

I used to be painfully shy. So shy in fact that my father took me out of preschool because I would not talk to my classmates, seemingly content to sit in the corner and quietly read my book. However, my introvertedness often left me deeply frustrated. Now, almost twenty years later, although I still sit alone occasionally to read or write or just think, I have overcome my shyness, having learned how important it is to communicate with those around me—my peers, those mentors and advisers further along life's path who can offer me guidance, and especially those less experienced than myself who can in turn learn from me.

As a freshman setter on the Rutgers University Varsity Women's xxxxxx team, I first discovered that engaging with my teammates on a personal level could actually help me to become a better player. When I initially joined the team, I liked all the girls but my goal was not to make friends but to make myself the best player I could possibly be. At first, I hesitated being open with others because I feared I might find myself vulnerable to criticism. I assumed everyone else was, like I had always been, quick to judge. My teammates and my coach taught me otherwise. Friendship and self-improvement, I learned, were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the very intimacy that good teammates develop among themselves is the strongest ground on which an individual player can become the very best she can, or at least it was so in my case.

But my epiphany had only begun. At Rutgers, when I volunteered as a tutor at the xxxxxx Public Library, my immediate reaction to the children I taught was: Why are these kids failing? I wanted to know why these students were so far behind where I recalled I was at their age. Earlier I might have assumed a lack of motivation or even laziness as the reason for these students' low achievement. But, mainly through becoming friends with a football player at Rutgers who came from a background less privileged than my own, I had come to realize that the answer to my question about what may have caused my students' deficiencies could be found in social conditions rather than some individual weakness.

My understanding of how sociocultural environment affects individuals developed further through a health research internship at the Institute for xxxxxx at Rutgers during the summer after my junior year. My fellow interns and I learned complex statistical analyses, scientific writing, and oral presentation skills. During the internship, I also wrote a paper about children with chronic health conditions that would eventually be expanded into my senior thesis, presented at several major academic conferences, and finally accepted for publication by the scholarly journal, xxxxxxxx. Yet my proudest moment came the last day of my internship when I had the chance to present the results of my research to my fellow interns, faculty at the Institute, and friends. Standing in front of this audience, I felt like an advocate for the population I studied and a spokesperson for a group that is easily overlooked—disadvantaged kids. At the Population Association of America Conference and the AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting, I continued to speak for those who cannot easily speak for themselves. Presenting at these conferences was exhilarating, but always in the back of my mind was the question: Shouldn't this research inform social policy?

The summer after graduation, through the Barbara Jordan Health Policy Scholars Program, I was placed as a Fellow in the office of Senator *First and Last Name* from Maine, which allowed me to engage firsthand with the same policy issues I had begun to explore in my senior thesis. Following the Barbara Jordan Fellowship, the Chief of Staff for xxxxxxxx offered me a full-time position in the office. I had planned to tutor high-school students in Boston for a year, but I accepted the offer, in a sense choosing policy work over teaching. Rather than helping only a handful of students in Boston, I am now in the position to contribute to transforming the education of thousands of young people across the country.

The last day of my fellowship in Washington, D.C., something occurred that made it clear to me why I wanted to continue to work for Senator *Last Name*. I and a group of high-school students and fellow interns had our pictures taken with the Senator. I was last in line, and as she shook my hand, the Senator said, “Thank you for your leadership this summer.” Then, after all the pictures were taken, she spoke directly to her high-school constituents: “Leadership is all about give and take,” she told them. Senator *Last Name* was right. Leaders must come to a consensus through compromise. Successful politicians have the vision of idealists but must also have the practical skills to make those visions reality.

Similarly, successful academic programs blend theory with practice to achieve change in the world. The Department of Education at Oxford will give me historical perspective on international education not only to better enlighten policy decisions, but also the skills in comparative analysis and research to best implement such strategies. The Master’s program in Comparative and International Education explores the theoretical underpinnings of comparative education as they are applied in countries throughout the world. I am excited to have the opportunity to study and discuss global education policies, facilitated by seminars planned by international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in this small, close-knit, and supportive program. Specifically, Dr. *First and Last Name* conducts impact evaluations of educational interventions in several African and South American countries, my two geographic areas of interest. Combined with the academic background of Professor *Last Name*, who extensively studies educational policy borrowing, I hope to utilize my research at Oxford to bring academia closer to the world of education policy.

When I was a child, I had no functional problems with my voice; I simply chose not to use it. Discovering my voice has been the most powerful revelation of my life. As I share my voice with more and more people, I expand my sphere of influence and by whom I am myself influenced. But having found my own voice, it is my responsibility to speak for others who cannot speak for themselves. All children lack a “voice” in politics because they cannot vote. Though yet without franchise, children deserve to be listened to as well, and my life’s mission, as an educator and policymaker, is to give them a voice with which they will be heard.