

**Ohio Legislative Service Commission Legislative Fellowship Program: Personal Statement**

**Prompt:** You have free rein to write on whatever you would like; we just require that the personal statement be at least two pages but no more than four pages long. It can be single or double spaced. We will use it to evaluate your writing skills.

In January of 2012, I began volunteering with Organizing for America, the grassroots arm of President Obama's reelection campaign. A friend who was involved encouraged me to come make some phone calls, telling me it would be fun (especially for someone interested in political experience) and that it could be a way to get some community service hours. Going into the experience, I wasn't sure what to expect. But I was curious and open-minded, and the second I became involved, I was hooked. After my first night of phonebanking, I couldn't stop smiling. The thoughts bouncing around in my head were "these are my people," and "this is a way I can actually make a difference." I continued to volunteer all semester and eventually gained a summer internship with the Obama campaign in my hometown.

Near the end of the summer, my boss mentioned that the campaign was hiring additional Field Organizers. "You should maybe think about sending me your resume, if you're interested," she said to me one night as I was leaving. Even though I wasn't sure what it would mean to drop everything and take a semester away from school to work full-time, or how I would break that news to my parents, I sent my resume to the campaign and was interviewed. When I got the job and decided to take it, my most overarching feeling was sense of relief. For the last few weeks, as the 'Days til the Election!' count on the wall had dropped lower and lower, it increasingly felt like it was not the right time for me to go back to sitting in a classroom. Though it took some convincing to get my socially and politically conservative parents on board, I eventually took a leave of absence from my university for the fall 2012 semester.

My experience with the campaign provided a confirmation and an intensification of my current views on politics. Though the hours were long and the pay was middling at best, I felt like I was doing important work (both for myself and for others) with people who were as dedicated as me. It didn't bother me that I never knew what was coming next—it was exciting. I came away from the experience with a greater understanding of political activism and many new skills: I was better at public speaking, doing research, using databases, working with volunteers, and thinking on my feet. I learned about different elements of campaigning, as well local, state, and national politics. Perhaps most importantly, I left the campaign knowing that I definitely wanted to continue to work in politics.

I didn't always know that the career path I wanted to take involved politics, but I did begin to realize the importance of political discourse at an early age. My earliest memory is from fourth grade, and involves the only big argument I've ever had with my best friend. We were split right down the middle: I, like my parents, was supporting George W. Bush, and she was in favor of Al Gore, who her family supported. We spent an entire recess period walking around the

playground, arguing about who was the better candidate. At that point in time, I wasn't really able to form a cohesive argument, but I was already able to see that political discourse was important, and I found it exciting. I couldn't have articulated an interest in public service as a means of staying politically active and informed, or that I wanted to integrate my interest in social justice into my day job. But today, I feel lucky to have found a field that allows me to affect political and social change through my professional life, as well as through my personal life.

My interest in political science as a discipline started in my high school A.P. Government class. Up until that point, I hadn't taken a class that explained the practical implications of the role of government, and I was amazed at what I was learning. At the same time, I was beginning to come to terms with my own political identity, something I was very conflicted about because of the degree to which I could see my own beliefs diverging from those of my highly conservative parents. I was beginning to see the truth to the statement 'the personal is political.'

I came into college undecided on what I wanted to study, largely because I had so many interests—it felt like I could major in almost anything and be engaged and pleased with my coursework. But something kept pulling me toward politics. I took an introductory course called 'Politics and Government' my first semester, and was introduced to theory, international politics, and comparative systems of government. The class did the same thing that my high school A.P. Government class had done—it opened my eyes to the role of politics, only this time on a broader scale. After that, it was fairly clear to me that regardless of whatever else I did, I would be doing something with politics. I also saw politics as a field that integrated a number of other disciplines, both in an academic sense and also in terms of the role that political action plays in the world.

At the same time, I was becoming increasingly aware of, and interested in, a number of social justice issues, particularly those that pertained to women. My campus is one where social justice is hard to miss—we have a 'Peace and Justice House' that students live in, we've made the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for the last five years, and almost every week, there is a rally or demonstration or exhibition centering around some social justice issue. My consciousness was raised to international and domestic issues like access to healthcare, child trafficking, violence against women and girls, and human rights violations. I continued to be involved in on-campus activities, attend lectures, and participate in service trips. I also was lucky to be able to travel internationally for the first time through my school, an experience that furthered my understanding of the importance international cooperation and connection, and the reality of globalization. The dedication of fellow students to these issues would have been enough to impress their importance to me. But I also felt that what I was learning was making it more and more difficult for me to see myself as an isolated agent. It was becoming more and more clear to me that the issues affecting a child in inner-city Chicago or a woman in India could related to me.

