

Internship deepens HPU student's passion for religious liberty

December 5, 2018

BROWNWOOD—A 10-week internship with the Christian human rights organization 21Wilberforce fueled a Howard Payne University student's passion for advocacy and commitment to religious freedom.

"The freedom of belief leads to a lot of other freedoms," said Caleb Kostreva, a senior from Clifton, Colo. "Countries that have more religious freedom have better economies, better gender equality and all these other positive things connected to religious freedom—not perfect, but better."

[21Wilberforce](#) takes its name from 19th century British parliamentarian William Wilberforce, who led a successful abolitionist movement in England using collaborative partnerships, grassroots empowerment and policy campaigns. By adopting those strategies, the organization—based in the Washington, D.C., area—seeks to defend people of faith internationally and expand religious freedom.

Kostreva's path to working with 21Wilberforce came about in an unlikely manner. As a freshman at HPU, he happened upon a business card for the organization, which piqued his interest.

"I knew who William Wilberforce was, and I really respect him, and so I thought, 'This must be an interesting organization,'" Kostreva said. "So I looked them up and kept them in the back of my mind."

Later, one of Kostreva's friends interned with 21Wilberforce, further strengthening his ties to the group. Meeting with representatives of

21Wilberforce visiting HPU solidified the connection.

Internship offered unique opportunity

Kostreva, along with four other college students from institutions across the United States, worked with 21Wilberforce, meeting legislators and planning events. Through the internship, he gained firsthand experience in learning how U.S. policies on global issues such as human rights are shaped.

“It’s something that you won’t find interning for other organizations,” he said. “They see it as a professional-development internship, making it a really unique opportunity.”

While working at 21Wilberforce, Kostreva planned a rally highlighting the plight of [prisoners of conscience in China](#). Speakers included Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas; Rep. Nancy Polosi, D-Calif.; and former Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va.

The rally was held on the one-year anniversary of Nobel Peace Prize recipient and political prisoner Liu Xiaobo’s death. Xiaobo died in imprisonment following his 2008 arrest for helping to write and publish Charter 08, advocating for the shifting of China’s political system toward democracy.

‘Opens the door for Christians to spread the light’

“Religious freedom isn’t about advancing one specific faith, but it allows the common exchange of ideas,” Kostreva said. “In a society that allows people to have diverse beliefs, it means that people of all faiths have the ability to believe what they want, and it especially opens the door for

Christians to spread the light.”

Kostreva is pursuing a double major in social sciences with a global studies emphasis and in HPU’s Guy D. Newman Honors Academy with an English minor. He is presiding senior senator in the HPU Student Government Association, and he participates in Model U.N. and the Baptist Student Ministry. He also works as a residence hall assistant and with the HPU Office of Institutional Advancement.

Matthew McNiece, director of Guy D. Newman Honors Academy and associate professor of history and government, said Kostreva exemplifies the ideals of the Honors Academy.

“Caleb’s desire to participate in an internship of this quality with an organization with this mission is a perfect demonstration of the alignment of the academy’s motto—Facing the future with faith and knowledge,” McNiece said. “We’re immensely proud of his work this summer, and eager to see where and how he applies this passion next.”

Kostreva’s interest and experiences with Wilberforce gave him a vision for the future.

“I want to work in policy development and human rights advocacy,” he said. “I’m not entirely sure what path that’s going to take me on, but I’m really interested in international issues, so I can see myself being led abroad. I’m waiting to see what doors are opened.”