coverage, books, and incidentals.

The cost of the Washington program has traditionally been consistent with that of other off-campus and study abroad programs. The board recommends maintaining this parity. Allowing the cost of a semester in Washington to exceed the cost of other off-campus programs could deter interested students.

The board explored lowering the cost of the Washington program compared to other off-campus offerings. However, the high cost of living in Washington precluded such a move. To offer students a lower cost would mean cutting extracurricular activities from the program, something the board was not prepared to suggest.

CHALLENGES

The board is keenly aware that the college discontinued the Washington program after years of diminishing interest among faculty and students. This represents a significant challenge should the college begin offering the Washington program again. However, the board believes the dwindling interest was not inevitable but rather a result of missed opportunities. This proposal has identified several possible updates to the program designed to sustain engagement, namely:

- Rotating the trip leadership among academic departments.
- Updating the program curriculum.
- Supporting students with finding internships.

Furthermore, the board offers to take additional actions to support the renewed program during its first three years. The board's members will:

- Host regular informational sessions about the program.
- Advertise the program to students and their parents.
- Conduct focus group research among alumni and students to solicit ideas for keeping the program fresh and relevant.

CONCLUSION

The United States is at a pivotal moment. Divisiveness and civic disengagement are increasing even as the world confronts problems like income inequality and climate change. How the federal government responds, and how various nonstate entities try to shape this response, is a topic worth studying. And Washington, D.C., is a perfect laboratory for observing the response. Lewis & Clark students should have the opportunity to enter this laboratory as part of a reinstated Washington program.

In the preceding proposal, the Board of Alumni has laid out its vision for reinstating the Washington, D.C., program. Board members look forward to dialog with other college leaders about this proposal and stand ready to answer their questions.