

# Motivation? The Effects of High-Impact Experiential Learning Activities on Political Science Students

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**ABSTRACT:** This research examines whether high-impact experiential learning activities in politics motivate students positively in learning, personal development and establishing career goals? Using participant observations and student journals recorded during their participation in the Osgood Center for International Studies 2017 Presidential Inauguration Seminar and the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminar's 2016 Democratic and Republican Convention seminars, this research identifies specific outcomes related to the impact of such experiential learning opportunities on students of political science.

**KEYWORDS:** motivation, experiential learning, transformational opportunities, high-impact learning activities, the Washington Center, the Osgood Center

## Introduction

Efforts to motivate students to achieve more in their academic field of study is often difficult to quantify, but easy to identify. Increasingly, educators are compelled to find innovative ways to engage students. For students of political science, meeting and interacting with politicians, working on campaigns, conducting research, serving as interns at governmental agencies and political offices, usually illicit greater interest in the discipline. Moreover, participating in high-impact experiential learning activities, such as the Washington Center's Democratic and Republican Convention

Seminars, and the Osgood Center for International Studies Presidential Inauguration Seminar, allow students to witness the nomination of presidential candidates, and the transformation of power from one president to another, up-close and personal. This type of learning experience, which cannot be imparted in a traditional classroom setting, is sure to be life changing, but to what extent, is unknown.

In 2008, Kuh articulated strong positive effects of participating in high-impact activities. He found that “first-year students and seniors who participated in learning communities, service-learning, study abroad, student-faculty research and senior culminating experiences reported greater gains in learning and personal development” (Brownell and Swaner 2009). According to Kuh (2008) the greater gains include a “‘deep approach to learning,’ which encompasses integrating ideas and diverse perspectives, discussing ideas with faculty and peers outside of the class, analyzing and synthesizing ideas, applying theories, judging the value of information as well as one’s own views, and trying to understand others’ perspectives” (Brownell and Swaner 2009).

Using participant observations and student journals recorded during their participation in these programs, and from my personal experiences as a student of, and a faculty leader for the Washington Center, and later for the Osgood Center programs, the current research seeks to determine whether high-impact experiential learning activities provided by the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars and the Osgood Center for International Studies, motivate student positively in learning, personal development, and establishing career goals? And if so, in what ways?

## Background Information

Long before many universities adopted policies to include experiential and service learning as a core curriculum agenda, the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars (TWC) and the Osgood Center for International Studies, both non-profit, non-partisan, educational organizations, were providing college students with what they deem to be “transformational” opportunities in Washington, DC.

The Washington Center opened its doors in 1975 and continues to open doors for students to realize their full potential. According to TWC, since its founding, “it has helped more than 55,000 young people find their career path and has become the premier provider of internships and seminars to higher education partners and students worldwide” (twc.edu). Over the years, TWC has expanded and adapted to change, but continues to remain true to its primary mission which is to provide “young

people with enriching experiences, professional connections and caring support to help them pursue successful careers” (<http://www.twc.edu>).

Similarly, the Osgood Center’s stated mission is “[To] positively affect the lives of participants and prepare them to be better global citizens through quality educational experiences that emphasize short learning programs and experiential learning” ([osgoodcenter.org/mission](http://osgoodcenter.org/mission)). Their programs are “thought-provoking, experiential, and solution focused. Students come face-to-face with foreign policy and international leaders, including experts from the U.S. State Department, National Security Council at the White House, U.S. Congress, and premier think tanks” (<http://www.osgoodcenter.org>).

### *Exploration into the Academic Seminars at TWC and the Osgood Center*

The academic seminars at the Washington Center and the Osgood Center are usually two-week programs, but there are also one-week programs, that expose students to a large number of speakers, who are usually politicians, journalists, and governmental bureaucrats, that come and speak and interact with students to discuss their career trajectory and share policy perspectives. In addition, students have scheduled site visits to U.S. embassies, think tanks and governmental agencies to further engage professionally. Most importantly, students often have the privilege of working and attending culminating events such as the Democratic/Republican National Conventions and Presidential Inaugurations.

