

Panetta Institute Congressional Internship

Fall 2026

Applications due March 25, 2026

The Panetta Institute for Public Policy, located at CSU, Monterey Bay, offers an outstanding opportunity for a Chico State undergraduate student to get an inside look at the workings of the U.S. Congress and Washington politics.

Each year, the Panetta Institute invites CSU presidents to nominate one outstanding student from each campus to participate in the fall semester Congressional Internship Program. This internship is open to students who will be juniors or seniors in fall 2026 with **fewer than 120 units** of college credit.

Outstanding students from **all majors** are encouraged to apply.

The Panetta Institute Congressional Intern Program begins in mid-August 2026 with an intensive orientation program at CSU, Monterey Bay. Students meet with seasoned governmental veterans who explain how the legislative process in Congress actually works. Then each intern is assigned to the Capitol Hill office of a member of the California congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. for the remainder of the fall semester.

The Costs of the Program Are Fully Covered

The program guarantees every student has the opportunity to participate by providing for all associated costs: tuition, food and housing, transportation and a stipend. Students earn academic credit while in Washington, D.C. through CSU, Monterey Bay's Social and Behavioral Sciences Division.

Applications due by 12:00 noon on WEDNESDAY **March 25, 2026**

Email all materials to Professor Fernandes
Department of Political Science & Criminal Justice
dfernandes@csuchico.edu

Questions? Contact Professor Fernandes - dfernandes@csuchico.edu

<https://www.panettainstitute.org/programs/study-with-us/congressional-intern-training/>

Panetta Institute Congressional Internship
How to apply for the Panetta Institute Congressional Internship

Review the attached materials, then put together an application that includes the following:

- A completed Panetta Congressional Internship Application Form (see next page)
- A **two-page essay** stating the reasons you are interested in the Panetta Institute's Congressional Internship Program (typed and double spaced).
- A completed *References Form* (see below) that includes the name, phone number and email address of **two (2) faculty members who will serve as references for you**. (Make sure to give each of them this document for their reference.)
- Your **complete college transcripts**, including community college work and/or other college/university work (unofficial transcripts are fine).
- A current one-page **resume**.
- A copy of **one of a recent graded paper** (at least three pages long, WITH the grading comments on the paper).

(Additional materials may be requested.)

Email your applications materials to Professor Fernandes (dfernandes@csuchico.edu) by **12:00 noon on March 25, 2026**

Questions? Contact Professor Fernandes
dfernandes@csuchico.edu

Panetta Institute Congressional Internship
Application Information

Submit this form with your application by 12 noon on March 25, 2026

Name of Applicant _____

Chico State Student ID# _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone Number _____

Chico State E-mail _____

Major _____ Minor (if applicable) _____

Number of units completed as of August 2025 _____

Cumulative GPA _____ Chico State GPA _____

Are you a first-generation student? _____

- I authorize the faculty members of the selection committee to review my educational record in conjunction with this application.
- I understand that the Panetta Institute requires the following:
 - A background check is required prior to nomination and final selection for the Panetta Congressional Intern Program, and I agree to cooperate with the background check process.
 - Must provide proof of health insurance that is compliant with the Affordable Care Act and that covers me while residing and working in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and in Northern California
 - Must provide copies of the full vaccination (including booster vaccines) for COVID-19
 - Must provide a copy of a government-issued photo identification card
 - U.S. citizenship is required and must be a California resident
 - Never been sanctioned under the California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Article (Student Discipline), Section 41301.
 - Must not have held this Panetta internship in previous years.

Applicant's signature _____

Date _____

Panetta Institute Congressional Internship

References

Submit this form with your application to dfernandes@csuchico.edu by 12 noon on March 25, 2026

Name of Applicant: _____

Please provide the name, phone number and email address of two (2) faculty members who we may contact to discuss your qualifications for the Panetta Congressional Internship. *Please print clearly.*

Reference #1:

Name: _____

Employer/Department: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Your relationship to this reference: _____

Reference #2:

Name: _____

Employer/Department: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Your relationship to this reference: _____

I have provided the references listed above with the Panetta Institute Congressional Internship application materials, and I agree to waive my access to any information collected from these references and any letters of recommendation regarding my application for the Panetta Congressional Internship.

Applicant's signature _____

Date _____



The Panetta Institute for Public Policy

Congressional Internship Program Description

The Panetta Institute extends its mission of service through its *Congressional Internship Program*. This program is open to undergraduate students in their junior or senior year with an interest in public service within any academic discipline from the twenty-three California State Universities and three private colleges and universities. This internship provides the opportunity to work and live within the rich cultural, historical and political heritage of our nation's capital. As interns with Congress, students gain firsthand exposure to the American political process while attaining professional learning experience that offers meaningful, practical work experience and provides an opportunity for career exploration and development.

