On a snowy December afternoon, the Massachusetts State House was abuzz with activity: a military ceremony assembled in the Hall of Flags—the grand staircase festooned with garlands, poinsettia and sparkling lights. It was easy to be awestruck by the history and full regalia on display. In the final weeks of her internship in the office on State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, Brettney Douglas was poised and confident as she walked swiftly by a bust of John Adams and portraits of former governors.

As a Human Services major in the College of Public and Community Service, students apply theory to practice with an internship seminar and field work during their undergraduate education. In Human Services Policy and Practice, students investigate the political and historical contexts of many social welfare issues and apply research and capstone projects related to a particular topic. Demonstrating an understanding of forces and ethics that shape policy reinforces a student’s research and relevance to their internship experience. Examining how citizens influence decision making through the legislative process provide practical context for students. When Professor Cuf Ferguson suggested she apply for an internship in the office of State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, she knew there would be an extraordinary opportunity for both personal and professional growth. Brettney has tailored her coursework to focus on issues of youth work and advocacy and felt interning for the senator, who has focused on accessing opportunities for public education, would align with her interests. After passing the rigor of the interview process, Brettney was primed for the opportunity. As a component of the semester-long internship, interns are encouraged to participate in various parts of the legislative process, including attending briefings, hearings, and debates on the Senate floor. One hearing had resonated for her as it related to her passion and interest in serving the at-risk youth population. On October 8th, Brettney attended a public hearing set for the Drop-Out Prevention Recovery Act (No. 208). The bill aims to increase the drop out age from age 16 to 18 and support the pathway to graduation for at-risk youth, families, schools and the community. At the hearing, articulate, passionate students and families shared testimony of personal challenges and victories in their routes to graduation. By voicing their stories and experiences, she witnessed how the public is a truly involved in the legislative process. With real life applications to her Human Services coursework, Brettney sees strong ties between the government experience and youth advocacy. Beyond providing services, she sees concrete examples of how the legislative process encourages empowerment in communities. From staffers to fellow interns, Brettney remarked that the wealth of
experience and ambition among her colleagues made the internship experience exceptional. She learned to ask questions, attended as many hearing and events as possible. Motivated to make the most out of her professional relationships, she took initiative and learned the power and timing of networking and began to ask herself "Am I making the most of this experience?" With a wealth of varied perspectives in the office, she saw a thread between university coursework and work experience as a process of "relationship building." Throughout the fall semester, she was able to juggle a full course load, the internship and life responsibilities while increasing the hours she spent at the State House. A new sense of personal growth for her was the most surprising.

As she nears graduation, Brettney seems to be able to keep her composure working in the legislative office, while not being too overwhelmed. On a recent morning, she was in the security line in the State House lobby alongside Governor Deval Patrick himself. Taking a deep breath, she exchanged a pleasant "Good Morning" and went on her way to the senator's office.

Nathanael Shea, Legislative Aide for Senator Chang-Diaz commented on the internship experience:

"An internship here is a unique opportunity for those interested in public service to give back to their community. Our interns are able to see firsthand how a political office operates and discover the means it has of responding to the constituents it serves. We hope that Brettney had the rich experience we try to provide for all of our interns, and we are grateful that she was able to help us serve many of the Senator's constituents during her time in the office."