According to TWC’s website, “since 1984, The Washington Center. . . has provided [students] with and inside look at both national nominating conventions. These special academic seminars place students in volunteer fieldwork positions with the party, convention committee, host committee, media, and many other convention related organizations and events. We also bring noteworthy speakers to address the participants each morning. The courses take within the city of the two major national conventions” (<http://www.twc.edu/seminars/programs#conventions>)

Over the years, speakers have included: Major General Mike Murray; Dr. Cornell West; tv host, Tavis Smiley; Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform; Steve Scully, host of *Washington Journal*; journalist Clarence Page; founder of C-SPAN Brian Lamb; Michael Steele, former chair of the RNC; Debbie Wasserman Schultz, former chair of the DNC; Major Garret, Chief White House Correspondent; Dee Dee Myers, former White House Press Secretary; Candy Crowley, chief political

correspondent, for Governor Howard Dean, Senator Robert Bennett, and a host of other prominent politicians, journalists, and scholars.

Examples of some of the site visits where students have gone include: The Woodrow Wilson Center; Fenn Communication Group; Rock the Vote; EMILY' List, the African American Museum of History and Culture, the American Association of University Women, the Humane Society Legislative Fund, and a host of DC universities, museums, monuments, non-profits, U.S. embassies, think tanks, and bureaucratic agencies.

Students are also afforded the opportunity to serve as volunteers and attend party nominating conventions and Presidential inaugurations by participating in TWC and/or the Osgood Center's convention(s) and inauguration seminars. This exposure provides students with front row seat to these events. For example, one of my students shadowed Karl Rove at the Republican Convention in 2012, and another one shadowed Wolf Blitzer in 2008. During the 2016 Republican convention, my student served as security detail with the secret service (through the TWC program) to secure the hotel where the presidential nominee's family and friends were staying.

From transporting prominent political figures via golf carts from parking lots to the convention hall(s), to setting up and safe guarding venues, to obtaining seated and standing tickets to attend the Bush, Obama, and Trump inaugurations, these experiences are highly impactful and often make an indelible mark on the lives and careers of young people.

### *The 2017 Inauguration Program with the Osgood Center*

The 2017 Osgood Inauguration Program began Sunday, January 8 and ended Monday, January 20. The nine students under my supervision for this program arrived at various times of the day, but most managed to arrive in DC before the 3:00pm check-in and building orientation. The opening session started Monday, January 9 with formal introductions, a program orientation, and a presentation from the Osgood staff on "Understanding Washington and its Culture." This presentation included tips to students about safety and being aware of their surroundings, traveling in pairs, tips on how to use the Metro Transit system, and the power of networking in DC and making a great first impression. The presentation also included expectations on how the students were to conduct themselves and interact with the invited speakers, their peers in the public/professional sphere, as well as in the private sphere, including their hotels.

**The 2017 Presidential Inauguration Seminar Program format included:**

✦ Orientation
✦ Morning Speaker(s) and Panel Presentations
✦ Daily Meeting with Faculty Leaders and Peers to Discuss
✦ Afternoon site visits to meet with governmental, advocacy, media and international representatives and experts
✦ Reception (second week of program) at the National Press Club
✦ Free time to explore DC or attend congressional hearings and inaugural activities
✦ Special day at the Newseum ( <a href="http://osgoodcenter.org/inauguration-2017.php">http://osgoodcenter.org/inauguration-2017.php</a> )

The speakers for the two-week program included: Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., co-chair for the Commission on Presidential Debates; Rodell Mollineau, co-founder of ROKK Solutions; Dr. Stephen Farnsworth, professor and director of the Center for Leadership and Media Studies at Mary Washington University; Dr. Linda Bishai, the director for the U.S. Institute of Peace at George Washington University; journalist and political commentator, Steven V. Roberts; former Congresswoman, Ann Marie Buerkle (R-NY); former Congressman, Don Glickman (D-KS); Brian Lamb, executive chairman of C-SPAN; Dr. Laura Brown, director for the School of Political Management at George Washington University; journalist Clarence Page of the Chicago Tribune; Shane Harris, national security correspondent for the Wall Street Journal; Ambassador Sally Shelton-Colby; and Don Richie, historian emeritus of the U.S. Senate.

The site visits for the 2017 Presidential Inauguration Seminar included: tours of the Washington Monuments and the Washington National Cathedral. My students visited Howard University, the African American Museum of History and Culture, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Humane Society Legislative Fund, and attended the confirmation hearings for cabinet nominees: Scott Pruitt, John Kelly, and Jeff Sessions. During our Capitol Hill site visits, my students met Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA), Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), journalist and NBC news anchor, Andrea Mitchell, and a host of House members, lobbyists and activists. Several students attended the “Make America Great Again Welcome Celebration” and all nine students received tickets (from various members of Congress) to attend the Inauguration Ceremony for the 45<sup>th</sup> President, Donald J. Trump.

