

COLLEGE TOPICS FEATURES

FROM THE NEWSROOM TO THE CAPITOL DOME, ALUMNI TURN LESSONS LEARNED AT CD INTO POLITICAL CAPITAL

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Special to College Topics

When former Executive Editor Brian Cook spent one month during winter break his fourth year working for former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean's presidential campaign, he knew politics was for him.

"That's when I knew I would rather go into politics than journalism," said Cook, a 2004 graduate. "Fighting for something—working toward a cause that you believe in—can be an incredible motivator."

Cook, who double-majored in American studies and politics, currently works as a press aide for Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner.

"Where I work now combines both the atmosphere and community of a Cav Daily—a lot of people who are passionate about what they're doing and the sense that you're working toward a common cause," he said.

Over the years, The Cavalier Daily has seen hundreds of writers, editors, columnists, photographers and artists come and go.

Some joined the staff with an active interest in journalism; others wandered into the newspaper's Newcomb Hall office by chance. While staff members graduate and pursue a number of different career paths, many have chosen to work in local, state or

federal government offices. Career choices often are driven by internship and work experience during students' undergraduate years.

Former News Editor Matt Phillips, a history major and 1995 alumnus, said he considered careers in both journalism and politics.

"I was debating early on in school whether to go the political route or the journalism route, and a lot of it was driven by internships and summer jobs," said Phillips, who currently works for the State Department as a special adviser for the Bureau of International Information Programs.

Phillips had internship experiences in both fields—working two summers in his congresswoman's district office in Maryland and also journalism-related externships through University Career Services.

"Ultimately I got more led in the political direction," he said. "During my fourth year I knew I wanted to

work on Capitol Hill—it just sounded like a great place for a 21-year-old just out of college to come."

The summer after he graduated, Phillips applied for several jobs on Capitol Hill before getting hired as a legislative correspondent for Steve Horne, then a Republican Congressman from California.

Former Life Editor Robin Swanson, a foreign affairs major and 1995 graduate, also dabbled in both journalism and political internships as an undergraduate.

Swanson, currently a political consultant for the Sacramento-based Kaufman Campaign Consultants, interned as a reporter at the Charlottesville Observer and as a press aide for University Media Relations. She also interned for EMILY's List, an organization that elects pro-choice Democratic women, which ultimately pushed her toward a political career.

"Because I had interned at EMILY's List I knew I wanted to work in Congress for issues I cared about," Swanson said.

After graduating, Swanson worked as a legislative correspondent for Karen McCarthy, a pro-choice Democratic congresswoman from Kansas City.

A combination of networking with the right people and similar political ideals helped Cook land his current job, where he has worked for about two months.

"I had talked to [Warner Press Secretary] Ellen Qualls a couple times through the Cav Daily, and I had been very supportive of Gov. Warner and his policies personally," Cook said. "I knew I wanted to stay in Virginia and I thought that a job like the one I'm in now was exactly what I'd want to be doing."

For other alumni, a career path is not always so clear-cut. Qualls, an English major and 1988 graduate who wrote a few feature articles as a Cavalier Daily staff writer, said it took a couple years out of college before she found her niche in broadcast journalism. In turn, her decade-long career in broadcast journalism led Qualls to her current position as press secretary.

"I didn't focus on a serious career until my fourth year," Qualls said. "After graduation, I ended up taking a year or two to figure out I was interested in broadcast journalism, where I then spent a decade before coming to this job."

After Qualls had spent several years as the Richmond bureau chief for CBS, former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder recommended her in 2001 to Warner, at that time the governor-elect.

"It was just a door opening and me thinking it was an interesting opportunity," Qualls said. While some alumni were led toward political careers by work experience and experimentation with several different jobs, others came to the University with an eye already on public life.

Former Editor-in-Chief David Hallock, a foreign affairs major and 1992 alumnus, said he was always interested more in government and politics than journalism.

Hallock, who currently serves as Warner's deputy counselor and deputy director of policy, worked for state government offices and several political campaigns before attending the University Law School from 1994 to 1997. Prior to joining Warner's staff in 2002, Hallock worked for a Richmond law firm.

Former photographer and opinion columnist Kevin Mannix, a 1971 Echols scholar graduate with no major concentration, also was drawn to public life as an undergraduate, serving as Student Council President his fourth year.

Mannix currently serves as Chairman of the Oregon Republican Party, a far cry from his political roots as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1972, when he was a 22-year-old University law student and Cavalier Daily opinion columnist.

