

## A LOBBYIST AND A CONGRESSMAN WALK INTO A CLASSROOM...AND TRY TO INFLUENCE A NEW GENERATION OF DECISION-MAKERS.

Historically, lobbyists would congregate in hotel lobbies or parliament halls to voice their legislative concerns directly to the policymakers who would inevitably pass through. They would hope to influence the decision making of government officials by delivering 30 seconds of persuasive speech on their way out the door, up the elevator, or down the front steps. Today, that process has become more regulated and even includes formal instruction in university classrooms such as Pepperdine's. Part of this evolution stems from the desire to tear down misconceptions of lobbyists as being insignificant and irrelevant to policymaking, says Matt Leighty (MPP '10), one of two faculty members teaching the Lobbying and Policy Change course at the School of Public Policy.

As a former student of the master of public policy program, Leighty's classmates would often question his past life as a professional lobbyist. "I would explain that, even if you weren't going to be one, lobbyists and government-relations professionals play an active role in the creation and implementation of public policy," he says.

Last fall Leighty drew from personal experience and academic literature to develop the curriculum to introduce the next generation of policymakers, bureaucrats, and even lobbyists to the ways their interaction helps shape legislation. Next fall Leighty will impart these same concepts to undergraduate students at Seaver College.

"A lot of times in government and political science, you study the way laws and bills and regulations are passed according to the textbook," explains Leighty. "But realistically, lobbyists have a role in the process and to ignore that component is to ignore a big part of policy-making."

Leighty knows firsthand how that well-oiled process works. He has campaigned for presidential, federal, and state candidates, and most recently, roamed the halls of the Virginia General Assembly lobbying on behalf of political action committees and grassroots operations for the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association.

In order to squash impressions of hostile lobbyist-congressperson relations and provide a more practical perspective of the practice, School of Public Policy dean James Wilburn helped Leighty bring **John Campbell, U.S. representative for California's 48th Congressional District**, to coteach alongside last fall. "I described it to the students as a Monday night football game: I did the play-by-play and John provided color commentary," laughs Leighty.

Together Leighty, a Democrat, and **Campbell**, a Republican, enabled the students to see two different perspectives of the lawmaking process.

**"I think my value to the class was that I perhaps don't have the academic background in the subject, but I have lived it and worked in it for a dozen years,"**

explains

**Campbell**

, who frequently brought his real-world experience to the classroom.

**"I would go to Washington, D.C., for the week and oftentimes bring back to students the exact issues that people had come into my office to lobby me about,"**

he continues.

Despite the competing interests of lobbyists and politicians, Leighty explains that developing positive bonds and trust is a vital aspect of the relationship. "Lobbyists aren't fools," he contends. "You don't want to burn your bridges—you want to develop trust to be successful at your job, because there are so many issues out there. You might agree on one issue and disagree on another and you want to keep the relationships positive."

**Campbell** concurs: **"Lobbying is actually a fundamental part of our democracy, otherwise it means that no one can approach their representatives and try to influence the way they think about things."**

While the first half of the semester focused on the theoretical study, history, and evolution of lobbying, the latter half highlighted its practical application. "If a student continues on to represent a nonprofit organization or corporation in some sort of advocacy capacity, they need to know what motivates lobbyists in the process to understand more about them," explains Leighty. "So many of our students also pursue careers in Congress or a state legislature," he continues, "and it seems to me that understanding the role lobbyists play is important when they are on the receiving end, as well."

To this effect, students were assigned position papers, or “leave-behind” documents, as well as “elevator speeches,” 30-second summaries of major points that lobbyists present to policy-makers, addressing such topics as the Stop Online Policy Act, military defense spending, and international trade policy. MPP candidate Melissa Jacobs considers this process the most valuable lesson she took away from the class. “The first time we gave our ‘elevator speeches,’ they weren’t that great,” she recalls, explaining how the students walked with Campbell through the school hallway and up and down the elevator practicing their pitches. “We were all nervous and had never done one before, but the congressman gave us great feedback and, by the end of the class, everyone’s elevator speech had improved tremendously.”

Winifred Yang, a second-year MPP candidate from China, enrolled in the class because she thought it would help her learn more about the U.S. political system, which she hopes to apply to her future career in public policy and international relations. “To be frank, I had no idea what a ‘lobbyist’ was before taking this class,” she admits, of a concept unfamiliar in her native country. “Because of the differences in political systems, most Chinese know little about the U.S. and I thought it might be something I must become familiar with if I want to work for a Chinese company dealing with U.S. politicians.”

Ultimately, Leighty argues, those taking any sort of political position or making policy decisions must become familiar with the practice and role of lobbyists. “People think that lobbyists are not critical to the process, that they gum it up, and that somehow, if you got rid of lobbyists entirely, things would be better,” he says. “But they’re a critical component to the process of policy-making and, more often than not, help drive it.”

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