



Name: Austin Travis

Major: Political Science and International Affairs

Job Title: Assistant for Constituent Services

What is the day in the life like at your job? What are typical job responsibilities for someone in this role?

My office is responsible for handling communication between Tennesseans and the Governor and his staff. Messages come via phone calls, voicemails, emails, our online contact form, and postal mail. We sort it, determining which ones to respond to and which need additional follow-up. When a constituent has an issue with a state agency or program (i.e., drivers license, unemployment, SNAP/TANF, prison concerns), we work with that agency on the constituent's behalf to identify the issue and find a resolution. We also receive requests for, evaluate, and create recognition documents from the Governor, including certificates, letters, and proclamations. Our team divides up the responsibilities, and I primarily handle live phone calls, voicemails, and recognition documents. I'm responsible for staying up-to-date on the Governor's policy and legislative proposals and his other positions, and for communicating those effectively when constituents have questions.

What do you love about your job?

I love being able to make a difference and help Tennesseans who are encountering issues with state agencies. It's a problem solving-oriented job, and I love getting into the details to tease out the source of the issue. I also love getting to speak to our legislative, policy, and communications teams to gain a deeper understanding of the Governor's proposals and why they're important to Tennesseans. My job also affords me a bird's eye view of state government. I know more about how Tennessee's agencies and departments work, the programs they offer, and the people who make it all work than I ever dreamed I would at this point in my career.

What is challenging about your role?

Certainly, any role dealing with the public can be challenging at times. It can be difficult to pick up the phone and hear an angry person on the other end of the line, sometimes upset about something which we have no control over. My patience can be tested, but it's so rewarding when we get a response that an issue has been resolved or when someone calls to say thank you for our help.

What are the benefits of working in this field?

As discussed above, constituent services truly does provide a bird's eye view of government, which is something few others can say when they're just a few years removed from graduation. Working in government more generally provides other benefits, including getting to see how your work directly impacts the communities and individuals around you. From a career perspective, state government also often offers a quicker pathway up the career ladder than some of its private sector counterparts.

What experiences did you have that prepared you for this role? What types of activities were you involved in at Lipscomb or during college that helped develop your skills? And/or what about your first jobs helped you obtain a more desired career?

I was involved in Lipscomb's delegation to the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature all four years during undergrad. TISL helped refine my communication, research, and management skills, and it allowed me to gain connections across the state. It was also my first intensive experience with government on the state level, opening my eyes to the impact state government can have on citizens. During my sophomore year, I studied abroad in Vienna, Austria, an experience which profoundly strengthened my personal management and confidence. Lipscomb's location in Nashville also provided me the opportunity to have several internships and other roles prior to graduation. I worked on a campaign for State House in the Nashville area two cycles in a row, serving as campaign manager during the second cycle. I also interned with the Tennessee World Affairs Council and then at the Governor's Office during my final semester. That final internship ultimately resulted in a job.

What do you see happening in the future for these types of careers?

Constituent services is one field which definitely isn't going anywhere in the future. While technology can help make our duties simpler, citizens still expect to be able to call and speak to a staffer in their elected officials' offices.

What advice do you have for a student considering a career in your profession?

Get involved on campus and with the surrounding community. Take on leadership roles, and improve your communication and management skills.

Also, Lipscomb is in such a great location for political science-related internships, and too many people take that for granted. I have many friends from other schools across the state who couldn't do internships at the General Assembly, Governor's Office, or other government/political agencies because their school was too far away and/or they would have to pay for their own room during it. I was able to do those internships for credit, staying on-campus in my dorm.