

# ARE YOU MY MENTOR?

## AN EXPERIMENT ON GENDER AND POLITICAL ENCOURAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: Do electoral gatekeepers routinely discourage women from running for office? Through an audit experiment with 8,189 public officials, we examine whether (hypothetical) male and female students who express interest in political careers receive differential encouragement from electoral gatekeepers. We report three striking findings. First, emails sent by female students were *more* likely to receive a response than those sent by male students, especially when the official was male. Second, the responses women received were as likely to be long, thoughtful, and contain an offer of help as those to men. Third, there were no partisan differences in responsiveness to male or female senders. Examining senders with Hispanic last names bolsters the credibility of the results: Hispanic senders, especially men, were less likely to receive a quality response than non-Hispanic senders. These findings suggest that unequal encouragement by public officials is not a likely culprit of women's under-representation in politics.

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**INTRODUCTION.** When women express an interest in politics, are they less likely to be encouraged to run than men? In this paper we ask whether public officials in the United States are more responsive to (hypothetical) male students who reach out to them for advice than to (hypothetical) female students. In an audit experiment, which entailed sending emails to 8,189 public officials in the United States, hypothetical students express an interest in a political career and ask the official for information on how to start down that path.<sup>2</sup> We randomly varied the gender of the student sender to investigate eight outcome variables including receipt of a reply, praise and encouragement, length, and warnings against running. These outcome variables were investigated for all senders (including those who did not receive a response), and examined in light of three different respondent sub-groups: 1.) male versus female public officials, 2.) democratic versus republican office-holders, and 3.) the level of office. Across all these analyses we find the arresting result that when differences arose, female senders were *more* likely to be encouraged to pursue political careers than men.

This experiment was motivated by three strains of thought: first is the work on women’s under-representation in prestigious fields including politics, law, business, and academic positions. In fixing the “leaky” pipeline from degree to a high-powered career, mentorship is often considered key (e.g. Bos and Schneider 2012). Although anecdotes abound, we know little about whether potential mentors are as responsive to women as to men who demonstrate interest in a career path. Second is the literature on political ambition, which pins the lack of women’s representation on women’s self-selection out of the aspirant

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<sup>2</sup> We pre-registered hypotheses by the gender, party, office type (local vs. state) and state-level professionalization of the legislator using Experiments in Governance and Politics (EGAP)’s design registration form.

pool. This “gender gap” in political ambition is thought to emerge during college (Fox and Lawless 2014). Since college is a time where students informally begin to gather information about different career paths, cues from public officials may affect students’ interest in a political career. Both lab and field experiments have shown that women’s political ambition is sensitive to role model cues (Holman and Schneider 2015, Foos and Gilardi 2016). Hence a lack of responsiveness or outright discouragement might mediate women’s desire to work in politics.

The third intellectual root of this project is the growing experimental literature on representation and access to political elites. Here, the pioneering work which looks at officials’ responsiveness to citizen inquiries has shown enormous and disconcerting heterogeneity based on citizens’ and officials’ ascriptive characteristics such as race (Butler and Broockman 2011; Broockman 2013; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015), partisanship (Gift and Gift 2015; Broockman and Ryan 2015); and campaign support (Kalla and Broockman 2016). We build on this work by being the first to look for possible interactions between responsiveness and the gender of officials. Along with reporting our findings, the concluding discussion considers the internal and external validity of the experiment.

**EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN.** Using information supplied by the New Organizing Institute (now available from Vote Smart), we constructed a database of public officials at all levels of government in the U.S. (city, county, and state) that included the email addresses and basic demographic characteristics of 8,189 public officials. Since aides and campaign workers may be responsible for communication, the unit of analysis is the email address of an official rather than the officials themselves. Figure 1 displays the text of the email. Public officials were told that the sender was a college student working on a class project about how

**Figure 1 Treatment Description.** Emails Sent to US public officials reflecting a Request for Mentorship Treatment: How to pursue a political career?

**From:** [Treatment: Student Sex]  
**To:** [Legislator's email]  
**Subject:** Help on a class project?

Dear [LEGISLATOR],

My name is [MALE/FEMALE] and I am a college sophomore. I'm interviewing politicians for a class project to learn about how they entered their field and what advice they might have for students interested in politics. As someone who really cares about my community, one day I hope to be a politician. What advice would you give to me?

Sincerely, [MALE/FEMALE]

politicians entered their field, and solicited advice about going into public service themselves.

The email sender's name provided the only cue for gender.