## 2016 National Conventions Programs with the Washington Center

For the 2016 Washington Center Conventions programs, three students under my supervision participated in the program. Two attended the Democratic National Convention Program in Philadelphia, and one student attended the Republican National Convention Program in Cleveland. The program format for this academic seminar included: an opening day orientation, morning speakers, afternoon site visits, group meetings with faculty leaders and peers to discuss daily speakers/ activities, and networking opportunities with convention delegates, journalists, and host committees.

Students in these programs heard from A-list journalists, politicians and party delegates who had traveled to the conventions to take part in their party's nomination process. Unlike the Inauguration seminar(s), the convention programs took place, outside of Washington, in the city where the conventions were held. Students who participate in the conventions programs are often provided an opportunity to serve as volunteers and assist with the logistics and preparations for the national party conventions.

During the 2016 Conventions programs, one of my students was placed with CNN where his job was drive CNN operatives, via golf cart, from the parking lot to the Wells Fargo Center, where the convention was held. Cars were prohibited from the perimeter of the arena, for security purposes. In this role of transporting VIP's to and from the convention center, the student met and took photographs with CNN's weekend edition newsroom anchor, Fredricka Whitfield; CNN's *The Situation Room* host, Wolf Blitzer, and investigative journalist and author, Carl Bernstein. The student diligently networked and secured credentials to the convention and was seated with his state party's delegation for the nightly speeches during the week. He witnessed first-hand the speeches of Michelle Obama, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Senator Al Franken (D-MN), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and watched Hillary Clinton accept the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, the final night of the convention.

The second student that participated in the TWC Democratic Convention program served as a volunteer with the Democratic National Convention Committee (DNCC). The DNCC is the committee that planned and staffed the entire convention. She, along with other TWC students, were stationed throughout the convention hall assisting and giving directions to politicians, party delegates, speakers, and members of the press about the location of party delegation meeting rooms, their seating arrangements, and where the various television networks were located.

The DNCC volunteers had undergone an extensive program orientation, days before the convention and were highly knowledgeable of the where things were. They were in charge

of crowd control, checking convention credentials, running errands, and helping with necessary tasks to make the convention flow smoothly. Although my student became frustrated with her DNCC assignment, largely due to the lack of communication and tension between the convention committee's team leaders, volunteers, and disgruntled patrons, she enjoyed the experience. By volunteering with Democratic National Convention Committee through the TWC program, she too, witnessed first-hand many of the speeches and performances during the convention, including President Barack Obama, Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton's acceptance speech.

The student who attended the 2016 Republican Convention program sponsored by the Washington Center was placed with the Secret Service and was required to complete a top-secret background check. He traveled around the city of Cleveland to secure locations for high ranking members of the Republican Party. Each night of the convention he had complete access to the convention floor and an access pass to go wherever he wanted within the Quicken Loans Arena. During the last night of the convention, he sat next to Dr. Ben Carson in the Trump family suite and watched Donald J. Trump accept the Republican Party's presidential nomination. In his words, during the week, "I got to pitch my resume to Ben Carson and he gave me his personal number and told me to do not hesitate to call if I ever needed anything."

#### Assessment Criteria for the Academic Seminars

During the Convention(s) programs and the Presidential Inauguration programs, each student was assigned to a small group of 10-20 students, led by a faculty leader who oversaw and assessed student's academic performance on written assignments for the program. Specifically, the faculty leader's task was to attend all program sessions, meet with students for group discussions and instruction, accompany the students on site visits, read students' written work and evaluate their academic and professional performance, and recommend a grade for each student at the end of the program (twc.edu). After the completion of the program, the faculty leader provided the faculty liaison at the student's home institution a written assessment of each students' work. Since 2004, I have had the honor of teaching, observing and evaluating hundreds of students in the Washington Center and Osgood Center programs. I have served as faculty leader for TWC's Democratic and Republican Convention Programs, their *Inside Washington* January Program, and their 2009 and 2013 Presidential Inauguration Programs. More recently, I served as a faculty leader for the Osgood Center's 2017 Presidential Inauguration. My experiences as a faculty leader continue to be highly rewarding, personally and professionally.