An active Democrat, Mannix ran the 1972 George McGovern presidential campaign in what was then the seventh district of Virginia.

"From McGovern to [George W.] Bush—go figure," Mannix joked.

After moving to Oregon in 1974 and opening a legal practice in 1986, he served four two-year terms as a Democrat in the Oregon House of Representatives from 1989-1997. When Oregon Democrats seemed to be heading too far to the left, Mannix switched his political affiliation. In 1998, he served a partial term as a Republican in the state senate, and returned to the house for a full term as a Republican representative.

In 2002, Mannix ran as a Republican in the state gubernatorial race, losing by a narrow margin to Democratic candidate, Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

"I'm 54, and I still have plenty of miles to go," he said. "I'll stay actively engaged in politics."

Hallock, who is not quite as advanced in his career, said he too plans to stay in politics, even when Warner's term expires in 2005.

"I'll most likely take the revolving door back to the private sector—still doing political work from a private-sector perspective," said Hallock, whose legal practice does legislative lobbying work for state agencies.

Other alumni have less concrete plans and seemingly infinite options for which direction to take their careers. Phillips is about to leave his current job to start a security studies program for a Master's degree at Georgetown University.

"My ideal job would combine the political side with the substantive policy side," he said. "Washington is a great place—there are think tanks that produce research on policy issues, and on the political side, that research is used by the administration or on the Hill to develop proposals. There are a lot of options."

Swanson, who served as life editor while Phillips was news editor, is content with her career as it is and uncertain about what's next for her.

"What I'm doing now is a good fit for me," Swanson said of her current job. "It works with the skills I learned at the Cav Daily along with my interest in politics. The 'next step'



COURTESY ELLEN QUALLS



COURTESY ROBIN SWANSON

Former CD staffers Ellen Qualls, Robin Swanson, Kevin Mannix and Brian Cook (below left) each took different paths from the Cavalier Daily offices to their current political positions.

question has become ambiguous—I think I had a clearer picture when I was working on Capitol Hill."

The Cavalier Daily, while serving as a springboard for the careers of some alumni and a minor notch in the bells of others, has imbued lasting memories and lessons in every staff member.

A major influence on all who pass through The Cavalier Daily's office stems from the work environment—from the late hours and time management skills to the hierarchical structure to working on strict deadlines.

"In a working atmosphere like that, you learn how to motivate people around you and you derive motivation from other people," Cook said. "The Cav Daily doesn't pay its writers—there's no financial incentive for people to be down there. The fact that everyone wanted to be down there and wanted to put out the best paper possible made it a wonderful community."

As all editors know, putting out the best paper possible means working late hours that often extend past midnight.

"There wasn't anything I didn't like about the Cav Daily except lack of sleep, but that was part of the buzz of working for the Cav Daily—you're there all hours of the night," Swanson said. "There was just an energy about it."

Working in a hierarchical environment and taking assignments from editors and higher-ups who are peers outside the office also provides good professional training.

"I learned how to work with others," Mannix said of his years as a photographer. "I learned to allow others in positions of authority to give assignments, and how to carry out those assignments and meet their needs."

Phillips said The Cavalier Daily gave him experience both in working within a hierarchy and learning what it takes to move up in that hierarchy.



COURTESY KEVIN MANNIX

"Learning just what it takes to have an organization accomplish its goals on a daily basis—that's very fundamental," he added.

Equally important to The Cavalier Daily's workplace preparation is its influence on writing skills.

"Writing skills are just the most valuable skill you can have in the workplace today—the ability to communicate well in writing, and to communicate concisely but definitively," Hallock said.

For some, lessons learned through experiences at The Cavalier Daily outlast those learned in the classroom.

"The CD taught me how to be a better writer than any class I took," Phillips said. "That ability to write something high quality and substantive on a very short deadline was a valuable skill from the CD."

Swanson remembers more lessons learned in Newcomb Hall than any other building on Grounds.

"It's honestly the most important thing I did in college," Swanson said. "I couldn't tell you about foreign affairs, but the rules of writing and everything I learned at The Cav Daily really stuck with me."

Perhaps one of the most lasting influence of The Cavalier Daily—beyond workplace skills and writing abilities—are the relationships built with fellow staff members.

"My favorite part was definitely the people," Hallock said. "Most of my best friends are still—12 years later—the people I met and got to know through The Cavalier Daily. The tight-knit relationships you build as a CD staffer—those relationships last a lifetime."