The college student sender treatments, one male and one female, were assigned a "typical" American name drawn from Census and Social Security data. The most common male and female names, such as Jacob and Lauren, communicate the sex of the sender but are less obviously tied to ethnicity or income. Table OA.2 provides a list of first and last names used in the study. After randomly combining common (by gender) first names with common last names, we generated Gmail accounts in the form: first.lastXXXX@gmail.com, where XXXX were 4 random digits. The accounts were randomly assigned to send emails over one of two days, either a Sunday or Monday in October 2014, with no follow-up requests thereafter. Because of the November 2014 election, this is a time when we might expect heightened responsiveness, although the election could also place more constraints on the time of the leaders.

In order to ensure that all treatment conditions were evenly distributed, we block randomized legislators' gender and state. We then divided each block into four groups in order to vary both the gender of the email sender and the question asked of the legislator. The first row in table 1 summarizes the experimental design, and table OA1 shows that there

is balance across the experimental conditions of public officials' gender, ethnicity, partisanship, local or national office, and whether the email bounced.

**RESULTS.** Table 1 presents the main results. It considers the difference in response rates on eight outcome variables based on whether the email sender was male or female. These outcome variables include: (1) receiving a reply, (2) receiving a meaningful response, (3) receiving praise, (4) receiving an offer of help, (5) being warned against running, (6) receiving substantive advice, (7) response length measured by the log word count, (8) or the character count in the reply. Additional details on the dependent variables and coding process are presented in table OA.3. Examples of meaningful responses are in the appendix.

In table 1 and throughout this section, all p-values, standard errors, and confidence intervals are based on OLS regression that control for strata fixed effects and clustered standard errors. Strata were defined as gender and state of legislator for randomization. Standard errors are clustered at the email account level. Importantly, for word and character count, no reply was coded as 0 to avoid post-treatment bias, meaning that the denominator is always the total number of emails sent from a male or female address.

Surprisingly, we found no favoritism towards male students. The first dependent variable in table 1 measures the difference in response rates to male and female students. We expected that women would be less likely to receive a reply, however there are no differences across the sender gender. Moreover, women and men were as likely to receive what our coding scheme deemed a “meaningful” response – which was not a “canned” letter or a request for more information from the student; they were as likely to be praised (5.2 percent of responses on average); they were as likely to be *discouraged* from running as male senders (on average 1.23 percent of emails received a discouraging response); and they were as likely to get substantive advice (7.7 percent of responses).

**Table 1: Treatment Effects by Dependent Variable.** All p-values estimate the effect of the gender of the sender for different classifications of reply. The p-values are based on OLS regressions that control for strata fixed effects and clustered standard errors. Strata were defined as gender and state of legislator for randomization. Standard errors are clustered at the email account level. Non-responses are included in the denominators.

Treatment:	Request for Mentorship		
	Male Sender	Female Sender	
Design: Legislators emailed by condition (N)	4,097	4,092	
<b>Dependent variable:</b>			<b>p-value of diff.</b>
1. Received Reply	25%	27%	0.15
2. Meaningful Response	11%	13%	0.47
3. Praised	5%	6%	0.17
4. Offer to help	3%	<u>5%</u>	<b>0.09</b>
5. Warned Against Running	1%	1.50%	0.14
6. Substantive Advice	7%	8%	0.33
7. Log Word Count	1	<u>1.1</u>	<b>0.06</b>
8. Character Count	145	<u>170</u>	<b>0.04</b>

In fact, when gender differences occurred, female inquirers were slightly *more* likely to be encouraged than their male counterparts. Five percent of female senders received an offer of help from the legislator as opposed to three percent of male legislators (row 4). And the responses sent to women tended to be longer over all (rows 7 and 8). In three of eight outcomes women were more likely to be encouraged. This share is larger than what is likely to have happened by chance, implying that overall, when given an opportunity for informal networking and communication, politicians are not less supportive of women.

*Study-group heterogeneity.* To see whether these overall results mask differences across public officials, we investigate responses for several sub-groups. First, we investigated response rates based on the gender associated with the public officials' email account. Some studies in social psychology suggest that women and men have different styles of communication (see,

for example, Mulac 1989; Lightfoot 2006; Gilbert 1985). In the context of business school professors responding to hypothetical student inquiries, Brajer and Gill (2010) found heightened communication between female-female dyads, so we expected female respondents to have more, and more meaningful, responses for female senders overall. Our findings cut against this expectation.

