

## Lesson Title: Political Participation

### Handout # 2: Preparing for a Career in Politics

Build a political education, starting in secondary school.

- Work hard in your social studies classes. That's where you will learn about history, government, economics, geography – the topics you will need to know in your field.
- Develop skills in speaking, writing, reading and research, the tools of the politician.
- Practice debating skills by joining your high school's forensics club ([www.speechanddebate.org](http://www.speechanddebate.org)).
- Read a newspaper – or more than one – every day, and watch television news. In all cases, choose sources that are as neutral as possible. Don't depend on social media, as it often reinforces opinions you may already have.
- Choose a college major that builds political knowledge and skills: Political Science, Economics, History, Public Administration, Communications, Criminal Justice. Choose courses that require research assignments, since these will be an entrée into political jobs. (See below.)

Volunteer in a campaign.

- Choose a local candidate or an issue that's compelling to you, which could give you opportunities to do more interesting work than you might get to do working on a national campaign.
- Attend and observe carefully at as many campaign events as you can: fundraisers, forums, media events.
- Keep track of the people you meet in your volunteer position; store their e-mails and social media contacts for later.

Keep networking.

- Use social media to build an audience for your goals (Facebook, Twitter, a listserv for your own political blog). Make sure you do not post anything now that could hurt a campaign later.
- Join LinkedIn and identify your political ambitions.
- Use your college career center to help you develop the most effective resume.

Serve an internship.

- Your college career center can help you to find one. You may even get paid as a researcher.
- <http://www.internships.com/political-science> locates internships all over the country. Some are paid, some give you college credit, and some provide unpaid experience that is valuable anyway.
- *USA News and World Report*, *USA Today*, and other online sources list universities that are particularly noted for political science majors and internships. Notable ones in Washington, D.C. for federal government internships are American University, George Washington University, and Georgetown University.
- Again, keep in touch actively with colleagues and supervisors through social media and your blog.

Find a job in politics or government.

- Start at your college career center. Here's where a degree in Public Administration can be helpful: it's a requirement for many government positions.
- In political seasons, look for positions as a campaign staffer, field representative, or legislative aide.
- Easier said than done? Seek jobs that parallel the skills you will need in politics: research, writing, organizational skills.

NOW – Run for an office!

- Start locally: precinct committee leader, school board, town council, selectman.
- Find out the rules for filing petitions, deadlines, fundraising, advertising, and organize a campaign to follow them.
- Put together a campaign committee and hold regular meetings of that group.
- Construct a budget you can handle and follow it. Some constituencies have Clean Elections laws that can at least partially fund you.
- Use that communications network to tell everyone you are running, and encourage people to hold events for you.