

## **Seventeen Indian American Undergraduate Students Selected for IACPA Internship Program for the Summer of 2001**

**By Anita Banerji**

**WASHINGTON**—On June 18, seventeen under graduate Indian American students will embark on a politically charged, hectic orientation week of the Washington Leadership Program (WLP) hosted by the India Abroad Center for Political Awareness, which is now known as the *Indian American Center for Political Awareness* (IACPA). In its seventh consecutive year, the WLP has placed sixteen of these students in Congressional Offices on Capitol Hill; the seventeenth student will intern at the Center with a focus on policy issues. This program will run from June 18 until August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

For six of these eight weeks, students will intern in Republican and Democratic offices for U.S House Representatives and Senators for six weeks, as part of the WLP. The last week of the program will be an evaluation period in which the participants of the program will have an opportunity to share their Capitol Hill experiences with one another.

The WLP was first conceptualized by Gopal Raju, the chairman of IACPA's Board of Directors in order to enable Indian American students to learn first-hand about the American political process, how it functions, who the political players are, and what role Indian Americans can have in this process.

It has been deemed "one of the best programs of its kind," by Congressman Sherrod Brown (D-OH), who hosted the first WLP intern in 1995 and has accepted an intern in his Office, ever summer since then.

Uma Seshamani, an alumna of the WLP ('00), told *India Abroad* that this program has deeply impacted her life. "Words cannot describe how amazing my summer was as a result of the WLP. My political views, lifestyle and thought processes were continually challenged in my Capitol Hill experience and by interacting with other (WLP) interns," she said.

Having received 155 applications for this program this year, which is a record number for the Center and a 32 percent increase from last year, the WLP will expound on last summer's programming to help motivate the participants to become politically active and effective. To date, IACPA has sponsored over 80 students through the internship program since 1995.

This summer's program is primarily funded by the *India Abroad*, but also largely supported with grants of \$5,000 from the American Association of Physicians of Indian origin (AAPI), the Asian American Hotel Owners' Association (AAHOA), and the India Medical Association of Illinois (IMA-IL). The beneficiaries of the generous monetary support from AAPI, AAHOA and IMA-IL are: Deepti Agarwal, a second-year student at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; Sandeep Rao, a third-year student at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY; Rekha Tadoori, a second-year student at Indiana

University in Bloomington; Anitha Ibrahim, a third-year student at the University of Colorado at Boulder; and Kavita Shah, a third-year student at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

The WLP programming will include a dinner at the home of the Indian Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission Alok Prasad, a meeting with the Indian Ambassador Lalit Mansingh, and private meetings with members of Congress. A special event that became part of the program last summer was an unofficial kick off, with a cookout at the home of former Congressman Steve Solarz (D-NY). On July 22nd, he and his wife will host a similar event for this summer's interns. Many students from last year's program deemed this event one of the best events of the first week.

The start date, June 18, 2001 will serve as the introduction day to a weeklong orientation in which the advisor of the Center, Ralph Nurnberger, will spend the day talking to the interns about the intricacies of Congress and show them a video to help them become acquainted with Congress.

Throughout the week the interns will meet various individuals in the Indian American community. They are also paired with two mentors—a WLP alumnus, who is currently in Washington, DC and a Capitol Hill Indian American staffer, who has a position on the Hill. These mentorships are a vehicle for networking, an essential tool for this program.

Also during the first week, the Center holds its annual Congressional Reception, which is an opportunity for the interns to meet and mingle with other Indian American interns in the city as well as people of political clout and experience in the Indian American community. It is a networking opportunity, and this year the Center will partner with the Indian CEO High Tech Council, the Washington, DC chapter of The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE), to hold this event. Members of Congress will be invited to this reception to share a few words with the interns and attendees.

Throughout the summer the interns will partake in the Center's Summer Speakers Series. For one night each week during the six-week period in which the interns will work on Capitol Hill, the Center will host a guest speaker to speak to the interns and the community at large. The Center's email listserve will announce the dates of these open events and the prominent people from the Indian American community who will be featured.

Confirmed to speak this summer include; Kumar Barve, the first Indian American to be elected to a state legislature (D-MD); Satveer Chaudhary, the first Indian American to be a state Senator (D-MN); foreign policy gurus Bob Hathaway from the Woodrow Wilson Center and Stephen Cohen from the Brookings Institution; and Preeta Bansal, the New York Solicitor General.

This program not only has a profound effect on the students who participate in it, but it resonates with the associates of the Center, who work directly with these students. Prem

Shunmugavelu, the political associate at the Center, said helping to direct last year's program changed his perspective on life.

"The students in last year's program made a huge difference in my life," he said. "The diversity in geographic region (from which they are from), thought processes, family backgrounds and experiences of the students helped me to better interpret my beliefs. I know that I started looking at issues in our (Indian American) community in a different light after last summer."

The following 17 students have been selected for this summer's program. A brief bio and their pictures have been provided. Should you have any questions about the Center's program, please contact Anita Banerji, Community Relations Associate, via email at [Banerji@iacfpa.org](mailto:Banerji@iacfpa.org) or phone at 202/289-3654.