Table OA.4 shows that emails sent to *male* legislators drive most of the increased response rate to female students. Across both sender genders, emails sent to female legislators received responses 27 percent of the time. However, emails sent from male accounts to male office-holders received responses 24 percent of the time, while those sent from female senders to male legislators received a response 27 percent of the time. While studies have found an important link between having role models and women's interest in politics (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 2001: ch 11; Escobar Lemmon and Taylor Robinson 2014), our findings suggest that in practice, female politicians may be as likely to help men as to help other women.

Second, we examined whether response rates varied based on public officials' partisan affiliations. Despite the presence of a U.S. gender voting gap in a Democratic direction and a common association of female politicians with liberal leanings (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009), both Democratic and Republican public officials were around 2 percentage points more likely to reply to female than male senders (see Table OA.5 for full results). Finally we consider the level of office held by the official. 74 percent of the officials contacted served at the city or county level. Overall, we find that state officials replied to 26 percent of emails while local officials replied to 27 percent. Across both samples of officials, we continue to find that female senders were more likely to receive helpful replies than male senders (see Table OA.6 for full results).

*Internal validity:* How credible is the finding no gender bias – the finding that, in fact, women received preferential treatment? The study is highly powered, with a sufficient number of emails sent (N=8,189) and responses received (N=2,127) to detect even small differences in responses to male and female senders. Specifically, the experiment was large enough to detect differences in response rates as small as two percentage points. Nevertheless, social desirability bias could drive respondents (either legislators or their aides), especially those in male officials’ offices, to be particularly sensitive to inquiries by women. One way to investigate this possibility is by utilizing the fact that many common last names have discernible Latin roots.<sup>3</sup> Emails sent with the surnames Garcia, Hernandez, Martinez, and Rodriguez (comprising 11 percent of the emails sent) were as likely to receive a reply as non-Hispanic senders (24 percent vs. 26 percent,  $p=0.3$ ). However, Table OA.7 shows that *senders with Latinx last names were less likely to receive a meaningful response, less likely to be encouraged to run, and less likely to receive substantive advice.*

When these findings are broken down by the gender of the Latinx sender, we find that most of these differences stem from *male* senders (see Table OA.8). Female senders with non-ethnic first names but Latinx surnames receive similar response rates across all seven indicators while male senders with non-ethnic first names but Latinx last names were given less encouragement than men with non-ethnic names. The effect of being Latinx is negative for both male and female students, but we did not find “additive” bias for being female *and* Hispanic. The fact that we can discern differential patterns of response to senders with Latinx last names increases our confidence that the findings of heightened responsiveness to women were not simply an artifact of the method.

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<sup>3</sup> This is a happy feature of choosing common surnames, not part of the registered design.

*External validity:* There are two concerns for external validity. First, to what extent are public officials themselves, as opposed to parties, involved in political recruitment? Second is it realistic to assume that students might contact politicians (or, more generally, professionals in other careers of interest) to gather information? Although the majority of candidates report being recruited for political office, somewhere in the vicinity of 30 percent are self-starters (Broockman 2014: 107-8). Nevertheless, it is hard to say how often college women reach out to public officials in search of information about political careers. Certainly women are less likely to contact officials than men overall (Burns et al. 2001). However, collecting job-related information from a diverse array of sources is a common part of a preparatory job search and networking (Van Hoye et al. 2013). Contacting friends, relatives, and outsiders often gives job-seekers information and leads about opportunities. As the seminal work of Granovetter (cited in Van Hoye et al. 2013) shows, job-seekers are often given access to information that is otherwise difficult to obtain by people with whom they have informal (or weak) ties.

**DISCUSSION** Do electoral gatekeepers routinely discourage women from running for office? Our audit experiment finds that students who contact incumbent public officials for advice or mentorship do not receive vastly different attention based on their gender alone. Yet even with this evidence a few wrinkles remain. First, the growing consensus that “women don’t ask” may mean that even if women would receive a warm response from sitting public servants, they are unlikely to be in a position to receive that support. Second, we should note that the vast majority of emails sent (74 percent) did not receive any response at all. This “rejection” may be interpreted differently by men and women. As recent research suggests, women may be more easily discouraged (London et al. 2012), or place a lower probability on the amount of support they would receive than men (Butler and Preece 2016), producing

negative multiplier effects even in a world of positive encouragement. Future research might follow up on these threads to see gender matters for the tint of interpretation.

