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Capitol interns find comfort in numbers

By Josh Fatzick - 04/24/12 05:54 PM ET

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Moving to a new city can be a daunting task for anyone. Aside from the possible culture shock, securing a place to live, making new friends, learning how to use public transportation and even finding where to get a quality haircut can be exponentially more challenging alone in unexplored terrain.

These issues are compounded for new interns in Washington, D.C., who, due to the temporary nature of the assignment, are forced to do all these things in short order while working long hours, taking care of school work and trying to squeeze in a little fun along the way.

"We only have one semester here," said Allie Schleisman, an intern in Sen. Saxby Chambliss's (R-Ga.) D.C. office. "So we were always told that everything that you want to do, try to get done as soon as possible because you're gone before you know it, and there is so much to do it just gets really hectic."

Schleisman, who moved from Athens, Ga., for her internship on Capitol Hill, along with 20 of her classmates at the University of Georgia, found a way to bypass loneliness in a big city by participating in an intern housing program called Washington Intern Student Housing (WISH).

"We all live together, and that really helps because everybody that lives in the apartment building is also an intern in D.C.," she said. "Everybody is young and doing the same thing as you, and they have the same sorts of interests. We hang out with everybody, it's been a lot of fun."

WISH has multiple locations within walking distance of Capitol Hill. The organization gives safe and secure housing to all types of interns and students and quiet hours to study if they need it, but more importantly, WISH provides interns with the opportunity to network with other interns who could quite possibly be the future leaders in their chosen fields.

"By the time we are adults and have jobs, some of the people I've met might be working in the nonprofits or in the media, and if I ever need to deal with them I can say 'Oh, I already know somebody,' and I can call them," said Sarah Chambers, a fellow intern in Chambliss's office and resident at WISH.

Schleisman and Chambers both agreed that the most important service provided by WISH, though, was the community they shared in their apartment building and not being forced to go home to an empty house to be alone after work.

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