This summer I was given the opportunity to intern at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress (CSPC or “the Center”) through funding from the Tonya Public Affairs Internship Fund. Located in Washington, D.C., The Center’s goal is to find solutions to today’s public policy issues by providing a forum for open dialogue between representatives of both parties by applying lessons from our political history and through round table discussions brokered by CSPC staff. CSPC also publishes various scholarly writings including the only journal devoted to the study of the presidency, Presidential Studies Quarterly, as well as many books and reports on public policy initiatives. As an intern, I spent the majority of my time researching issues and events that pertained to CSPC’s current initiatives, such as U.S.-Latin America relations, U.S.-Middle East relations and the government’s procurement and acquisition process. I would then compile this information into policy briefs that were included in different reports published by the Center and given to political leaders from both parties.

What attracted me most to working for CSPC this summer was their bipartisan approach to all of the issues that they tackle in their publications and programs. I believe wholeheartedly in their desire to enact change in Washington by bridging the political gaps and preventing governmental gridlock that is so prominent on Capitol Hill. This approach, combined with the nature of being a non-profit company, gives the Center the unique ability
to be an intermediary between the public and their elected officials and also to moderate between opposing opinions. What made working for CSPC particularly great was its small size and the sense of camaraderie throughout the office. Any and all projects taken on by the Center were truly a team effort. The staff members worked hard to make sure that the interns felt valued and included, therefore I was comfortable going to any of them with questions pertaining to a project, life in D.C. or even just advice on what to do after I graduate. This was incredibly helpful considering it was my first time ever being in the city and there were many things I had to learn quickly.

My actual tasks and responsibilities differed from day-to-day and ranged from urgent short-term tasks to projects that we worked on continuously throughout the summer. I spent the majority of the summer working on our Latin America project. When I started in June, the policy team was working on their interim report for the project that would not only go to the project’s funders, but also to different 2016 Presidential Candidates who have a specific interest in Latin America, like Jeb Bush. This report focused on both the direct and indirect effects of the violence that is taking place in that region, particularly in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and what actions the government should take to combat it. It also analyzes the geopolitics of the region and the relationships that the U.S. has with the various countries. Along with research for this report, I also kept a running timeline of the events surrounding the Iran Nuclear Deal for our Middle East project and copy edited submissions
for the Center’s annual presidential Fellows Review, a compilation of research papers written by university students from across the country that participated in the CSPC Fellows Program. Additionally, I was named the company softball intern, which meant I was responsible for writing weekly updates with our game stats and lineup and making sure everyone made it to our extremely important Tuesday night games. This was arguably the most important thing I did for the Center.

Working with CSPC allowed me to attend many events that I would not have heard about had I simply been living in the city. These events covered a wide range of topics including Mexico-Brazil relations and Air Force weapons procurement. Even more important than these were the Center’s highly informational and interesting roundtable discussions I was allowed to attend. These talks provided a space for me to network with some of the most important people in their chosen fields. I realized very quickly how truly important and influential this organization is when I ended up at a CSPC-sponsored talk headed by Henry Kissinger on my very first day. It was truly surreal.

This fantastic experience working for the Center would not have been possible without funding from the Tonya Public Affairs Internship Fund and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity it provided me. The things I learned and the connections I made through working with the Center will be invaluable when I enter the job market after I graduate in 2016. This summer opened my eyes to the vast network of Sewanee alumni that are living in
D.C. and more than willing to help-out young grads. I learned that policy research really excites me and is something that I see myself pursuing as a career after I leave Sewanee.