

**National Millennial Community Trip to Philadelphia
and Washington, DC**

Report to the President's Club

Attended by:

Dr. Matthew J. Kushin

Ellen Buchanan (senior)

Sarah Burke (junior)

Department of Mass Communication

Report

Overview

Dr. Matthew J. Kushin and two students, Ellen Buchanan and Sarah Burke, from the Shepherd University Department of Mass Communication participated in the National Millennial Community (NMC) spring break trip. The trip to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. was from March 11-14th.

The National Millennial Community

Founded in January 2016, the mission of the National Millennial Community is to change the conversation about millennials. The organization has 37 member colleges in 37 states plus the District of Columbia. The organization has taken 18 trips to visit with corporate, foundation, and nonprofit executives.

About the Trip

During the trip, Dr. Kushin and students visited with executives from the following companies, nonprofits, and government agencies:

- WeWork - an international property management group offering space for startups and small businesses
- Tierney - a marketing agency in Philadelphia
- Vault Communications, Inc. - a public relations agency in Philadelphia
- Comcast NBC Universal Corporation - an international media conglomerate
- Republican National Committee (RNC)
- Lockheed Martin Corporation - a government maritime and aerospace contractor
- Burson-Marsteller - a public relations agency
- U.S. Office of Personnel Management - the agency in charge of hiring and placement for all government agencies
- Nestle Corporation - an international consumer packaged goods company
- The White House - this was a self-guided tour
- The White House Executive Staff in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building - the group was briefed by executive staff and discussed the opioid crisis and cyberbullying
- YWCA - an advocacy group that aims to fight racism and empower women
- PBS - a private, nonprofit corporation of America's public television stations

A few of the executives we met with on our trip:

- Ms. Lauren Jacobson, Marketing Associate, Nestle Beverage
- Ms. Melissa Fwu, Associate Director, White House Office of Public Liaison
- Ms. Amy L. Lust, Digital Manager, PBS
- Ms. Jayme Swain. SVP - Strategy and Operations, PBS
- Ms. Jessica Phelan, EVP and Partner, Vault Communications
- Mr. Woody Woodward, VP - Corporate Communications, Rotary and Mission Systems, Sikorsky (A Lockheed Martin Company)

We also ate dinner with:

- A former CIA Agent
- The CEO of the Hannon Group, a public relations agency
- NMC alumni working in government and the private sector, including a communication graduate from Shepherd University who is now working for a marketing agency in Arlington, Virginia: Tessa Sawyers

Key Takeaways

Below are the key takeaways for Dr. Kushin, Ellen Buchanan, and Sarah Burke written in their own words:

Dr. Kushin, Associate Professor of Communication

The trip was an incredible learning experience for me. It was an intensive professional development experience and one that occurred through interaction with over a dozen of the top national and international brands and communication agencies. The opportunity to be exposed to the work these organizations and corporations are doing in the communication space helped in several key respects.

First, the students and I were able to meet top executives at the organizations we visited with. The impact of opening the door for these organizations to see talented students from Shepherd University is invaluable. In effect, it helps put our department on the map and shows that our students are as talented as any students out there.

Second, this trip offered myself and our students a voice in helping bring positive change to the conversation around the millennial generation. We provided feedback on ways these organizations can better harness the talents of young people and helped to counter existing stereotypes. An executive in corporate communication at PBS said to me that she was very impressed by the millennial generation and their level of engagement and caring.

Third, we learned by seeing the research and development phases of communication campaigns. These are skills that I teach our students. For example, in my research class, students learn to conduct interviews and focus groups. In my campaigns class, students conduct interviews and focus groups to test the messaging they are developing. It was insightful to see how different companies approached this process, while identifying consistencies across these organizations. We were able to participate in focus groups and brainstorming sessions with several of the companies that we met with. We provided feedback on the early stages of real PR and marketing campaigns that several at several companies were working on. We offered PBS insights into the news and information consumption habits of millennials to help them better adapt their organization to changing consumer habits and demographics. It was clear to me that the companies truly valued our feedback and planned to take it into consideration. To have that kind of input helped our students see how what they are learning is used in the corporate world and the impact these techniques can have.

Fourth, we were able to see how several of the organizations we met with were striving to address key social issues that we discuss in my classes. Having this exposure takes an abstract classroom concept and makes it real. I am able to walk back into the classroom and demonstrate how these issues are being tackled outside of the university setting. For example, both Comcast NBC and YWCA discussed the importance of bridging the digital divide and

getting high-speed Internet access to low income and rural areas. Comcast NBC discussed their Internet Essentials corporate social responsibility initiative aimed at addressing this issue. This helped students see the role of corporate social responsibility, which we discuss in my classes. YWCA approaches this issue from an advocacy standpoint, working to affect public policy and provide outreach.