*Academic Component of the 2017 Inauguration Seminar*

As participants in these programs, students are expected to maintain and complete the academic requirements for the programs. During the 2017 Presidential Inauguration Seminar, students under my supervision were evaluated and received a grade for their attendance and participation, writing a short essay, posting about their experiences on social media, and creating and consistently contributing to an academic journal.

Areas of Evaluation		
I.	Attendance and Participation	20%
II.	Short Essay	15%
III.	Presence on Social Media	15%
IV.	Academic Journal/ Reflections	50% (twc.edu)

In the area of **Attendance**, students were expected to be on time for all sessions, (general session, small group sessions, site visits, etc). Failure to be on time resulted in points being deducted from their final grade for the seminar. In the area of **Participation**, students were required to read the speakers bio prior to the general sessions and pose questions to the speakers during the sessions. They were encouraged to introduce themselves to the speaker by stating their names and the college/university that they represented, before asking questions.

Another area in which the students were evaluated was by writing a short **essay** (1000 to 1100 words) on what they deemed to be the most important public policy issue(s) that the president would face after his inauguration? They were asked to discuss the pros and cons of his policy choices on the issue(s)? Finally, the essay should conclude with their views on how they thought the issue(s) would ultimately be resolved?

Further, the students were expected to have a **presence on social media** and post at least two or more daily feeds on Twitter and/or Instagram. The students' home institutions usually kept track of the students' activities, and the public relations departments retweeted and reposted images of students at site visits and interactions with political figures, to publicize these activities and to generate enthusiasm and excitement on campus.

Finally, the largest academic component and most important aspect of the evaluation process was for students to create and maintain an active **journal** that chronicled their experience. The journal is not a diary, rather students were expected to critically evaluate and analyze the information they receive from the news, peers, speakers, etc.

They were expected to document what they were doing and what they had learned from each particular activity. Students were asked to set three goals/objectives for the seminar during the first day and to assess those goals at the end of the two-week period, within their journal. They were encouraged to develop a theme for each day to help synthesize their work that included an evaluation of the speakers' remarks, reactions to site visits, topics from their small group discussions, sound bites of the day, any new language they heard for the first time, topics in the national news, and write journal entries using a theme. They were asked whether they would recommend the program to others, and why or why not?

<b>Academic Journal Outline</b>
I. Initial Statement of Seminar and Individual Goals (the first day students were asked to write 3 learning objectives of what they hoped to achieve in the program)
II. Analysis of Daily Activities
III. Soundbite of the Day
IV. New Language
V. Discussion and Reflection of Speakers/ News/ Site Visits
VI. Final Assessment of Goals (Students are asked to review their initial statement of goals for the program to determine whether they achieved them).

## Data and Methods

In an effort to measure the effects of these high-impact experiential learning activities on student learning, motivation, and establishing career goals, I examined student journals recorded during their participation in these programs. From my personal experiences as a student and as a faculty leader for the Washington Center, and for the Osgood Center programs, I rely on participant observations to investigate the personal growth and identify specific outcomes related to the impact of such experiential learning activities on students of political science.

Students have the opportunity to evaluate the program(s) when assessing whether their three learning objectives and their initial statement goals were achieved. The questions posed to the students was 1) Did you meet your stated goals? 2) Would you recommend the program to others, why or why not?

Fifty-eight statements were analyzed that were recorded in twelve student journals. Of the twelve students, ten were political science majors, two were political science minors, and five were members of the campus student government.

QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative text analysis software, was used to analyze the statements written by the students in their journals. QDA Miner Lite was released by Provalis Research in 2012. It is the free version of QDA Miner and “provides an easy-to-use tool for coding, annotating, and analyzing collections of documents and images such as interview or focus-group transcripts, journal articles, web pages, or customer feedback” (<https://provalisresearch.com/news-events/the-new-qda-miner-lite/>).

Using QDA Miner Lite to code and analyze student journal statements proved to be both effective and efficient. The statements were coded under four broad categories: *learning through first-hand experiences, motivation/inspirational, career/networking opportunities, and would recommend the program.*

*Learning through First-Hand Experience.* Statements placed in this category centered around students’ comments regarding learning through their observations and real-world experiences.

