

Student Sets Record Straight on D.C. Semester

Editor:

I am writing this letter in response to articles about the Washington Semester Program that appeared in both the **Griffin** and the **Chronicle** last semester.

The Washington Semester Program, offered each year at the American University, was rightly described as providing the student with an introduction to American government in action. However, there was, I believe, a serious omission in both articles. Neither one mentioned the Science and Technology division that has recently been added to the program. The other divisions (Washington Semester, Urban Studies, Economic Policy, Foreign Policy, American Studies and International Development) would tend to attract the "poli-sci" student. The Science and Technology Division, however, attracts the science student (i.e. biology, biochemistry, chemistry)

who also has an interest in the impact of science and science policy on society, and thus adds a unique dimension to the entire program.

This S&T division was introduced in Fall 1976; as a senior Chemistry major I participated in this innovative program this past fall (1977). The entire semester was devoted to studying the roles of scientists in science policy and included important aspects such as: scientists as advisors to government; the science press; the science policies of foreign governments; the public interest movement and science policy; and the significance of science education. To discuss these topics we visited people throughout the DC area who lectured to our group. The lectures took us to Congressional Subcommittees, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Library of Congress, the Consumer Products Safety Commission, and the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA). We also talked with science attaches from Great Britain, the U.S.S.R. and Sweden.

Specific topics discussed included recombinant genes, chemicals in the environment, social responsibility of the scientist, the saccharin controversy and the problems of energy development, to mention just a few.

These seminars composed two courses of the program. The remainder included an internship (two full days a week) and a course elective at the University. My position was as a legislative intern to the Senate Subcommittee on Nuclear Regulation. This internship provided me with the invaluable experience of observing how legislation is developed and

how the entire legislative process is both effective . . . and ineffective. It also allowed me to become thoroughly familiar with "the Hill" as I attended hearings, reviewed testimonies, delivered copies to both the House and Senate sides, and made frequent visits to the Library of Congress.

As a final note, the science and technology division stressed the importance of science in government, and helped to define the role of the scientist in Congress (and the governmental agencies), in industry, and in the public sector. It was also emphasized that scientists are playing an ever-increasing role in all these areas. As a result, we must consider the effects of this involvement on technology, regulation and economics. Most importantly, the program demonstrated to the participating science students the significance of their future as scientists.

—Mary E. Theeman