Fifth, our students were exposed to key life lessons in leadership and professionalism that one simply cannot get in the classroom. Sarah, Ellen and I had several discussions about the leadership styles we observed from senior executives at various companies. Students received input from employees at various companies on tips for interviewing, finding a company that is a good fit, and professional development. In another case, we received advice from an entrepreneur we met at WeWork on ambition, seeking opportunity, and lifelong learning. In fact, he encouraged us to read two books that I am already using in my classes.

Sixth, I was able to identify possible opportunities to enhance our department. In speaking with PBS, I learned about opportunities to potentially connect the upstart TV station in our department with PBS. I'll be passing this information on to our department chair.

Lastly, doors were opened to possible future internship and networking opportunities. At several organizations, we were encouraged to tell the students to apply for internships and jobs as they became available.

Ellen Buchanan, senior communication student

I found the experience of visiting so many corporate companies and discussing topics with executives and other students to be so enlightening and unlike anything I am able to experience in class on a regular basis. It was wonderful to hear from so many other perspectives from across the nation and be apart of a group that stands for one goal, changing the conversation about the Millennial generation. Experiences like this are not things that can be taught in a classroom, but I have found to be invaluable and life-changing as I finish my undergraduate career at Shepherd.

For me, on this trip I was able to concretely establish exactly what I would like to do as career, and it gave me the opportunities to learn more about the career field of public relations. I was able to experience first-hand what it would be like to work in an agency setting. The things I saw showed me that the education I am receiving is preparing me for a career. For example, in the Strategic Campaigns class taught by Dr. Kushin, we work in groups to develop our own campaigns for a local client and at the end of the semester, we present the campaigns to the client and the client decided which they would like to pursue further. At places like Tierney and Vault Communications, I was able to see the campaigns they had completed and compare them to the one I worked on in class. It was amazing to see how the work I was doing in class was very similar to the work they were doing when completing a campaign.

As I am looking for companies to begin my career at, the National Millennial Community has been able to open doors for me and show me companies I otherwise would not have been interested in. An example would be Lockheed Martin. Before, when I thought about Lockheed Martin, I pegged them as an engineering company that dealt with the military. Now, I think of them as a company not only committed to keeping United States military members safe, but also as a company with lots of growing potential and a possible place of employment. Talking with these employees as a valuable opportunity for me to see what their company was actually

like on the inside. I was able to assess whether I thought I would fit in well or not. As a group, we were also able to change their opinions on which schools they should be recruiting employees from. We were able to show them that talent can stem from smaller schools and they should broaden their search when hiring new employees. This was both a learning experience for me, but also for them, as they were able to pick the brains of 31 young millennial students.

This trip would not have been possible without Dr. Kushin, Bill Imada, and President Hendrix. The experiences I have had on this trip have been invaluable and I am forever grateful for them committing their time and resources to bettering my education.

Sarah Burke, junior communication student

Sarah Burke

The bus pulled over to let us off as the White House shined in the distance. After clambering off the bus, the group walked to the front of the gate protecting the White House and began taking pictures, both solo and in groups. We walked past the United States Treasury building and, after swiftly going through three security checkpoints, we arrived at the West Wing of the White House. As I walked down the corridor, on the left were several photos of the previous presidents during their campaigns, during their time in office, and while with their families and beloved pets. At the end of the corridor, the doors to the china room and library were open for viewing tourists before they ascend the marble stairs that led to the ballroom, red room, blue room, green room, and the formal dining room on the second floor. Each of the rooms had painted portraits of previous presidents and their wives. At the end of the tour our group saw the staircase that led to the President's courters. Upon exiting the West Wing, our group noticed a collection of people protesting outside the White House gates for National Walkout Day in support of the 17 people that passed in the Parkland, Florida school shooting. We were shuffled to the side and instructed to wait for a security personnel to escort us across the grounds, past the East Wing and to the steps of the Eisenhower building.

After having our ID's checked once again, three White House workers and a security personnel escorted us to the Eisenhower building. At this point within the visit we were not allowed to continue taking photos. We were taken to a room and awaited our speakers for the briefing, Steve Munisteri, deputy assistant to the President, Andrew Giuliani, public liaison assistant to the President, and Laura Pence, policy advisor to the Senior Counselor. Mr. Munisteri began the briefing with the history of the White House and how the operations within the organization work. After being briefly interrupted, a conversation opened up about the opioid crisis and how the government is trying to prevent opioid addiction but also rehabilitate the current addicts around the country. From there my fellow community members asked questions surrounding how to increase growth in certain areas to avoid an influx of opioid addictions, how to eliminate opioids, specifically heroin, within communities that already have prevalent addiction cases and if there will be an availability to stock drugstores with over the counter Narcan. Ms. Pence answered a few questions before having to leave for another meeting.

