

Interviews with Influencers: Congresswoman Donna Shalala



Interviews *with* **INFLUENCERS**

DONNA
SHALALA

*US Representative for the
27th district of Florida*



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Donna Shalala hardly needs an introduction. She's dedicated nearly two decades of her life to higher education through professorships at Baruch College and Columbia University, presidencies at Hunter College, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the University of Miami (just to name a few!), served in two presidential administrations, and is now representing the 27th district of Florida as a US Congresswoman. We were lucky enough to feature Rep. Shalala at our quarterly women in higher education happy hour, and knew we'd regret not snagging a few extra minutes to sit down with her for our interview series. Enjoy!

Q: What was your great accomplishment serving as President of major university systems? And what do you miss most about being on a college campus every day?

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A: My greatest accomplishment was graduating a lot of students, and the students are also what I miss the most about no longer being on a college campus.

Q: After an incredibly impressive career in academia spanning more than two decades, a post as Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President Jimmy Carter, and eight years serving as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, amongst many other accomplishments, what was the driving force behind your desire to serve as a U.S. Representative for the State of Florida?

A: I was so concerned about what was going in Washington that I decided that I should really do it, that I wasn't finished with public service yet.

Q: As one of the founding members of EMILY's List, what does it mean to you to be a part of this history-making class of more than 100 women serving in the House of Representatives?

A: It's actually thrilling, and they're very impressive women. They come from the military, they come from government, they're entrepreneurs, and it's an impressive list of really outstanding women.

Q: What's one change to federal higher education policy you'd like to see happen during your first term as a Member of Congress?

A: Lower the interest rates, figure out a way to give people a faster way to pay off their loans, including public service, which this administration is ignoring. I would do it faster and encourage people to spend two to five years and help them cut down their debt dramatically.

Q: What are your influencers – in education and beyond?

A: I had a lot of influencers because I was lucky enough to have a lot of professors over the years I worked with, and count my fellow students as influencers. I knew some of the great leaders. I knew [Lawrence Cremin](#), the great historian of American education. I knew [Albert Shanker](#), who was a forward-thinking union leader, along with his successor, [Sandy Feldman](#), and now [Randi Weingarten](#). I'm a member of the National Academy of Education, so I knew many of the giants in education policy. [Susan Fuhrman](#), the President of Teachers College was my PHD student many years ago. It was both a combination of the great academics in higher education, as well as those that taught me a lot about elementary and secondary education.

education, as well as those that taught me a lot about elementary and secondary education that were most influential to me.

Q: What do you miss most about Miami now that you're spending more time in DC?

A: The weather. The weather. I repeat that, the weather.

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