A 90-minute film changed how Renée Barouxis ’14 sees the world. As part of a class assignment she watched the documentary "Miss Representation" which describes the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and influence in the U.S. Since viewing the film, she has been inspired to further examine how women successfully assume leadership.

Renée herself is already a leader. She has served in a variety of campus positions, including as secretary of outreach for the Student Government Association, as a research assistant conducting studies on the effectiveness of female faculty
mentorship, and as a peer ambassador and communications assistant in Commonwealth Honors College. She also worked as an intern for the campaign to elect Elizabeth Warren the first woman U.S. senator from Massachusetts. An avid hiker and biker, the Westfield, Massachusetts, native was recognized for her "honor, integrity, spirit, and service," and selected as Homecoming Queen for which she received an award from the UMass Alumni Association in the fall of 2012.

Renée has assembled a broad educational package that positions her to examine women's participation in politics and governance. A political science major with minors in history and in women, gender and sexuality studies, she is also pursuing three certificates in international relations, public policy and international scholars.

As a sophomore, Renée enrolled in the courses U.S. Women's History Since 1890 and Women & Politics in the U.S.A. to learn, she says, "things I felt like I should know." These courses, taught by Jacqueline Castledine and Maryann Barakso, respectively, informed Renée about women's rights movements, presented data about why women do not seek political office, and introduced stories Renée had never heard before. A year later, she returned to Professor Barakso's course to implore current students to take action in support of women's political engagement.

The next step in Renée's quest to make "advancing women's participation in government a big part of [her] career," is to gain an international perspective on women's involvement in politics. She is spending the spring 2013 semester in Cape Town, South Africa, serving as a monitor in the South African Parliament, where she plans to attend and report on committee meetings to make the information accessible across all sectors of public life. While there, she also hopes to sit in on higher education and status of women committees.

After she returns from South Africa and completes her final year on campus, Renée intends to earn an advanced degree in public policy in order to research the low rates of women in political power around the world. She ultimately aims to work in a government office, with a non-profit, or for a political consulting firm. She also plans to continue engaging in community service.

Renée is clear in her goal to help create "a society where women are equally represented in all structures of governance and women are skilled and empowered to avail themselves for the leadership positions." Increasing representation among women, she notes, creates a critical mass that brings women's issues into discussions and prevents men from fully controlling policy. She adds that seeing successful women leaders debunks stereotypes about women's inability to lead.
Already an asset to and advocate for women in the U.S. and around the world, Renée is committed to engaging women in political leadership, especially herself.

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