

Scholars to Members: Father and Daughter Register at 2021 Annual Meeting

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Attendance of the American Political Science Association's Annual Meeting, held in September of 2021, was not limited purely to students, faculty, and practitioners. The conference was set in Seattle, Washington, and any APSA member or non-member was allowed to register. And even though they entered the event as non-members, Michael S. Olkowski and his daughter Gabrielle decided to become registered members of APSA before they left.

Mike, a professional truck driver, and Gabrielle, a political science major at Grand Valley State University, came all the way from Michigan to attend the APSA Annual Meeting in Seattle. Both are devoted to political science, but each was attracted to different panels at the conference, so the pair often chose to split up to pursue their different interests. Gabrielle, for instance, is interested in women and gender studies, while Mike is interested in systems of voting and government.

While Gabrielle hopes to get a job after graduation and eventually attend graduate school, Mike's job—truck driving—affords him plenty of time to do two of his favorite activities: listen to political audiobooks and contemplate the American political system.

Among the audiobooks and audio lectures Mike has listened to are *America for Americans* by Erika Lee (2019), *Our Broken Two Party System: Can American Politics be Fixed?* by Robert Watson (Lynn University 2021), *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (2016), and many other informative works that offer insight into the American political system.



Above: Michael S. Olkowski (left) and daughter, Gabrielle Olkowski (right), who attended the APSA Annual Meeting together because of their shared interest in political science.

Mike noted that APSA's Annual Meeting taught him the difference between being "well-read," as he describes himself, and "well-educated," as he describes the political scientists who presented panels at the conference.

"Being well-read means I'm kind of a visionary type, but the well-educated are more into research and how the political machine works," Mike said. "It was very interesting to go to the different sessions [at the conference] to see all of that—it was a whole different animal for me. It was very inspiring."

Gabrielle appreciated the opportunity to watch author panels, noting that "the best [panel] I went to was on democratic resilience, which included the discussion of a book that's coming out by one of my favorite authors, Steven Levitsky."

Mike preferred the opportunity to observe how political scientists felt about the state of American democracy. An amateur theorist himself, Mike also took interest in how political scientists presented their thoughts and discussed criticism. He hopes to one day submit his own theories to a group of political scientists to gather feedback on his personal conclusions.

The two found the experience incredibly rewarding and hope to attend next year's APSA Annual Meeting, as well as other political conferences in the meantime. ■



Above: Attendees of the APSA 2021 Annual Meeting practice social distancing and wear masks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.



Above: Audience members attend events at the APSA Annual Meeting and ask questions of the speakers present.