The sponsor and donors of the Panetta Institute make it possible to offer this opportunity without regard to a student's financial background. Since the Panetta Institute pays all expenses, any qualified student can participate regardless of family income. Student selection is based on exemplary scholastic record, potential for a public service career and interest in politics.

Two-Week Orientation

A fundamental part of the *Congressional Internship Program* academic curriculum is the two-week orientation designed to supplement the intern's experience through attending and participating in the class sessions, and then completing reflective, substantive session reviews. Experts in their respective fields' present seminars during this orientation. During the first week of the orientation, seminars concentrate on: United States Congress, the legislative process of regular order, House of Representatives parliamentary rules and procedures, budget and appropriations process, congressional committees and structure, elections, congressional-presidential relations, federal and state relations, American jurisprudence as lead by the U.S. Supreme Court and the role of a free press in a democracy.

Guest Speakers

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in a democracy. Added to the program, students participated in a budget reconciliation exercise and a focused three-part consensus building exercise as well as receive targeted lessons on communication skills in a Congressional office and policy writing.

During the orientation, the Panetta Institute provides students with guidance for the congressional office placement process. Included in the program are special one-to-one meetings that are solely dedicated to prepare interns for interviews with the congressional offices. These sessions emphasize good interviewing techniques and aim to improve student awareness of any speech or behavioral mannerisms that might detract from a successful interview. The Panetta Institute then arranges interviews with Congressional staff members and secures each student's appointment to intern for a congressional office.

In 2025, the orientation classes began on Saturday, August 9 and were the first part of the thirteen-week hands-on learning experience for accomplished, civic-minded young people. Noted experts from the East and West Coast, along with national, state and local elected representatives speak directly with the interns and provide them with a strong foundation for their work in different Representative's offices.

Secretary Panetta taught classes on the founding and creation of the American Republic and the role of a member of Congress. Additional policy issues to be covered during this orientation included: national security; foreign policy; the impact of the press and media on politics; fiscal and monetary policy; economic and the budget; health policy and economics; wealth and income inequality; access to health and education resources; election reform; criminal justice reform; immigration; climate change; education; and cyber security.

Below is a list of the speakers and topics during the 2025 orientation course:

John Arquilla, Ph.D., distinguished professor emeritus, Defense Analysis Department, Naval Postgraduate School on cyber security and national security.

Dan Balz, chief correspondent, The Washington Post and Carla Marinucci of Politico on the impact of the press and media on politics.

Sonia Banks, Esq., LL.M., Panetta Institute professor on congressional organization and the committee structure.

The Hon. Kim Barber, City Council Member, City of Monterey will present with The Hon. Kathy Biala, City Council Member, City of Marina and The Hon. Tyler Williamson, Mayor, City of Monterey on serving local constituencies and urban policy.

Jeremy Bash, Esq., national security analyst for NBC Nightly News, chief of staff to the Secretary of Defense (2011-2013) and chief of staff to the Director of the CIA (2009-2011) on the role and responsibility of the intelligence community.

Theresa Cardinal Brown, senior advisor, immigration and border policy, Bipartisan Policy Center on immigration policy.

Paulette Cha, Ph.D., research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California on income social policy interpretation in health and education.

The Hon. Ming Chin, former associate justice of the Supreme Court of California discussed recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court and the role of the Judiciary Branch.

Chris Christie, 55th governor of the State of New Jersey discussed presidential elections and their impact on policy outcomes and the direction of the nation.

Ryan Coonerty, former 3rd District supervisor, Santa Cruz County on election reform and how to secure our democracy.

James Copeland, former White House deputy assistant to President Jimmy Carter and Les Francis, former deputy chief of staff to President Jimmy Carter, addressed relations between the executive and legislative branches.

Jim Cunneen, former assemblyman, 24th District, California State Assembly and Fred Keeley, Mayor of Santa Cruz presented as part of a special three part exercise on consensus building.

Ambassador Rahm Emanuel former mayor of Chicago and chief of staff for President Barack Obama on a course on the Executive Branch.

Sam Farr, former United States representative, 17th/20th District, California, discussed the role or a member of Congress and the challenge of simultaneous serving your constituency and your country.

Kristen Fletcher, Esq., LL.M. faculty associate at the Naval Postgraduate School presented on energy security and resilience.

