

Shelly (Camacho) Astle, a 2000 American studies graduate, said she “remembered a situation when a professor gave the class counsel on how to combat the inevitable teasing we would receive from those who derided our major as impractical and hardly helpful when looking for employment upon graduation.” Astle has taken the tools gained in her major and capitalized on them quite well—pun intended—as she worked for two U.S. Senators and a governor.

“When choosing my major for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I used the following personal philosophy: Enjoy the journey,” Astle said. “If I was going to take all those classes and write all those papers, I’d better enjoy what I was learning.”

A self-proclaimed American history junkie at heart, American studies was a natural choice. “I loved anything and everything having to do with the study of America,” she said. “Thus my journey began. And to this day I cannot think of a single class that I didn’t enjoy.”

Several courses changed Astle’s perspective on things American in a big way. In the introductory course, taught by Professor Neil York, her concept of the “American Dream” was forever changed. The American film course, taught by Professor James D’Arc, altered the way she viewed films. And two courses taught by Professor Frank Fox, one on popular culture and the other on San Francisco, also had a long-lasting affect.

“Politics is all about people, and American studies is the study of the American people—as they were, as they are, and as they will be—molded by shared experiences, traditions, and values such as liberty, individualism, and equality,” said Astle. “By coming to understand what it means to be an American through my studies at BYU, I understand people better and have learned to thrive in a profession that is all about people.”

Her career began in the offices of Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah. “He gave me my first break as a staff assistant answering phones in his D.C. front office and giving tours of the Capitol building,” recalled Astle. “I was soon promoted to work as a legislative correspondent, drafting responses to mail from his constituents.

“In 2002, I moved to the office of Senator John Ensign of Nevada, as his advisor on natural resources, energy, and various other issues,” she continued. “I drafted bills, worked with legislators and staff, and became an integral part of the policymaking process—a dream come true.”

Early this year, Astle joined the staff of Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts as a speech writer. “This has been an excellent opportunity to get an idea of how state

government works and see things from an executive perspective,” Astle affirmed.

She remembers a comment made at her graduation, that they “were part of a group of individuals who would do incredible things—not only for our nation but also for our world. I was inspired that day, and I knew I wanted to pursue a career where I felt like I was making a difference. My education at BYU has enabled me to achieve that goal.”

*Astle had the opportunity to do the inspiring for spring 2004 graduates as the alumni guest speaker at convocation.*

No Events