As time ran out, I began to get nervous I wouldn't be able to ask my question. Bill Imada told the group that our time was up yet Mr. Giuliani stated that he would take one more question. As I shot my hand into the air, the two members beside me pointed to me, grabbing Mr. Giuliani's attention. I stood up and spoke with determination even though my heart was

pounding, "Sarah Burke, state of West Virginia. I love my state but some of you may not know [directing my voice to the rest of the group] West Virginia is one of the poorest states in the country. Most of our poverty is due to an increase of opioids and opioid addiction [directing back to Mr. Giuliani] so I have a question that has two parts to it. You stated that the government is trying to decrease the overprescribing of opioids, could you give an example on how exactly you plan to do that? The second part of the question is, I live in the Eastern Panhandle, the majority of our drugs and opioid addiction cases are in the south, the southern part of the state. I don't know the people in the southern part of the state so how am I to help them, how can I help my state? How can they help their states with this issue?" To this Mr. Giuliani said thank you and began to explain that the government is issuing a policy some time in the next few weeks that will limit the amount opioids a doctor can prescribe. The policy limits the amount to seven days' worth and will be release when the President travels to New Hampshire.

As for helping our states, Mr. Giuliani stated that a new interface will be released soon that will allow people to share their stories and testimonies of their struggles with opioid addiction in hopes to create a safe and welcoming environment to those recovering or planning to recover. He stated that the team working on this issue is struggling to find what works for combating this crisis so anything would help them. I said thank you and sat down as the briefing ended.

As we filed out the door, I met up with Mr. Giuliani once again and began to discuss the process of drug court and the positive numbers that West Virginia has began to see with drug court cases and numbers of recovery. He found the drug court success a surprise and I recommended he watch a documentary called *Heroin(e)* that details the opioid crisis in Huntington, WV from the first responders to the drug court judge and how they combat this crisis first hand. I had to depart so I shook Mr. Giuliani's hand, reminded him of the title once again and stepped on the elevator before the doors closed. I found another member, Bella from Ohio, and we discussed ways to help out our states dealing with opioid addiction as we walked out of the ground and to our bus. Our group was buzzing from my question and as I met up with Dr. Kushin again on the bus he remarked that everyone was energized by the question I asked in the meeting. I found the meeting to be both energizing and depleting. From our meeting, it seemed our government had no leads on how to truly help the opioid crisis apart from adding pressure to doctors prescribing these drugs. Ms. Pence had stated, "There's no silver bullet to this issue," Meaning there's not one solution to this complicated crisis. Yet I felt energized and proud that I was able to stand up and represent the state of West Virginia at the White House.

This trip was incredibly eye-opening to me. I joined this organization to help the generation of millennials change the stereotypes and negative connotations surrounding us, little did I know organizations wanted to listen. It was incredible to talk to so many companies and to see them taking notes on what we were saying, engaging with our group, and treating us like the young adults we are. I learned what those companies were expecting of us while we taught them how to reach us better. The National Millennial Community calls each other a family and that's what we truly are, a family trying to help better the future one conversation at a time. I couldn't have gone without the help of Dr. Kushin, Bill Imada, and President Hendrix; they've invested their time and resources into me and this is something that I find irreplaceable.

Summary

In summary, this trip was an incredible exposure and learning opportunity for Shepherd University communication department students and faculty. We were collectively exposed to eight major brands or PR agencies, the Republican National Committee, the executive staff of the White House, an advocacy non-profit, and the Office of Personnel Management. Second, it provides us a voice with major brands and government entities as a representative of our state and our university. Third, it showed our students a diversity of potential career pathways. Fourth, it provided networking and relationship opportunities for the students and myself. Fifth, it demonstrated to these organizations the quality of talent we have here at Shepherd.

Lastly, Dr. Kushin has already had other students approach him and inquire about joining our chapter of the National Millennial Community. As such, trips like these have the potential to offer students an opportunity to get more involved on campus - which can help with retention and satisfaction with one's education at Shepherd - while serving as a recruiting story for our department.

Future Goals

This trip was truly life-changing for the professor and the students. It is Dr. Kushin's goal to identify a long-term funding source to provide one student a year the ability to attend one of these trips. Dr. Kushin has had early conversations with Dean Benedict about possibly approaching the WISH foundation to assess their interest in the possibility of creating a small grant to support a promising female student. Females remain underrepresented in leadership positions at large corporations.

Dr. Kushin has had contact with the Shepherd University Foundation. However, while no funding sources have been identified thus far, he is going to maintain contact with them in search of future opportunities.

PR for University

The following PR resulted from this trip:

- Shepherd University News - <http://www.shepherd.edu/news/kushin-burke-and-buchanan-participate-in-national-millennial-community-trip/>
- Harold Mail - https://www.heraldmailmedia.com/news/tri_state/west_virginia/kushin-burke-and-buchanan-participate-in-national-millennial-community-trip/article_a7012b68-33b0-11e8-9b42-c766e6789ba7.html
- The Martinsburg Journal - <http://www.journal-news.net/life/in-our-neighborhood/2018/03/su-students-participate-in-national-millennial-community-trip/>