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## APPENDIX (ONLINE ONLY)

*Ethics:* As experiments designed and implemented by political researchers have become increasingly common, important questions have been raised about the conditions under which these projects can be executed ethically. Because experiments are carried out in real world settings, and because they are distinguished by an “intervention” as opposed to mere “observation”, experiments raise higher hurdles to guarantee the ethical treatment of human subjects than traditional observational methods (Teele 2014). In particular, there are four issues to consider: the exploitation of vulnerable groups; risk to subjects and community; deception; and consent. While the experiment is safely in ethical terrain on the first two issues (that is, it does not place undue burden on vulnerable groups to be the subjects of study, and poses minimal risk on the subjects and community at large), it does involve deception and does not procure standard forms of informed consent. It is our belief that deception and a lack of informed consent are ethically problematic when experiments are carried out on vulnerable populations, when they carry risk to the participant, and when they have potential community-level or downstream consequences after the experiment is completed. An intervention of the sort described here, which asks elite leaders to help a student with a class project, and to engage in communication that is on-par with the types of things that these leaders do every day (i.e. answer emails) does not evince these concerns. Following the suggestion of McClendon (2013), we will engage in a de-briefing exercise with an opportunity to receive feedback from our sample of public officials when the paper is nearing publication.

Table OA1: Experimental Balance

	Male Sender	Female Sender
Female Legislator	32%	32%
Democratic Legislator	21%	23%
Republican Legislator	27%	26%
Local official	74%	74%
White Legislator	87%	88%
% Bounced Email	4%	5%
N	4,097	4,092

Table OA2. List of Names Used for Email Accounts

The most common first (by gender) and last names were randomly assigned as well to generate Gmail accounts in the form: first.lastXXXX@gmail.com, where XXXX were 4 random digits.<sup>4</sup> The masculine first names used were: Andrew, Brandon, Christopher, Daniel, David, Jacob, James, John, Joseph, Joshua, Matthew, Michael, Nicholas, Ryan, and Tyler. The feminine first names used were: Amanda, Ashley, Brittany, Elizabeth, Emily, Hannah, Jessica, Kayla, Lauren, Megan, Rachel, Samantha, Sarah, Stephanie, and Taylor. The last names used (regardless of the gender associated with the first name) were: Allen, Anderson, Brown, Clark, Davis, Garcia, Hall, Harris, Hernandez, Jackson, Johnson, Jones,

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<sup>4</sup> First names came from the Social Security Administration's list of most popular male and female names, 1994. <http://www.ssa.gov/cgi-bin/popularnames.cgi>. Last names came from the Frequently Occurring Surnames from Census 1990. Available at [http://www.census.gov/topics/population/genealogy/data/1990\\_census/1990\\_census\\_namefiles.html](http://www.census.gov/topics/population/genealogy/data/1990_census/1990_census_namefiles.html).

King, Lee, Lewis, Martin, Martinez, Miller, Moore, Robinson, Rodriguez, Smith, Taylor, Thomas, Thompson, Walker, White, Williams, Wilson, and Young.

*Table OA3. Details of Coding Classifications*

The PIs trained undergraduate research assistants to read and code the emails by answering the list of questions in table OA.3. These coding questions were developed by the PIs' close readings of twelve randomly selected emails. The RAs were blind to the hypotheses being tested. The RAs re-coded those same twelve emails to ensure consistency. The PIs then reviewed these codings with the RAs and engaged in additional practice coding. For word and character count, no reply was coded as 0 to avoid post-treatment bias.

To avoid biases in the coding, the PIs randomly assigned which RAs coded which email accounts. 63% of the emails were coded by female RAs while 37% were coded by male RAs. The below table shows that the manual coding did not meaningfully differ by the gender of the RA. Note that only emails that received a reply were coded, hence the denominator for each cell is different from that of other tables.

	Female Coder	Male Coder	p-value (Effect of male vs. female coder)
% Receiving Meaningful Response	48%	43%	0.56
% Receiving Praise	20%	20%	0.91
% Receiving Offer to Help	17%	13%	0.18
% Warned Against Running	4%	6%	0.16
% Receiving Substantive	29%	30%	0.92

Advice			
N	1,335	792	-

The p-values are based on OLS regressions that control for clustered standard errors of the email account.

