

John O'Brien '10 M'16

Please provide your biographical information.

I received my bachelor's degree in political science from West Chester in 2010. In 2016 I completed my Masters of Business Administration from West Chester. When I was in high school looking at colleges there were two things I was considering- size and cost. For me West Chester fit both. It wasn't too big or too small and it was affordable.

What made you go into a Political Science degree?

I have always been a bit of a history nerd which is why I gravitate towards politics. When I first came to West Chester I was heavily considering becoming a lawyer and I figured a political science degree would be good training for that.

What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

I currently serve as the Communications Director for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee. The committee I work for is tasked with evaluating the fiscal impact of any legislation being considered by the House and for crafting the yearly state budget. In my role I handle press relations and the messaging strategy for the budget. I also serve as an advisor on budgetary policy.

What is a typical day like at work?

It's hard for me to define typical in my line of work. Every day is a new challenge where you are asked to balance many different interests while trying to get a single goal accomplished. Everyone bemoans the political process as broken and I can understand that to a degree. To me there are definitely reforms that would help our political discourse, but to some extent there is a method to the madness. Politics is the art of compromise because a person in Center City Philadelphia is going to have different needs and views than a person in Warren, PA. The question for us in Harrisburg is how to balance those needs.

What have been the biggest challenges at work?

The biggest challenge for me is to create a message to such a diverse state. People in Southeast PA are going to view things differently than those in the Northwest so it is important that I am conscientious about what I say and how I say it and how it will be perceived by people throughout Pennsylvania.

What do you enjoy most about your current position?

I love the excitement of the job. No two days are the same and the job always provides challenges which require you to think on many different levels.

What skills, talents, and other traits are useful and necessary to do your job?

For my particular job you have to have an ease with public speaking and an ability to think and respond quickly under pressure. This job also requires strong writing skills. Patience is also a key trait to have. There are many times that this field of work will frustrate you and you need to step back and take a breath before responding.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Outside of work I enjoy volunteering at First West Chester Fire Company. I am an avid runner and I recently started woodworking.

What advice would you give to a current student who aspires to follow in your footsteps and pursue a similar career path?

Politics is all about relationships. The key to getting involved professionally is to start by volunteering on local campaigns which will allow you to network yourself. Internships are also key. And internship will give you the insight to see what area of this field you're interested in and it will help build connections with individuals who know about job openings.

How has your WCU education contributed to your success?

I give West Chester a lot of credit for building me into the person I am today. Not only did the University give me a strong academic foundation, the leadership skills that I was able to develop through the student activities I was involved in have served me well in my professional career. When I came to West Chester I was a shy and quiet student and West Chester helped mold me into a confident person who is able to take charge in stressful situations.

What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishments (both personally and professionally)?

In 2014 two of constituents came into our office. They had lost their son Matt to suicide and wanted to make a positive change, in spite of their grief, to help prevent other families from going through their pain. It took a lot of work, but I am proud we were able to get the Matt Adler Suicide Prevention Act signed into law last year. This legislation requires that social workers, therapists, counselors, and psychologists have some training in recognizing suicide risk and how to treat it. Out of my seven years with the House this is by far my proudest moment, not only because this legislation could help save lives but because it meant so much to Matt's parents.

What's your favorite memory from when you were a student at WCU?

It is really hard for me to pick out one memory as my favorite. West Chester means so much to me that I'm not sure I can sum it up in one memory. Whether it was my time in Schmidt Hall to being a member of the Friars' Society to serving as a Leadership Consultant I am thankful for everything that West Chester has given me. I know it is a bit cliché, but I West Chester truly did give me live long friends who are like family to me.