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Alumni Profile

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Advice from the White House

There was no such thing as a typical day in the White House for Elizabeth (Dozier) Kelley '02, who just completed a stint as special assistant to President Barack Obama and chief of staff to the National Economic Council (NEC). Each day involved a range of issues.

"In one 24-hour period, I could be up at night watching European markets, working on housing the next morning and (then) emerging autonomous vehicle policy by the afternoon," Kelley said.

An internship while Kelley was a Linfield political science major helped put her on the track to the White House, though she had no idea at the time.

As part of the requirements for her major, she interned in the Portland office of Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR). That opened the door for her to take a position in his Washington, D.C., office after graduation. From there, she moved to John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign, before working for then-Senator Max Baucus of Montana, who went on to become the Ambassador to China. Kelley also served as chief of staff for Sen. John Walsh (D-MT).

Her advice for those aspiring to politics?

"This town is filled with smart and driven people. To set yourself apart, be willing to take risks, ask for advice – and then take it – and work as hard as you can," Kelley said.

Kelley joined the Obama administration in 2015, where she became an assistant U.S. trade representative. Shortly after, she moved to the White House staff to continue to work on trade and economic policy.

"As special assistant to the President and chief of staff to the National Economic Council, I advise the NEC director on a range of domestic and international economic policy issues," Kelley said in December, before leaving as part of the transition to a new administration. "I also work closely with him on the overall management of the department to ensure that the team executes against President Obama's economic priorities."

In addition to her internship, Kelley credits a January Term study abroad opportunity with opening her eyes to the possibilities of a career in the world of government and politics. As a junior, she studied healthcare politics in the United Kingdom with Professor Howard Leichter.

"We visited Parliament and met with disability advocates about the need for policy reform," Kelley said. "That trip helped broaden my perspective and interest in politics. Of course, he gave me a B, but I wouldn't trade that experience and ways it opened my perspective to a life in politics."

In addition to working hard, for those Linfield students and alumni who might be interested in one day working at the top levels of government, Kelley has one additional piece of advice.



"The best advice I can give is this: remember to be nice to people," she said. "The most successful people I know are also the very nicest people I know. Being a nice person will take you far."

With the transition to a new president, Kelley hasn't quite decided what is next.

"I haven't confirmed my next steps yet, but look forward to the next adventure, a little more sleep, and maybe even a vacation," Kelley said.

– Kevin Curry '92

The Kelley File

Elizabeth (Dozier) Kelley '02

Majors: Political Science and Sociology

Minor: Gender Studies

Career:

- Special Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff for the National Economic Council
- Assistant United States Trade Representative
- Chief of Staff, Senator John Walsh (D-MT)
- Political Director, Senator Max Baucus (D-MT)
- Staff, John Kerry for President
- Staff, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)
- Intern, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)