This summer, I interned with the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) in Washington, D.C. NCPC is the federal planning agency for the national capital region and works in conjunction with the local government of the District of Columbia to manage the city both as a hometown and as the nation’s capital. Its primary function is to review projects affecting federal interests in the region, such as monuments, public space, federal buildings, and any project affecting the skyline and views of the Capitol and National Mall. During my two and a half months there, I worked in their Office of Public Engagement collecting news clips of interest to the agency, generating content for their social media outlets, and writing newsletters and reports. In addition, I created diagrams related to the Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative and wrote content for the website of the Urban Design Element of the Comprehensive Plan. I also had the opportunity to sit in on Commission and public meetings, talks with other capital cities, and even a conference call with Frank Gehry’s firm regarding its controversial design for the Eisenhower Memorial.

In this position, I saw how a government agency chooses to represent its complicated inner workings for the public. Each newsletter, image, and even Twitter post is carefully crafted and must undergo multiple iterations before it is ready to be seen by the public. This experience certainly gives me new perspectives on public participation in contrast to my previous experiences with grassroots organizations. Beyond what is readily visible to the average citizen, there are complex internal political structures projects must go through.

Living in DC was an exciting experience. Being at NCPC helped me learn the city and appreciate its many facets as both the capital and a local city. For example, DC must balance its monumental and symbolic spaces such as the National Mall with vibrant human scaled spaces. Cal in the Capital, the UC Berkeley Public Service Center program I participated in, provides housing for University of California in the heart of downtown, making it convenient to explore the city and its many networking events. While I was there, I attended events by national Asian American organizations and saw how their components at the local, state, and national levels interact. It was exciting to be in the capital, where change felt both possible because of its many driven citizens and impossible because of bureaucracy.
Gallery Place - Chinatown Metro Station. My Metro stop for work.

Courtyard at the National Portrait Gallery. Canopy designed by Norman Foster. A frequent lunch spot during my internship.
My office at the National Capital Planning Commission.

Public Meeting for the Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative in the NCPC Commission Chambers.
J. Edgar Hoover Building, FBI headquarters. Rooftop view from work.

Celebration at the Capitol for the 70th Anniversary of the Liberation of Guam.

Dumbarton Oaks Garden.
Fireworks on the Fourth of July, viewed from the steps of the Capitol.

I Have a Dream etched into the base of the Lincoln Memorial.
View of the Capitol on my way to weekly events by the Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership.

Catholic University School of Architecture, viewed while attending a conference by the local American Planning Association.