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Jenni Rodriguez, Andrew Marvin, Ben Williams, Matt Lovelace (background), Jamar Butler (front kneeling), Matt West, Nathan Werbel are in Washington, D.C. for the inauguration

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## As The Future Unfolds

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Rubbing elbows with ambassadors. Hearing lectures from legendary news reporters. Filling a seat so close to one of the most historic events in the history of the United States.

Jennifer Rodriguez, a 23-year-old Beacons College student, has visited Washington, D.C., before -- but never quite like this.

She's one of 11 Beacons College classmates in the city for an 11-day inauguration seminar, culminating with the swearing-in this morning of Barack Obama as the country's first black president.

"It's very emotional," she said Monday. "I wasn't crying or anything, but you can feel other people around you... that they have been waiting so long, since Martin Luther King, Jr.

"And just to witness this, to see their faces and people being joyful, it's a one-time experience," she said.

Students have been roaming the city as workers erected bleachers, installed thousands of portable outdoors toilets and put up crowd control barriers to hold back the millions estimated to be in the city for today's event.

But the Beacons students aren't just there for the swearing in of the country's first black president. They're meeting White House officials and learning about the transition of power. They're listening to lectures from media professionals who cover Washington politics. They're learning how complicated government can be, and they're learning by being a part of the process.

It's all part of the hands-on style of learning at Beacons, said professor Shane Runyon, chairman of

the college's Liberal Studies Department. It's the students in his Advanced History of Government class who are having the opportunity to see the transition through their own eyes, not the eyes of reporters and pundits.

"We're getting everyone to take in what the city in transition really means right now," Runyon said.

This is not Runyon's first inauguration; it bears some resemblance to past events, he said, but not completely.

The run-up to this one is different in that there is more popular fervor around the Obama inaugural. The frenzy through which people fought to get tickets to the event and the inability to find lodging in and around the city are two examples of the more populist appeal of this change in government.

"I've never seen (an inauguration) so popular," he said.

People are coming together in many different ways, some of the students said.

It seems as if some supporters haven't stopped campaigning for Obama despite his Nov. 4 general election win, said Andrew Marvin, a 22-year-old Beacons student. It's a rarity to walk down a street and not see Obama memorabilia plastered across a T-shirt, button or hat.

"A lot of people are expecting really big things (from the new administration)," Marvin said. "Obama has given people that air that hope is coming."

Such excitement can turn into something negative if a politician earns too much popular appeal and abuses it, Marvin said. That possibility adds a bit of worry to the buzz around being in Washington on Inauguration Day.

For Rodriguez, seeing so many people gathered together and excited about their country again is only a good thing. Standing in the National Mall Sunday night for a free concert and watching so many people sing together showed that whatever challenges were ahead -- navigating a recession and two wars -- people can still celebrate the positive, she marveled.

"It could be like that all the time," she added.

If anything, being in Washington should drive home that no successes come at a cheap price. The experience -- seeing Obama's inauguration, election, the set-up for those events and touring the monuments and museums in Washington -- should show students that "anything worth having is hard earned," Marvin said.

"It was difficult, but we have proof and evidence that hard work is worth it," he said.