**NZ US Council**

**Mike Moore Congressional Internship Programme:**

**Information for Participating Universities**

**Introduction**

The NZ US Council was founded in 2001 as a non-partisan, non-Government organisation, focused on advancing New Zealand’s relationship with the United States. The Council secured a position as a preeminent policy conduit for business, academia and others invested in NZ US connections. The organisation engages in formal and informal government and business processes involving the US.

Underpinning the Council’s current strategy is a desire to broaden the narrative relating to the US, recognise the extraordinary breadth, value and potential of the relationship and encourage ongoing engagement with, and commitment to, a stable rules-based approach to all aspects of bilateral, multilateral and plurilateral cooperation.

**Background**

Shortly after the Christchurch earthquakes, Rt Hon Mike Moore supported efforts to bolster an existing internship programme to facilitate students (normally four per year) from NZ spending time interning for members of Congress. His perspective was partly grounded in a desire to support Canterbury University during a period of rebuilding. But it quickly became evident that other universities were interested in such a programme.

The idea was to give university students real world experience of US policy processes while developing contacts and more nuanced insights into what drives US politics.

The placements, coordinated by our Embassy in Washington DC, involve facilitating interns to work in the offices of politicians on Capitol Hill. The Embassy looks first to people who are engaged with NZ and/or the sort of areas of particular interest to us.

The programme has been an incredible success and previous interns have gone on to do a range of impressive things – many of which reflect the utility and experience of their time in the US.

COVID derailed the Council’s ability to continue and grow the opportunities offered to the students but now, with a lot of support from our partners – especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, we are poised to get everything back on track for this year.

The opportunity is particularly valuable for students who have an international component to their career aspirations and are curious about the intersection between politics, business, legal and policy frameworks, and networking.

**How it worked before COVID interrupted**

The NZ US Council and participating universities each contributed roughly a third of the costs. (Air NZ providing its support in kind via return airfares to Washington DC).

MFAT provided a degree of pastoral support in Washington DC, worked hard to secure good spots on the Hill and to keep in touch with interns through some Embassy events.

The logistics relating to acquiring visas (J 1) and finding appropriate accommodation in DC were outsourced by the Embassy to companies with specialist knowledge in those areas. But the Embassy was directly involved in vetting suggested accommodation options and, where possible, finding places that could see the interns being housed together. So, in summary, the interns have all the arrangements made for them by the NZ US Council, MFAT and Air New Zealand. A small daily stipend is paid although interns are encouraged to fundraise for or contribute to discretionary expenses.

On return from the US, several of the former interns continued to be integrated into various Council activities – at least for a period. Air New Zealand helped to facilitate internal travel for interns to engage with high level visitors and participate, occasionally, in some diplomatic and private sector activities with a US focus.

**2023**

We have put in place the necessary steps to run the intern programme in late 2023. Per precedence, we would envisage letting the interns know of their selection by mid-August which mean universities selecting their preferred candidates by the end of July. Interns would leave NZ (pending confirmation of exam scheduling) around 11 November and stay in Washington DC for a period of eight weeks. That said, some may choose to see some more of the US at their own expense after their tenure in DC ends and that is an option for them as long as it conforms with the visa stipulations.

**Who are we looking for and how do they apply?**

For visa reasons, candidates must be a NZ citizen and need to have nothing on their record that would make them ineligible for a visa.

In terms of initial selection, we rely on the Universities in the first instance. Universities normally explain the origin and purpose of the programme to interested students and invite possible candidates to apply. A representative of the Council would be happy to talk to students and answer questions should that be deemed helpful. Generally, the candidates submit a CV and a letter explaining why they are interested in becoming an intern. Some candidates also choose to submit of short video giving a bit more background about their interest in the US, what they are studying and where they see it leading them.

From a shortlist (normally three if one intern is going or four if two are being selected) the NZ US Council, in collaboration with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, make a final decision on those who will gain a slot in DC.

When the universities, MFAT and the Council got together some years ago to discuss the sort of people who would benefit from the programme it was clear that those likely to benefit most were:

-Comfortable working in different environments and spaces with people running multiple agendas and often running at pace.

-Realistic about the fact that quite a bit of intern activity involves administration, coordination and working in the background.

- Keen to be proactive in developing connections and relationships.

-Able to present and articulate NZ perspectives, where appropriate, accurately, and constructively. There is a youth Ambassador component of the exercise.

-Skilled at reading a room to assess how to respond to different environments at different times.

Proactive in seeking to capitalise on the range of activities and opportunities open to the large cohort of interns working on the Hill.

Penny Tucker

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NZ US Council

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