Outcome	Description
Receiving a reply	Any non-bounceback sent from legislator’s account.
Receiving a meaningful response	Qualitative assessment by coded that the email “contains real content.”
Receiving praise	Coded as either “Praises student for an interest in a political career” or a vague praises (e.g., “Good luck with everything”, “hope this helps”).
Receiving an offer to help	Coded as willing to meet, to talk on the phone, to email further, or a general offer to follow-up (e.g., “If you have any other specific questions, please let me know.”)
Being warned against running	Coded as containing an explicit statement not to run, an encouragement to consider other career paths, or a warning of time commitment, work-life balance challenges, the difficulty of finding time for family, the challenges of fundraising, or the loss of privacy.
Receiving any advice	Coded as containing either practical advice (e.g., motivational advice, get a business job, go to law school, get a different type of job, become involved in local community groups, attend local party or political meetings, volunteer, get a mentor, fundraising advice, run for student government, learn about the issues, get a good education, always put your values first, stay loyal to your political party) or personality/image advice (e.g., always have a professional appearance, have thick skin, learn to be extroverted, learn to deal with conflict).

### Subgroup heterogeneity

Table OA.4: Experimental Results by Gender of Legislator and Gender of Sender.

	Sent to Female Legislator			Sent to Male Legislator		
	Male Sender	Female Sender	p-value (Effect of male sender among female legislators)	Male Sender	Female Sender	p-value (Effect of male sender among male legislators)
% Receiving Reply	27%	27%	0.85	24%	27%	<b>0.08</b>

% Receiving Meaningful Response	12%	13%	0.67	11%	12%	0.42
% Receiving Praise	7%	8%	0.42	4%	5%	0.11
% Receiving Offer to Help	3%	5%	<b>0.03</b>	4%	5%	0.21
% Warned Against Running	1.7%	1.5%	0.78	0.7%	1.4%	<b>0.03</b>
% Receiving Substantive Advice	9%	9%	0.86	6%	8%	0.17
Log Word Count	1.18	1.20	0.83	0.94	1.09	<b>0.01</b>
Character Count	199	209	0.69	120	152	<b>0.01</b>
N	1,301	1,299	-	2,796	2,793	-

Table OA.5: Experimental Results by Party of Legislator and Gender of Sender.

	Sent to Democratic Legislator			Sent to Republican Legislator		
	Male Sender	Female Sender	p-value (Effect of male sender among Democratic legislators)	Male Sender	Female Sender	p-value (Effect of male sender among Republican legislators)
% Receiving Reply	24%	26%	0.64	27%	28%	0.49
% Receiving Meaningful	9%	10%	0.60	12%	13%	0.75

Response						
% Receiving Praise	3%	4%	0.47	5%	6%	0.47
% Receiving Offer to Help	3%	4%	0.22	3%	6%	<b>0.02</b>
% Warned Against Running	0.7%	1.2%	0.22	1.2%	1.9%	0.19
% Receiving Substantive Advice	5%	6%	0.47	8%	8%	0.70
Log Word Count	0.93	1.02	0.43	1.06	1.17	0.27
Character Count	110	134	0.12	147	174	0.26
N	868	919	-	1,106	1,065	-

Table OA.6: Experimental Results by Office Level of Legislator and Gender of Sender.

	City Official			State Official		
	Male Sender	Female Sender	p-value (Effect of male sender among city officials)	Male Sender	Female Sender	p-value (Effect of male sender among state officials)
% Receiving Reply	24%	<b>27%</b>	<b>0.07</b>	27%	27%	0.95
% Receiving Meaningful	12%	13%	0.39	11%	11%	0.75

Response						
% Receiving Praise	5%	7%	0.16	3%	4%	0.54
% Receiving Offer to Help	4%	5%	0.26	3%	<b>5%</b>	<b>0.03</b>
% Warned Against Running	1.1%	1.7%	0.19	0.7%	0.9%	0.41
% Receiving Substantive Advice	8%	9%	0.27	5%	6%	0.67
Log Word Count	1.00	<b>1.15</b>	<b>0.02</b>	1.04	1.04	0.97
Character Count	155	<b>187</b>	<b>0.04</b>	116	123	0.75
N	3,021	3,014	-	1,076	1,078	-

Table OA.7: Experimental Results by Latinx Sender.

	Non-Hispanic Sender	Hispanic Sender	p-value
<i>Number emails sent</i>	7,307	882	-
% Receiving Reply	26%	24%	0.27
% Receiving Meaningful Response	13%	7%	<b>0.06</b>
% Receiving Praise	6%	3%	<b>0.03</b>
% Receiving Offer to Help	4%	2%	<b>0.08</b>
% Warned Against Running	1.3%	0.7%	<b>0.1</b>
% Receiving Substantive Advice	8%	4%	<b>0.07</b>
Log Word Count	1.08	0.97	0.30
Character Count	160	135	0.21

Table OA.8: Experimental Results by Latinx and Gender of Sender.

