

a change

WASN'T PART OF THE PLAN

A service trip to New Orleans changed Kyle Shong's life and career path forever

By Debbie Richard, '02, '04, Assistant Director of Marketing

Kyle Shong spent the summer interning in U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown's Cleveland office. Working as an office administrative assistant, Shong had a wide variety of tasks. One was answering the phones.

"You never knew what to expect when you picked up the phone. One day I took a call and found myself talking to a distraught mother. Her son had been critically injured while on vacation in Canada. Unfortunately, she didn't have a passport to get to Canada, and she was hoping the Senator could help," said Shong. "Other calls were regarding political issues, Social Security benefits, help with foreclosures. It could have been almost anything."

Along with helping the mother obtain permission to cross the border to Canada, Shong helped seniors with Social Security questions and concerns and even attended a naturalization ceremony as Sen. Brown's representative. "We advocated where we could. If a senior was denied Social Security benefits, we would call the person's local Social Security office and try to help. However, sometimes we couldn't do anything. I had a call from a lady whose house was being foreclosed on the next day. Normally we could have helped advocate for the family, but we needed more time than a day. Unfortunately we couldn't help her."

Through the good and bad, it was a great opportunity for Shong. After graduation this spring, he plans to attend graduate school for a master's in public policy and then hopes to work for either the State Department or USAID.

Shong didn't always want to be in public service. Originally from Defiance, he came to DC planning to graduate with

a degree in education. However, that all changed when he traveled his freshman year to New Orleans, just a little over a year after Hurricane Katrina had blown through.

"We went to New Orleans to help clean-up and also assisted the local city council," said Shong. "Politics played a big part in the aftermath of the devastation. This is what got me interested in politics, and I switched my major."

Along with the great opportunities during his travels and internship, Shong is busy on

campus. He's a member of Phi Alpha Theta (History) honor society, honors program, Citizen Leader, McMaster Scholar to Belize, president of Student Senate and has spoken at and attended many college functions, including being asked to be a member of the presidential search committee.

Shong has many memories from DC. One of his favorites is from a trip to Spain during his sophomore year. It was an Honors program trip and each student was studying a particular area of culture. Shong's area was

Gibraltar, a British governed area within Spain. His project was to give a historical run-down of the area. Along the way, he also had a chance to play with the protected Gibraltar monkeys and to sight-see.

Shong holds the same idealism that many students have as they near graduation. Their slate is clean, and it's now time to start writing on it. They can go anywhere, do anything, however, deciding which path to take is sometimes the hardest. It's another great opportunity waiting to happen. Armed

with the experiences and education found at DC, Shong is sure to find an exciting future awaiting him. ♦



Kyle with U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, above, and in Belize with Ivan Gillett of the Programme for Belize, at right.

