

USAWC students descend on Washington DC, see policy, government in action

Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College Public Affairs

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Members of the Army War College Class of 2011 talk with Congressman Lou Barletta, who represents the 11th District of Pa., during the academic trip to the nation's capitol May 10.

May 12, 2011 -- Anyone who has ever said, “this is much better than the book,” will

understand the Army War College students’ response to government agency visits after nine months of studying interagency and multi-national coordination during a recent trip to the nation’s capital.

During the 2011 National Capital Region Academic Trip nearly 350 USAWC students traveled to Washington DC to talk with members of Congress, and representatives of key government agencies and non-governmental organizations during the three-day academic program, May 9-11.

“The Washington, DC Trip, coming near the end of the academic year, offers a unique opportunity for students to synthesize all that they've been studying for during their time at USAWC thus far,” said Dr. Bill Johnsen, USAWC Dean of Academics. “Small group visits to think tanks, policy organizations, and, especially, Capitol Hill allow our students to observe in real time the policies, practices, and processes to which they've been exposed.”

The trip aims to help the students gain a broader perspective of government and non-government organizations that impact national security policy and national military strategy, with particular emphasis on those with interagency responsibilities. The class splits up into to small group to broaden the experience.

"The Army War College trip to Washington D.C. was an excellent way to see first-hand how our policy makers and elected officials address national security issues," said Lt. Col. Mark Kjorness, student. "The visits to Capitol Hill and hearing from our Congressional members provided unique insights into how legislators balance national defense requirements with local constituent concerns."

"The small group visits gave us an opportunity to discuss the Army's interaction with other agencies and civilian institutions or in some cases even to debate future national strategies," said Danish Lt. Col. Kim Simonsen, student. "It is always beneficial to see the challenges from different angles."

"In the seminar environment, it is very difficult to convey the human dimension of the national security issues we wrestle with and the concepts, frameworks, and processes we teach to work through these issues," said Dr. George Woods, a small group escort and member of the PKSOI staff. The trip to DC puts a face--a human component--to the organizations, agencies, and branches of government that contribute to our collective security."

15 of those students traveled to the headquarters of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to learn more about their programs and have an open dialogue about how they and the military can work together around the world.

"The discussion of civil, military relations at USAID helped me develop a mental picture of the friction that exists between the military and civilian counterparts and leadership, said Col. Elmer Speights, student. "The solution to reducing this friction is better understanding of each other followed by the ability to compromise."

The students and faculty also visited Capitol Hill, to talk face-to-face with the officials about issues facing the nations and the military.



Army War College students met with other government agencies like USAID during their visit.

"The congressional visits sparked discussions with our International Fellows that led to better understanding of the governments in their countries," said Speights. "It is one thing to say that democracy comes in many different forms, it is another thing to actually discuss the differences and how other nations tackle issues

similar to ours such as defense, security, and budgets.”

"Visiting the Senate and the Congress provided an interesting insight into American national politics and the close link to state interests as well as the busy schedule of the Representatives and their staffs," said Simonsen.

Other organizations that hosted visits included the CIA, Department of Homeland Security, the Supreme Court, National Security Agency, Department of Commerce, the Anti-Defamation league and the British Broadcasting Corporation.

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