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Helping Handshakes

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Brian Boda '14 (second from the left) attends a reception at Tortilla Coast restaurant in Washington, D.C., for the program's mentors and students.

Furman alumni can be found across the nation's capital, working in a variety of fields — and their connections to one another are strong. Brian Boda '14 found that out quickly when he took a defense consulting position with Deloitte Consulting.

"Just because I say 'Furman,' they are willing to sit down and have a conversation with me," Boda said.

He wanted a way to pay his Furman experience forward and to draw current students into those conversations. So Boda pitched a mentoring idea to Danielle Vinson, Furman professor of politics and international affairs.

Helping Handshakes

When navigating D.C. — and later the job market — interns benefit from alumni mentors.

BY TINA UNDERWOOD

His idea was to make sure each student received an advantage: one-on-one mentoring from a Furman graduate.

"It's really neat to see him wanting to do the same thing for other students," Vinson said.

Vinson came back to campus with the idea, only to find that Paige Blankenship,

manager of student programs and events for the department, was already working on the same concept as an outflow of The Furman Advantage. The two joined forces, with Boda recruiting mentors in Washington, and Blankenship coordinating from campus.

Accommodating any major, the Washington Internship places about 15 students each spring semester and another 10 to 20 every other summer. The program, created in the late 1970s, places students in internships for 30 to 35 hours a week. They fill the rest of their hours with evening classes and professional development.

"Literally anything students can imagine, there's something in D.C. that fits their interests," Vinson said. "It's a nice transition to the real world. And being in D.C. makes it a whole lot easier to find a job in D.C."

Boda and Blankenship introduced the mentoring

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idea in a departmental newsletter. Nearly 50 alumni responded to that first call for help.

Furman has “such a strong political science department, it’s so natural for Furman students to come up here to D.C.,” Boda said. “What we can do is leverage this massive network we have here and tie people to one-on-one relationships.”

The students and their mentors meet formally at a reception in Washington. Then they connect throughout the semester for individual support.

Mentors give the students a “better sense of what a job is really like,” Vinson said.

Jack Ligon ’19, a politics and international affairs major, interned in Washington in 2018 and plans to pursue a law degree and possibly a career in public interest law.

He interned in the Office of the Inspector General for the AbilityOne Commission, an investigative body overseeing nonprofits that serve people who are blind or severely disabled. His mentor was an attorney in private practice. He and his mentor have stayed in touch this fall as Ligon prepares to apply to law school.

“We traded stories about our experiences,” Ligon said. “It was the perfect balance to my public interest internship.”

To support student internships, go to www.furman.edu/givenow. ●



(Above) **Brian Boda '14** meets Sen. Lindsey Graham and retired Gen. David Petraeus at the 2012 Wilkins Legislative and Civic Leadership Awards.

(Below) Gil Klein, past president of the National Press Club (in bright red) gives students in the summer 2018 Washington Internship Program a tour of the NPC.