Examples of students’ statements placed into this category include:

- “I actually got to see how government worked listening to the speakers and getting to see it first-hand was absolutely incredible. It is one thing to read about it in the textbooks, but to witness it was remarkable. . . Going to the hearings watching the inauguration and going to the women’s March is something I will never forget.”
- “The Osgood Program presented the opportunity to witness, in person, a part of history that was an amazing experience to be a part of. Overall, the program is of value to students interested in the political world and would be of great value to attend.”
- “Overall, the Osgood inauguration program was a positive experience that I was pleased to attend. I was fortunate to have met prominent figures in our political system. The face-to-face experience that was ascertained from real world journalist, politicians, activist, lobbyist were pivotal to aid me in my path into the field.”

*Motivational/ Inspirational.* Statements placed in this category centered around emotional responses from students regarding their involvement in the program(s), or certain aspects of the programs.

Examples of students' statements placed in this category include:

- ✦ “The many site visits over the two weeks were motivational, inspirational, thought provoking, and informative in addition to first and foremost, educational. These educational hands-on experiences by visits to certain places in Washington brings a sense of reverence and awe to the power and tradition of the infrastructure of the National Capitol of the United States.
- ✦ “During my two weeks in Philadelphia, I was able to experience several once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. I heard speeches of people I admired for years, formed connections that will most likely last a lifetime, and earned invaluable life experiences.”
- ✦ “Becoming accustomed to the D.C. area is an experience within itself. The city has so much to offer minds that want to learn and explore the town. Everyone should experience the transfer of power, going to an inauguration, no matter who is coming into power. It is a beautiful experience of the United States democracy at work first hand and something that you can always look back and say you experienced.”

Career/Networking Opportunities. Statements placed in this category centered around the students' comments regarding networking and career opportunities afforded through the program and their interactions with industry professionals and political leaders.

Examples of students' statements placed in this category include:

- ✦ “The program offers a unique experience for college students where you are placed in the heart of Washington DC, the environment where you would potentially like to begin a career.”
- ✦ “In addition to attending the morning seminars, the program also left plenty of time to explore Washington DC, allotting time to communicate and network with persons of political importance. Much of our time was spent on Capitol Hill where we had the opportunity to speak with representatives and senators, in addition to sitting in on congressional hearing regarding various topics.”
- ✦ “This [Republican] Convention opened my eyes to a lot of things that I never thought I would want to do. After experiencing all this [interacting with the Trump family and friends], I know that I want to work in politics once I get out of the army. Even if I can't get a job in politics, I know that this will not be the last convention that I am ever going to attend.”

*Would Recommend.* Statements placed in this category include students' comments regarding their willingness to recommend the Washington Center and Osgood Center programs to others.

Examples of students' statements placed in this category include:

- ✦ "This is a program that I would recommend to anyone that asked even if they weren't a political science major. . .I can't say one bad thing about the Washington Center, from the way they present themselves, to the standards that they hold for every student that attends the program, it's impressive."
- ✦ "My personal experiences, both good and bad, do not alter the fact that I would encourage anyone to attend the TWC DNC program during the next election cycle. I was afforded the opportunity to see great leaders speak, learn about the workings of a convention as a whole, and learn just how important conventions are to a presidential nominating process."
- ✦ "I would recommend this program to anyone that has a desire to learn about anything that pertains to American politics. The trip to Washington DC gave me a first-hand experience in American politics."
- ✦ "The Osgood Presidential Inauguration Program is definitely one to be recommended to others. The program not only offers daily educational seminars where participants have the opportunity to listen and question significant individuals in the political world, but it also presents numerous unique opportunities that are not regularly offered to students."
- ✦ "I would absolutely recommend this program to my fellow classmates and let them know that the opportunity to meet and expand their horizon can certainly exist in Washington."

*Expectations for Research Outcomes based on Personal Experience*

In the mid-1990's as an undergraduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi, I participated in the Washington Center's "Women as Leaders" academic seminar. Participating in this seminar afforded me the opportunity to meet and establish contacts with students from other colleges and universities across the U.S., gain a greater understanding and deeper appreciation for the role women play in politics, and interact with prominent female leaders on Capitol Hill. I consider this experience and the subsequent two Congressional internships on the Hill to be the reason I chose a career in academia and politics.

This experience was truly transformational. It ignited a fire within me to learn all that I could about women and politics. It also allowed me to establish contacts from

around the nation with my contemporaries who were eager to do the same. Further, this experience broadened my perspective in that I became more socially, culturally and politically aware, and enhanced my desire to run for office. It made me more confident in my own abilities to achieve, causing me to be a more devoted student and to continue pursuing leadership positions on campus.