Hector Flores, M.D., founding member and co-director of the White Memorial Medical Center Family Residency Program on healthcare.

Michèle Flournoy, former under-secretary of defense for policy on global flash points including Russia and China.

Heather Harris, Ph.D., research fellow, Public Policy Institute of California discussed reforms in the criminal justice system.

Jeffrey Horwitt, partner, Hart Research Associates, covered the findings of the 2025 Panetta Institute Youth Civic Engagement Survey.

Richard Kezirian, Ph.D., Panetta Institute professor taught the history of the U.S. Congress.

The Hon. John Laird, senator, 17th District, State of California Senate California and former secretary of California natural resources on the importance of protecting California's natural resources.

Stephanie Leonard, director of research at Next 10 led the students in an interactive exercise on the state budget.

Marina Lesse, faculty associate at the Naval Postgraduate School addressed the Interconnectedness of Energy, Climate, and Environmental Policy.

Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget presented on the nation's fiscal challenges, the budget, deficit and national debt.

Joe Minarik, Ph.D., former chief economist of the Office of Management and Budget and senior vice president and director of research for the Committee for Economic Development, taught two courses: one on the economy and the budget of the United States, and the other on trade policy.

Admiral Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed defense and emerging threats around the globe.

The Hon. Janet Napolitano, former president of the University of California, former secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and former governor of Arizona discussed the challenges facing higher education.

Stephen Palumbi, Ph.D. professor of Marine Biology at Stanford's Hopkins Marine Station taught on environmental policy.

The Hon. Jimmy Panetta, United States representative, 19th District, California, discussed Congress and the power of the purse, the Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees.

Simón Salinas, former 3rd District supervisor, Monterey County and former assemblyman, 28th District, California State Assembly, taught on the relationship between state and local governments.

Jason Smith, J.D., parliamentarian, United States House of Representatives, instructed the interns on parliamentary procedure and the institutions and traditions of the House.

Matt Spence, Ph.D., J.D., former deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East covered Middle East politics, relations and current affairs.

Fernando Torres-Gil, Ph.D., former United States assistant secretary on aging and professor of social welfare and public policy, University of California, Los Angeles, taught on the politics and challenges of aging and diversity in the 21st century.

Tess Thorman, senior research associate at The Public Policy Institute of California discussed wealth and income disparity.

During their two weeks at the Panetta Institute, students were invited to attend three social events hosted by members of the Panetta Institute Board of Directors.

Congressional Internship in Washington D.C.

During the orientation, the Panetta Institute conducts intensive phone interview training sessions with each student to prepare them for their phone interview with a Congressional office within the California delegation in Washington, D.C. The Panetta Institute then arranges interviews with Congressional staff members and secures each student's appointment to intern for a congressional office.

Following the two-week orientation at the Panetta Institute, interns begin their two and one-half months internships for a member of the California congressional delegation on Capitol Hill.

Washington D.C. Seminars

Another unique feature of the *Congressional Internship Program* is the scope and quality of experts the Panetta Institute invites to teach seminars on policy issues that interns attend while working on Capitol Hill. The purpose of the D.C. seminars comes from the vision of Secretary Leon E. Panetta and CEO Sylvia M. Panetta to expand students' understanding of the application of politics and policy by professionals who are actually working at the top levels within their fields in the nation's capital and to further expose students to the importance of reaching consensus and compromise in order to discover possible paths of bipartisanship.

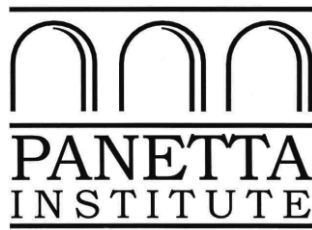
In 2025, the interns attended the following seminars in D.C.:

