CAMILLE WALSH’S STUDENTS do their research – lots of it – long before shaking hands with the government leaders, diplomats and lobbyists, they travel to meet in Washington D.C. for an intensive week-long policy studies seminar.

They start in the spring, with about 20 students going through a vetting process to make sure they’re up to the challenge of researching a complex international human rights problem and using on-the-ground insights gathered to formulate policy recommendations.

Once selected, students dive in and dig deep, studying issues such as the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on Turkey and other neighboring countries or the legal and social challenges that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face in Russia. They learn their issues inside out and prepare hard-hitting questions.

“Over the years, we’ve established that we are students who really know what we’re talking about,” says Lisa Maynard, a Masters of Arts in Policy Studies (MAPS) student, who took part in her second seminar this past September – this time as an assistant who helped coordinate the trip.

“Sometimes, people begin the meeting acting as though they expect an easy hour with college students asking softball questions,” says Lisa, who went on her first D.C. seminar while studying for her undergraduate degree in global studies.

“When they realize how prepared we are,” Lisa continues, “they ask us to follow up with them, so we can continue the conversation. It’s really engaging and empowering.”

It’s an experience that’s deepened the public policy expertise of many UW Bothell students every year since 1991 when Robert Schultz, one of UW Bothell’s founding faculty members, organized the first seminar.

“For many students, it’s one of those life-changing experiences they have in college,” Camille says. “To see them build their confidence as researchers, to learn they don’t need an assignment or to be told what to do … it’s incredible.”

More than 80 UW Bothell alumni gathered for a reunion earlier this fall to revel in the impact their D.C. seminars have had on their careers – and the impact they as policy experts are having on the world. W