In an interview about my experience,

After participating in 1995's "Women as Leaders" seminar, Kimberly S. Adams recalls, "I came away with so much. Personally, I was inspired by my peers from around the country. Professionally, it was a fantastic networking experience, meeting women like Rep. Maxine Waters (who served as her mentor for the program), Secretary Donna Shalala and other leaders." Many of the relationships she formed then, she explains, have lasted throughout the years.

Adams maintains close ties with the program, serving as her institution's liaison and on the Alumni Advisory board. She gave the commencement speech for last spring's participants. "Being an alumna of The Washington Center," she explains, "it was a special experience to share my appreciation for what the program has given me" (TWC Newsletter, 2008).

Participating in the Washington Center's "Women as Leaders" seminar made such an incredible mark on me personally and professionally, that when I became a professor I worked to provide my students exposure and access to such programs. Thus, based on my personal experience as a student in a TWC program in the mid-1990's, I expect that my own students, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, would also learn a great deal from their first-hand experience, be highly motivated and inspired by what the programs offer, make connections and network with Washington insiders to advance career opportunities, and would recommend the TWC and Osgood Center academic seminars to others.

## Research Findings

The results of this research seem to lend support to the findings of previous works on the topic. Overall, the findings indicate that experiential learning activities in politics are indeed a positive, motivating factor for college students with regard to learning, personal development and achieving their career goals. Overwhelmingly, the students believed that they had achieved, and in several instances, exceeded, their initial goals for the program.

The findings seem to suggest that the students greatly appreciated and learned a lot through their first-hand experiences. Out of the fifty-eight statements recorded, twenty statements (34.5%) pertained to students writing about witnessing the political process up close and personal. For example, one student stated that, “it was invaluable to attend specific hearings on cabinet appointments, and witness first-hand the process of selection for the inner cabinet of the President, during the Inauguration seminar.” Another student wrote that, “Listening to the speakers gave a more personal view of the political world rather than the typical ‘professional’ outlook that is often perceived.” Yet another student mentioned that, “Having experiential learning in a field such as political science is so important because sometimes the [class]work and material can be repetitive, so by having that hands-on experience, it really solidifies why a person would choose a political science path, at least for myself.”

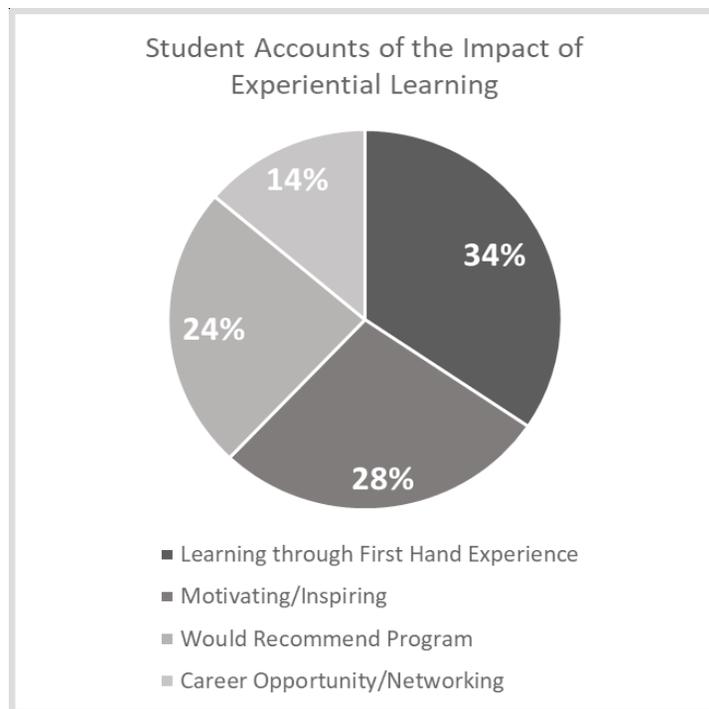
The findings further indicate that the students were motivated and inspired by their participation in the programs. Out of the fifty-eight statements recorded, sixteen statements (27.6%) underscored that the students were inspired and/or motivated by their experiences. For example, one student commented, “The inauguration program was an amazing experience, and one that will always be remembered.” Another student maintained that, “This trip gave myself, as everyone else who attended, an inside look at how Washington is. As political science majors, it was one of the greatest experiences to have.” Another student wrote, “The best part of this [program] was the last night of the convention I was in the Donald Trump suite with all his friends and family.”

