

# Inside the Beltway

## *Professor immerses students into the real world of politics*

For the past nine years, Associate Professor Sean Theriault has taken a group of undergraduate students to the nation's capital to learn, behind the scenes, how the legislative process works and to test their research against the reality of Beltway politics.

This year's group of 10 undergraduate researchers met with the chiefs of staff to House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT).



*Professor Sean Theriault (second from left) takes students to Washington, D.C. to see the legislative process firsthand.*

At meetings with officials from the Congressional Research Service, the House Legislative Counsel's office and the House Parliamentarian's office, students learned how members of Congress rely on nonpartisan professionals for research and guidance.

A special assistant to President Obama gave them an inside view of presidential decision making.

“Through the people we meet and what they show us, our eyes are opened and we gain newfound respect for the political process and the professionals who make it work,” Theriault says.

“The students come away appreciating politics more because they see how it works outside the spotlight of TV cameras. They see that behind the media show, staffers are figuring out how to get the details right so that legislation, when passed, will actually do what it is supposed to,” says Theriault.

“After the trip, the students appreciate political science more because they see how well our theories (and their own) hold up inside the real world of politics,” Theriault says.

Meetings with University of Texas alumni proved particularly valuable. Theriault’s former students work for an array of Capitol Hill offices, lobby groups, campaign organizations and interest groups. Meeting these alumni opens students’ eyes to career possibilities and has even led to job offers.