From Michigan and Wisconsin to UK and Beyond: Where Degrees in Political Science Can Take You

By Daniel Morey and Julie Wrinn

That two students from the upper Midwest would overcome a bad first impression of each other, form an indelible bond, and find their calling in Political Science is not surprising. Our faculty witness these sorts of transformations all the time. What’s surprising is that Willow Kreutzer and Kaleigh Yurkew (both B.A.s in Political Science 2017) would become so close that their friends began referring to them as “the Bobbsey Twins.” Who knew that today’s undergraduates had even heard of those iconic novels from the previous century?

Willow Kreutzer grew up in Lake Orion, Michigan, raised by parents who encouraged her to broaden her horizons by attending an out-of-state college. Once she visited the University of Kentucky, she knew it was the place for her. Kaleigh Yurkew grew up in Beloit, Wisconsin, and had never been to Lexington prior to enrolling at UK. Both young women found themselves in a class together during their first semester of freshman year, but Yurkew was initially annoyed by Kreutzer: “Willow and her friends would talk all through class, and I could not seem to escape them.”

In the spring semester, however, Kreutzer and Yurkew began to sit together in World Politics and learned they had many common interests and goals. This led to studying together and spending more time outside of class together. Their sophomore year, they scheduled nearly all of the same classes together. That’s when the “Bobbsey Twins” moniker kicked in.

Both students have high praise for the UK Political Science Department, for assets like faculty who pay attention to students, take an active interest in them, and are understanding, open, willing to go out of their way to be helpful. Another strength of the department that Kreutzer and Yurkew both appreciated is the variety of topics and courses, from classic political theory, to international relations, to women in politics. Students can branch out and explore a wide array of subjects and specialize in what interests them. Kreutzer’s advice to current students is be open to finding what interests you, what it is you love. Yurkew feels that once a student finds the one thing she is good at, she should learn all she can about it. Such advice carries extra value given their respective GPAs (Kreutzer 3.96, Yurkew 3.86).

During their time at UK, both students served as interns for Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes. Kreutzer also served as Vice President of Pi Sigma Alpha, was the founding President of the Alpha Chi Omega sorority, and was named the 2016 UK Homecoming Queen. Yurkew was the secretary of her sorority, Director of Communication for the Political Science Honor Society (Pi Sigma Alpha), and interned for the Jim Gray senate campaign.

Post-graduation, Kreutzer and Yurkew have exemplified the variety of career paths that political science majors can pursue. Yurkew is now a second year law student at the University of Louisville. She quickly rose to the top of her class, including “booking” several of her courses (law school lingo for earning the highest grade in that particular course). After law school Yurkew plans to work in the area of national security.
Kreutzer’s first position after college was as a junior analyst at Cloudburst, a housing and community development organization in Washington, D.C., and she recently accepted a new position as a research analyst for Ipsos, a public affairs office in Chicago. There her primary role is in data collection and analysis in the government health services business unit, which includes reviewing literature and aiding in technical writing. She describes her work as follows:

I work on a brand tracker for a client and create different presentations based on the data we receive from our surveys. Once the data has been weighted and cleaned, I can sort the data on SPSS or pull it directly from our Excel files. I work to add year over year statistical testing to the brand tracker, as well as showing the different ways we can present the information we have collected to the client. Weekly I present these findings to the client and work with them to solve any issues/inconsistencies they may find. I am also tasked with working on government proposals for my team. I review literature, aid in technical writing, and work to show why Ipsos is the best organization for this client’s needs.

This year Kreutzer will be presenting some of her research at the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research. Asked to describe how her time in the UK Political Science Department help prepare her for that opportunity, Kreutzer explained:

In my day to day tasks I use skills such as critical thinking, statistical analyses, writing, editing, and reading for details. At UK I was challenged in the classroom with reading assignments that I had to find applicable details in, mandatory statistics classes, research apprenticeships that taught me to use programs such as SPSS and R, writing reports with immense literature reviews, presenting my own work to classes or professors, continuously writing in-depth papers on new topics, and always being pushed by my professors to go farther by questioning the research presented and to come to my own conclusions from the material. The UK Political Science program is what I owe my current position to and is the foundation that the rest of my career will be built upon.

As more UK Political Science students move into jobs similar to Kreutzer’s, the department is adjusting its undergraduate curriculum with the goal of increasing students’ technical skills without losing the critical thinking and research skills that are the hallmark of a Political Science education. There truly is no limit to where a Political Science degree from the University of Kentucky can take its students.