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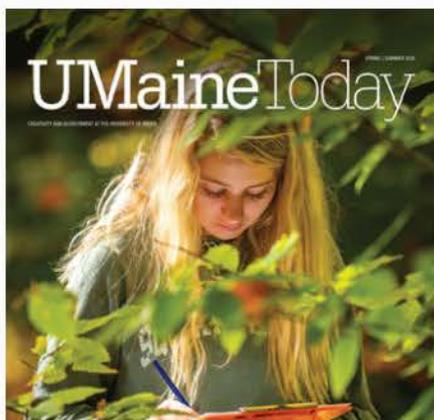
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## UMaine Today



Courtesy of Lila Harakles

## Lila Harakles: Aspiring public servant trains in Maine, Washington, D.C.

April 16, 2021

From studying in North Stevens Hall to interning on Capitol Hill, Lila Harakles' academic journey taught her what it means to be a public servant.

The University of Maine junior from Kennebunk translated her classroom instruction to the field in January 2020 when she began her UMaine Congressional Internship with U.S. Sen. Susan Collins. For the following year, she aided the senator's staff in Washington, D.C., Bangor, Biddeford and Portland.

By the time Harakles, a political science and philosophy major, set foot in the nation's capital to begin her internship, the House of Representatives delivered the first articles of impeachment against former President Donald Trump to the Senate. The nervousness she had about starting the job vanished as she jumped right into work at "this insanely busy time in the office," she says. While interning in Washington D.C., Harakles researched materials for legislation, tracked bills, engaged with constituents and attended hearings.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Harakles to leave the nation's capital early, but her internship continued by working with Sen. Collins' staff at three Maine offices to help constituents navigate issues with federal institutions. The experience, Harakles says, instilled a newfound joy for assisting others and taught her how to listen and practice compassion with people she served.

"Collins' office gave me confidence to pursue politics as a career and showed me that it's not all always cutthroat debates and media clips," Harakles says. "The government is about real people, and now I have a better understanding of what that means."

Harakles' passion for politics sparked while taking a first-year-level Introduction to Government course with Mark Brewer, the political science professor who later encouraged her to pursue the congressional internship and other opportunities.



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Congressional internship and other opportunities.

While Brewer's pop quizzes first worried Harakles, she says she found his use of thought-provoking storytelling for instruction engaging, and she "couldn't get enough of his lectures and readings."

"Professor Brewer encouraged all of his students to think for themselves and prided himself in his ability to teach politics without taking a side," she says, adding that he "is the reason I ever had the confidence to pursue politics in the way that I am."

Harakles earned both the John Mitchell Nickerson University of Maine Memorial Scholarship and a fellowship with the William S. Cohen Institute for Leadership & Public Service this year.

Serving as a Cohen Institute fellow, Harakles has been able to network with the accomplished members of its board of advisers and learned about multiple career paths. Working with Rich Powell, director of the Cohen Institute and UMaine's 2020 Distinguished Maine Professor, and Peter Madigan, executive in residence and advisory board chair for the institute, instilled in Harakles important lessons about professionalism and dedication, she says.

Madigan, who also instructs Harakles' political strategy class, also taught her that communication and seeking assistance demonstrates strength, not weakness; and his guidance and motivation helped her persevere through stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Encouragement and instruction from Powell, a professor of political science, "has been paramount to my success as well," Harakles says.

"Without specific professors such as professor Brewer, Powell and Madigan, I can confidently say I would not be as successful as a student or young professional as I am today," she says.

The UMaine junior will soon embark on her next opportunity: participating in the Henry Clay Center College Student Congress as the representative for Maine.

According to its website, the two-week summer program, held virtually this year, provides immersive, experiential instruction that teaches 51 college seniors, each one representing a state and the District of Columbia, about how the policy process works. Lawmakers, government relations experts, policy advisers, academics and other leaders also will meet with the student congress to delve into the obstacles to creating comprehensive public policy with them.

"It truly is an exciting honor to represent the great state of Maine. I am delighted to emulate the traits I have learned from working for Senator Collins at the College Student Congress," says Harakles, who has aspirations of becoming a lawyer who defends constitutional rights, a Supreme Court justice or the president, all of which she no longer views as impossible. Regardless of which path she follows, Harakles says she aims to be a leader who earns the support of her constituents, serves "through moral leadership" and finds ways to support others in the same way her professors helped her.

"The University of Maine community really changed the direction of my life," she says. "I went from thinking I might go to law school because my parents wanted me to, to having passion for literally everything I do because now I find joy in hard work and gratification in success. I had no idea that I was smart or even a competent student until my professors showed me that I am."

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