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Tried & true: Children's advocate

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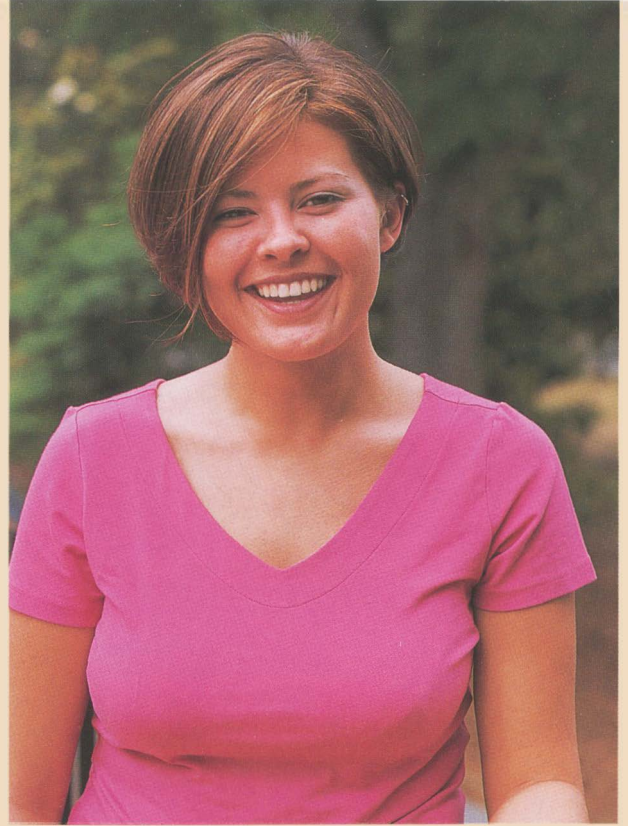
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Children's advocate



The Washington Program, established by Furman's political science department in 1980, has provided more than 500 students the opportunity to work in government and policy-related internships.

The jobs help students understand the inner workings of government and gain valuable contacts in Washington, D.C. Most of the internships are with governmental agencies or law firms.

So it was unusual when **Raegan Woodson** chose a different path.

During the summer of 1999, while many of her Furman classmates dashed off in suits and office attire to work in big office buildings, Woodson put on more comfortable clothes and commuted to a much different part of the city.

An urban studies major with an interest in non-profit service agencies, she signed on as a volunteer and intern at a pediatric center that cares for children whose lives have been affected, in one way or another, by the HIV virus.

Woodson, a native of Lawton, Okla., spent much of her internship coordinating an after-school program for the children at the clinic, which is located in a

disadvantaged section of the city. Much of her time, she says, was spent interacting and playing games with the children. When she wasn't working directly with the children, Woodson wrote grant applications, answered the phones and provided administrative assistance to the small staff.

Some of the children at the clinic were infected with HIV; others had a family member stricken with the fatal virus. She says she grew to love the children, many of whom turned to her for counseling, affection and guidance. Woodson even attended the funeral of one 8-year-old's mother who had died of AIDS. She calls the period "a real time of brokenness."

The job's 12-hour days left her exhausted, but it also expanded her horizons and exposed her to a world that most Furman students would never see. It was a harsh but eye-opening form of engaged learning.

At night, she and her Furman friends would recap their days and discuss office politics and workplace gossip. "My roommates would tell me about troubles at their job, and I would just think back to what some of those children were going through," Woodson says. "The job really put things in perspective. It wasn't

something that I was physically or emotionally prepared for."

Woodson persevered, though, and earned rave reviews from her supervisors. More importantly, she found her calling.

After she completed the internship and returned to Furman last fall for her senior year, Woodson could not escape thoughts of the clinic and the children. "I just can't wait to get back there," she said this spring. And now she is.

Woodson, who graduated in May, has returned to Washington with Americorps, the domestic Peace Corps, and is continuing her work with children affected by the HIV virus. She hopes eventually to attend medical school and ultimately become a public advocate for these children.

— John Roberts