- **U.S. Supreme Court** – tour and lecture with Jamil N. Jaffer, Esq., Founder, National Security Institute, Adjunct Professor of Law on *Significant U.S. Supreme Court cases and the Judicial Branch*
- **U.S. Department of the Treasury** – tour and lecture with Yasmeeen Wanees, Policy Advisor for Committee on Foreign Investments on *Foreign Investments and Tariffs*
- **Pentagon** – tour and lecture with Christian Gilbert, Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Director, Foreign Materiel Program on *National Security*
- **U.S. Department of State** with Mia Gilstrap, Policy Advisor for the Middle East on *Foreign Policy*
- **Floor of the U.S. House of Representatives** – tour and lecture with Parliamentarian Jason Smith on *House Rules*
- **U.S. Capitol** – tour and lecture with Kristen Donahue, Public Relations Officer for the U.S. House of Representatives on *History, Purpose and Organization of the U.S. Capitol*
- **Meeting with Secretary Leon Panetta** on *Working in a Congressional Office*
- **Seminar with Jeff Horwitt** of Hart Research Associations on *Review of Current Polling and Insights into Polling Methodology*
- **Watergate Building** – tour and lecture with Pat Griffin on *A Lobbyist's viewpoint on How Washington Works*
- **FBI Headquarters** – tour and lecture with Mathew Kowalewski, Public Relations Director on *The Justice Department and How the FBI Works*
- **With Honor** – all day seminar on *Foreign Policy*
- **Congressional Hispanic Caucus** with Congressmembers The Hon. Pete Aguilar, The Hon. Nanette Diaz Barragan and The Hon. Jimmy Gomez
- **Annual Meeting and Dinner of the Committee for Responsible Federal Budget** with Maya MacGuinness
- **Axios/One Decision Forum** with Secretary Panetta and Reporter Colin Demarest on *Global Affairs and Key Insights*

- **Library of Congress** with Jerry Mansfield on *Purpose, History and Congressional Research Service*
- **Seminar with the Hon. Tom Daschle** on *Politics in Washington*
- **Seminar with Congressman Sam Liccardo (D)** on *Insights of a First-Term Member*
- **Seminar with Congressman Ken Calvert (R)** on *The U.S. House Committee on Appropriations*
- **Migration Policy Center** – tour and lecture with Doris Meissner, Senior Fellow and Director of U.S. Immigration Policy Program, on *Comprehensive Immigration Reform*
- **Seminar with Chris Peckham** on *Self-Care and Well-Being*
- **International Spy Museum** – tour with exhibitions featuring Secretary Panetta
- **National Archives** – tour and lecture on *U.S. History and the U.S. Constitution*

Academic Work and Credits

The *Congressional Internship Program* is uniquely designed to have an academic focus together with an experiential learning component. **Students receive academic credit for each of the five component parts of the program for a total of twenty academic units.** Students must research and write a twenty-page comprehensive research policy paper. Students are also responsible for writing and submitting a twenty-page academic reflective journal that is a polished compendium of the student's internship experience. Students are further graded on their internship job performance through congressional staff reviews.



The Panetta Institute for Public Policy
2026 Congressional Internship Program
Important Deadline Dates

- Monday, April 27, 2026 – Campus deadline for nominations
- Monday, May 4 – May 22, 2026 – Student interviews with Panetta Institute via zoom
- Friday, June 5, 2026 – Panetta Institute announces intern class of 2026
- Monday, June 15, 2026 – Panetta Institute mails information to interns
- Friday, July 17, 2026 – Deadline for interns to submit information forms to the Panetta Institute
- Friday, August 7, 2026 – Interns arrive at the Panetta Institute
- Saturday, August 8, 2026 – Classes begin at the Panetta Institute
- Friday, August 21, 2026 – Interns depart for Washington, D.C.
- Monday, August 24, 2026 – Interns' first day of internship in assigned Congressional offices
- Friday, November 6, 2026 – Interns' last day of internship in assigned Congressional offices
- Saturday, November 7, 2026 – Interns return to California
- Monday, November 9, 2026 – Interns begin work on the policy paper and reflective journal assignments
- Monday, December 7, 2026 – Interns email policy paper and reflective journal to the Panetta Institute at info@panettainstitute.org by close of business 5:30 p.m.
- Friday, December 18, 2026 – Grades for twenty internship units submitted to CSUMB



The Panetta Institute for Public Policy

March 1, 2026

Steve Perez, Ph.D.
President
Chico State University

Dear Dr. Perez:

The Panetta Institute for Public Policy begins its twenty-eighth annual *Congressional Internship Program* on Friday, August 7, 2026 with students nominated by presidents of the twenty-two campuses of California State University along with two private universities. Due to the efforts of the Panetta Institute, the generosity of its supporters, and the Chancellor of California State University, this exceptional educational opportunity is available to students of all income levels. The Panetta Institute provides a full scholarship covering program courses, travel and lodging costs for each student. The *Congressional Internship Program* offers participating students an extraordinary opportunity to learn and experience politics and policymaking both at the Panetta Institute and in the nation's capital. Additionally, students earn twenty academic units with their successful completion of the Institute's internship.

