Alumnus name: Mikaela Meyer

Title: Mentorship fuels alumna’s path to policy research

Dr. Mikaela Meyer, an alumna of Purdue's John Martinson Honors College and Stamps Scholar Program, and Indiana’s 2017 Truman Scholar, embodies the transformative power of mentorship and interdisciplinary learning. Graduating in 2018 with degrees in mathematical statistics and applied statistics, along with a minor in political science, Mikaela’s academic journey reflects her commitment to public service and a unique approach to data science. Her achievements led her to Carnegie Mellon University, where she pursued a Ph.D. in statistics and public policy, applying her skills to address critical issues within the U.S. criminal legal system. Today, as a data scientist at The MITRE Corporation, Mikaela leverages her statistical expertise to inform policy research in Washington, D.C.

Reflecting on her college years, Mikaela shares, “I met Dr. Jengelley in my very first semester through his Sports and Politics class. I quickly realized theoretical math alone wasn’t my passion, and he helped me see how political science could fit with my goals. Dr. Jengelley opened doors I hadn’t anticipated, from guiding me in choosing classes to offering my first research assistant position analyzing media framing of terrorism. These experiences helped me blend my interests in statistics and policy and ultimately led me toward a career where I can make a difference through data.”

Throughout their years of collaboration, Mikaela and [Professor Dwaine Jengelley](https://click.deliver.purdue.edu/?qs=9b248cd8c9ce3b4f5a54e94e021a128137fa9140fd743162b0c8d20c089160b9b4bf4c3aa8cf1bbca4608161a4221a0ce2b32d3fddfc70fb) explored diverse topics—from Caribbean integration to editorial cartoons—and attended the National Society for Professional Journalists conference. Mikaela notes, “I gained confidence in my research abilities, and through his mentorship, I became comfortable with presenting my ideas and sharing my research. One of the most meaningful opportunities Dr. Jengelley encouraged was my first conference presentation as a sophomore, which made future academic presentations far less intimidating.”

Dr. Jengelley’s mentorship extended well beyond academics, supporting Mikaela through challenging applications, such as the Truman Scholarship. “Dr. Jengelley helped me prepare for practice interviews, reviewed my essays, and gave me the courage to keep going when the application process was difficult. The NISO office even advised me to approach the Truman interview like one of our ‘coffee chats’—professional yet relaxed,” Mikaela recalls.

Dr. Jengelley, who mentored Mikaela, reflects on their enduring connection: "Mikaela was one of the most exceptional students I’ve had the privilege to mentor and a pivotal part of my early experience teaching in the Honors College. Even after graduating, she stayed in touch, inviting me to her dissertation defense. Her path shows how impactful mentorship can be, a reciprocal relationship that has shaped my own approach to guiding students today. I frequently use her journey as an example of how success often comes through resilience and thoughtful mentorship beyond the classroom."

Now, over ten years into their mentorship, Mikaela and Dr. Jengelley’s bond exemplifies the lasting impact of meaningful faculty-student connections, enriching both their personal and professional journeys.