Fourteen (24.1%) of the fifty-eight statements analyzed in the student journals centered on their willingness to recommend the Washington Center and the Osgood Center programs to others. A huge endorsement for the Osgood Center comes from a student who participated in the Inauguration seminar stating, “I would say that more political science students should attend this trip and hopefully the university will realize the importance of it and provide more money for students to attend, it is definitely a once in a lifetime experience.” An equally strong endorsement for the Washington Center’s Republican Convention program comes from a student who stated, “This is a program that I would recommend to anyone that asked, even if they weren’t a political science major. This is something that I believe everyone should get a chance to experience. People pay thousands of dollars to get a chance just to go to the convention, but they didn’t get the experience like I had while I was there.”

With regard to career and networking opportunities for students during the program(s), the findings seem to suggest that only eight of the fifty-eight coded statements (14%) pertained to those topics. I observed that some students were more confident than others when approaching public figures and politicians. It was normally the same

three students that readily posed questions to the speakers and eagerly approached politicians on the Hill to request photos with them. Nevertheless, one student wrote that, “By participating in the TWC Democratic Convention program and meeting the delegates, journalists and politicians, I became convinced that my career should not only include the study of public policy and politics, but it should also include serving in public office. I will graduate in the spring of 2019 and I am planning to run for office that same year.”

Code	Count
Learning from First-Hand Experience	20
Motivational/Inspirational	16
Career/Networking Opportunity	8
Would Recommend Program	14



### Observations from a Faculty Leader's Perspective

There are enormous benefits that are bestowed upon faculty leaders who are fortunate enough to supervise their own students during these academic seminars. Time and time again, I have observed (not in a scientific way) the tremendous personal development of my students during the seminars. Their growth is readily apparent and continues when they return to campus. After participating in these high-impact experiential learning programs, I have observed that my students:

1. are more culturally, socially, and politically aware;
2. show greater interest in their academic endeavors;
3. are more confident in their own abilities to achieve;
4. assume leadership positions and have a greater appreciation for public service;
5. are better networkers and communicators;
6. have a better understanding of the political process and are able to integrate/synthesize experiential learning with academic learning.

Students from the 2017 Presidential Inauguration seminar and the 2016 National Conventions seminar(s), meet with me regularly and are enrolled in my classes, thus, I am able to continually observe their growth, which is in many ways, immeasurable.

### Concluding Remarks

This work was initialed in an effort to examine whether high-impact experiential learning activities in politics motivate students positively in learning, personal development, and establishing career goals and if so, in what ways? The findings of this work, using both the QDA analysis of students' statements, and faculty participant observations, seem to suggest that the political science students included in this study are indeed positively motivated by high-impact experiential learning activities in politics. Overall, the students reported that their experiences of engaging with leaders in the U.S. government and witnessing the political processes first-hand was inspirational. They found the activities thought provoking, informative and stated that their understanding of how government works was greater than what they gained through reading and in-class experiences. Students said they developed a deeper appreciation of public service and the overall experience supported and motivated personal career choices, often leading to careers in politics. The students overwhelmingly stated that they would recommend these hands-on opportunities, sponsored by the Washington Center and the Osgood Center, to others.

A number of shortcomings of this work are attributable to the researchers newly formed interest in trying to measure/assess the outcomes of the students' experiences. In the past, I thought that it was enough for students to gain the experience, now I realize the need for examining the specific effects of high-impact experiential learning activities on students' learning, personal development and establishing career goals. Hence, in order to improve upon this research, there needs to be an increase in the numbers of participants included in the study for greater analysis. Secondly, a questionnaire or survey should be developed to ask students specific questions regarding networking, career goals, motivation, and inspiration. Third, future research should include a more sophisticated version of the software used to code and assess student's comments. Finally, there should be some effort to track students after they leave the program(s) to determine whether their career choices can be traced directly to the information gleaned and/or the connections made during their participation in experiential learning.

Clearly, I have my work cut out for me. Perhaps, I should end this article and begin the exciting work of tracking down and reviewing the seventeen journals of the students under my supervision for the 2013 Presidential Inauguration program, sponsored by TWC. Long live the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars and the Osgood Center for International Studies! As evident by my career, my students' statements and careers, and the lives and stories of thousands of alumni from your respective programs, your work is truly, TRANSFOMATIONAL!

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