Through these dual levels of increasing awareness, both academic and social, I began to see politics as a way to affect positive change. My first campaign experience, with the 2012 Obama campaign, confirmed for me that grassroots work was most effective when it used as a complement to political action. Once I was back at school after the campaign, I formally declared my major in Politics and Government. I began to take more classes in the department, including a semester-long political theory seminar, with a professor and two other students, this past fall semester. Luckily, it is relatively easy to do this at my university, and so far I've taken three courses as independent studies with professors. Taking this type of course has given me the opportunity to have much more independence in directing my own coursework, and as a result, I am very comfortable doing research independently.

I also worked with a friend to research and write a grant to do independent research in Ireland on public policy issues related to reproductive rights. Our proposal was funded, and we spent an amazing two weeks on the island doing interviews and examining the public discourse surrounding current events. I was able to speak with elected officials, including a senator who is at the forefront of many of the policy issues we were studying, and also with the Executive Director of the IFPA (similar to the Irish equivalent of Planned Parenthood). I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to write and budget for a grant, set up and perform interviews, and think critically about public policy. Furthermore, I was able to learn about these issues not only from a textbook, but also in the field, focused on a particular issue that is an area of personal and academic interest.

In my last few semesters at school, I've continued to take political science classes while also focusing on my other major, English, and my minor in business. Taking a number of reading- and writing-intensive courses drastically improved my reading comprehension and writing skills. A number of independent studies with professors have provided me the chance to direct some of my own coursework and improve my research skills. At times I have carried a very heavy course load because of my majors and minor, but I've always been a very involved student, and I've used these busy periods as opportunities to learn to handle stress and to improve my time management skills. My time at OWU, a small, liberal arts institution, has had a huge influence on my worldview and my values. I have not been in a financial position to work in unpaid internships during my summers, but instead I have worked since my senior year of high school to help pay my tuition and other expenses. But my work experiences have been their own reward—they've helped me improve my professional skills and learn about fields that I likely would never have experienced had I not been employed.

All of these experiences have brought me to a place where I am ready to apply what I've learned, both in theory and in practice, to the LSC Fellowship. I know I want to continue to work in the political realm, and I want to learn more about what directions my interests could take me. Politics is not something in which my parents have encouraged my participation—rather, they have deterred me from the political field whenever possible. I've had to be extremely persistent and certain of myself and my abilities to be involved in the realm of politics, especially to get to

where I am today. In conjunction with my academic experiences, this has made me a hard worker, and strengthened my resolve to continue to engage politically.

In the next five years, I would like to attend graduate school to obtain a Master's degree in Public Policy or Public Administration, or potentially go straight into a PhD program in political science. In the long term, I'm not completely certain what direction I'd like to go with my political work—at this point, I think I would be equally happy in academia as I would be in the non-profit sector. So in the meantime, I want to continue to gain practical experience—my academic experiences so far have given me a strong foundation, and I think it is time to build on that. The Legislative Fellowship would be a mutually beneficial experience allowing me to apply what I've learned at school and through work experience. I would be grateful for the unique type of learning experience that this program could provide: I would have time to narrow down my career goals, but while still gaining practical experience that will be applicable to what I want to do, regardless of what I decide on specifically. As my past experiences show, I am always interested in an experience that has the potential to change my point of view and broaden my horizons. I believe that this experience would help me along the path of achieving my goals, and I believe I have the skills necessary to be successful as a Legislative Fellow.

My experiences so far have shown me that social justice and activist work is important, but have also shown me the importance of working 'inside the system' at times. Especially in recent years, my desire to 'do good' has been among the main factors driving my desire to work in politics. When I think back to that argument I had with my friend in fourth grade, it's safe to say that not only would I not have said I wanted to be a public servant, but I'm fairly sure that I had no idea what a public servant was. But my motivations, even at that point, were roughly the same as what they are today—I was curious, and wanted to learn more, so that I could really understand what was going on, while also wanting to make a choice that would benefit those other than myself. Today, I see myself moving along that path already, and I'm excited to see what my next step will be.