	Male Non-Latino Sender	Male Latino Sender	p-value (Effect of Latino sender among male senders)	Female Non-Latina Sender	Female Latina Sender	p-value (Effect of Latina sender among female senders)
% Receiving Reply	26%	21%	<b>0.03</b>	27%	27%	0.83
% Receiving Meaningful Response	12%	7%	0.11	13%	6%	0.23
% Receiving Praise	5%	2%	<b>0.02</b>	6%	3%	0.24
% Receiving Offer to Help	4%	2%	0.22	5%	2%	0.21
% Warned Against Running	1.1%	0.6%	0.15	1.5%	0.8%	0.28
% Receiving Substantive Advice	8%	5%	0.17	9%	4%	0.21
Log Word Count	1.03	0.83	<b>0.03</b>	1.12	1.15	0.80
Character Count	152	94	<b>&lt;0.01</b>	169	186	0.43
<i>N</i>	3,607	490	-	3,700	392	-

## Examples of meaningful responses:

The following were rated as meaningful responses:

### **From a Utah female official to a female student**

“Thanks for reaching out and having some interest in political action. I'll try to answer your questions and then if you'd like more information I'd be happy to talk with you on the phone. You could call my cell [... cut 220 words ...] My advice to someone like yourself who really cares about your community and wants to lay the groundwork for future political involvement is to find something you're passionate about: zoning laws, education, business regulation, potholes in your streets, or whatever it is. Then start following that issue on the local, state, or federal level. Find others with similar interests who can provide support and a platform for your voice. You'll find that numbers matter and your voice will be impactful on both an individual level as you reach out to elected officials, but as well when you've joined a larger group. Advocate and make your voice heard on the issues important to you. Maybe consider becoming involved in someone's campaign as a worker or supporter so you can see what things look like from that angle. Make a game plan and time line for yourself for potentially running for office. Life is long and it may not be right away, but be thinking of it and how it could combine with the other plans you have for your life (career, family etc.). Find mentors who you can bounce ideas off of and keep you involved. These can be community members or elected officials or just friends. There are plenty of things to be involved with and lots of time to do so. I applaud your commitment as this young age and encourage you to continue your efforts. Please reach out to me again if I can be of any help and good luck!” >> total words 517.

### **From a Tennessee male official a female student**

“Well I don't consider myself a politician. I consider myself as an elected official. Some generic advice that I would give you is to be involved in your community. To know get to know as many people as you can, treat them all the same, and never meet a stranger. I wish you the best of luck in whatever you choose to do.”

### **From a Washington male official to a male student**

Thanks for your email. Many people don't realize that the office of X is a political office with responsibilities set by statute and is the oldest law enforcement entity in history. [...cut 10 words...] It is great that you hope to be a politician someday so you can prepare yourself by maintaining a good record and developing networks of friends and employment contacts that will support you down the road. Everything you do from now on will either help or hurt you when you decide to campaign. To answer your questions: [...cut 183 words about personal trajectory ...] My suggestion for a successful future in politics is to get involved in the community through service clubs, volunteer to be on special planning committees for the school districts, city or county government and most important lead by example. Everything you do should pass the Front Page Test. How would what you do or your decision look like to your family or friends on the front page of the paper? Build a consistent trust from the community and when you run for office it will pay dividends. Avoid negative campaigning and have thick skin for those who choose to throw mud

during a campaign. I suggest joining XX as a fun way to learn to be more comfortable when giving speeches. Remember as an elected person, you can be unelected if you lose the trust of the voters and do not solve their problems. If I can answer any other questions, please ask.” > 431 words

**The following were rated as NOT meaningful responses:**

**From an Iowa female official to a female student**

“I apologize for not getting back to you sooner. I think my advice would be to work hard and stay positive. Hope this helps! Best regards,” >26 words

**From a Mississippi male official to a male student**

“Pray, be honest and sincere.”

**From a Michigan male official to a female student**

“Get involved now. Can we talk more after election.”

**From a Virginia male official to a female student**

“I entered local politics as a way to give back to the community that educated me and then supported me when I opened my business. I felt that I had much to offer. I am an individual that believes in cooperation and compromise to get real solutions to questions. Good luck in your future.” >words 54