The Panetta Institute *Congressional Internship Program* has been recognized as one of the premier intern experiences in the country. The program begins with a two-week training and orientation program at the Panetta Institute from Friday, August 7, 2026 through Friday, August 21, 2026. The focus of this training and orientation is to prepare students for their internship work in Washington, D.C. by giving them an in-depth background to understand the most important policy challenges facing our nation. The Panetta Institute invites experts at the top levels within their fields to expand students' understanding of politics and policy. Please refer to and broadly distribute to your students the attached *Congressional Internship Program* Description.

Following the two-week academic orientation at the Panetta Institute, on Friday, August 21, 2026, students will travel to Washington, D.C. for their eleven-week internships with members of the U.S. House of Representatives, both Republican and Democrat, from the California delegation where they will serve through Friday, November 6, 2026. While in Washington, D.C., students are mentored and closely supervised by Panetta Institute faculty in California as well as Panetta Institute staff in Washington, D.C. Another unique feature of the *Congressional Internship Program* also includes weekly seminars on policy issues that the interns attend while working on Capitol Hill and are led by nationally renowned leaders who currently practice in their specialized field.

On Saturday, November 7, 2026, interns will return to California to begin work on the academic requirements of the program: a twenty-page policy paper with evidence of research and analysis, and a twenty-page reflective journal, a polished compendium of the student's intern experience. Both academic written assignments must be submitted by Monday, December 7, 2026 for grading by the Institute professors. The program ends on Friday, December 18, 2026 with the submission of final grades.

We invite you to nominate an outstanding undergraduate student from your university, who is either a matriculating junior or senior during the Fall 2026 term, the period of the internship. Please note that students who have accumulated more than 120 semester units or 180 quarter units prior to Fall 2026 term, the start of the program, are ineligible. Further, the twenty academic units provided through the Institute's *Congressional Internship Program* must be accepted as an integral component of the student's academic transcript.

We ask that each president from the participating campuses nominate only the most qualified student using a rigorous review process that includes an interview by the president prior to sending the letter of nomination to the Panetta Institute. **We also request that each campus designate a backup student nominee.**

Notwithstanding the fact that every student has a compelling and unique background deserving of this opportunity, attached is a Checklist of Required Criteria to guide your selection process. Based on twenty-seven years of experience, students selected on the basis of their exemplary scholastic record; strong written, oral and analytical skills; desire for a public service career; and interest in politics are most successful in the program and reflect best upon their university. The attached Checklist of Required Criteria must be included as part of all outreach information. The Panetta Institute will reasonably accommodate interns with disabilities if the person is otherwise qualified to safely perform all of the essential functions of the position.

To attract the best-qualified students, please ensure broad advertisement of the Panetta Institute's *Congressional Internship Program* throughout the campus community well in advance to ensure that the entire student body is notified. The Panetta Institute *Congressional Internship Program* is open to students in any academic major recognized by the university. All departments on campus must be contacted to recruit for the program. A rigorous interview process must be conducted by a broad-based review committee that, amongst the required criteria, assesses the candidate's clarity of speech, writing skills and overall demeanor and character. Subsequent to the interview by a campus committee, the program expects the president of each university to conduct the final student interview before nominating the student. **Nomination letters by each university president must be received either by mail or email by Monday, April 27, 2026.**

The Panetta Institute interview team will carefully review the college transcripts, resume, and personal statement of interest, references and then schedule an online interview through zoom with the student nominee during the weeks of May 4, 2026 – May 22, 2026. After the student's interview and upon acceptance by the Panetta Institute, students will begin the process for a background investigation. The Panetta Institute reserves the right to reject the nominee if the student fails to meet the Institute's standards set for participation. Students could also be rejected due to the findings of the required background investigation. Qualified candidates must begin the application process at the president's office of their university.

Enclosed are the following documents:

- Checklist of Required Criteria to be completed and signed by either you or a representative of your office and returned with your signed nomination letter. This Checklist also itemizes the documents required to be submitted by each student nominee being considered by the Panetta Institute;
- Important Deadline Dates;
- Congressional Intern Program Description to provide each applicant with information about the program;

- Congressional Internship Position Description to inform and ensure that each applicant knows the type and nature of the internship work that will be involved;
- Program Flyer for distribution in all departments throughout the campus for broad-based recruitment for the most qualified candidate;

We strongly encourage your university's participation in this program. We believe that the educational experience provided by this *Congressional Internship Program* can be and often is a positive turning point in a student's life. We thank you for your cooperation and support and look forward to hearing from you and having a student from your campus join the program.

Sincerely,

Leon E. Panetta
Chairman
The Panetta Institute for Public Policy

Sylvia M. Panetta
Co-Chair and CEO
The Panetta Institute for Public Policy

LEP/SMP:sb
Attachments