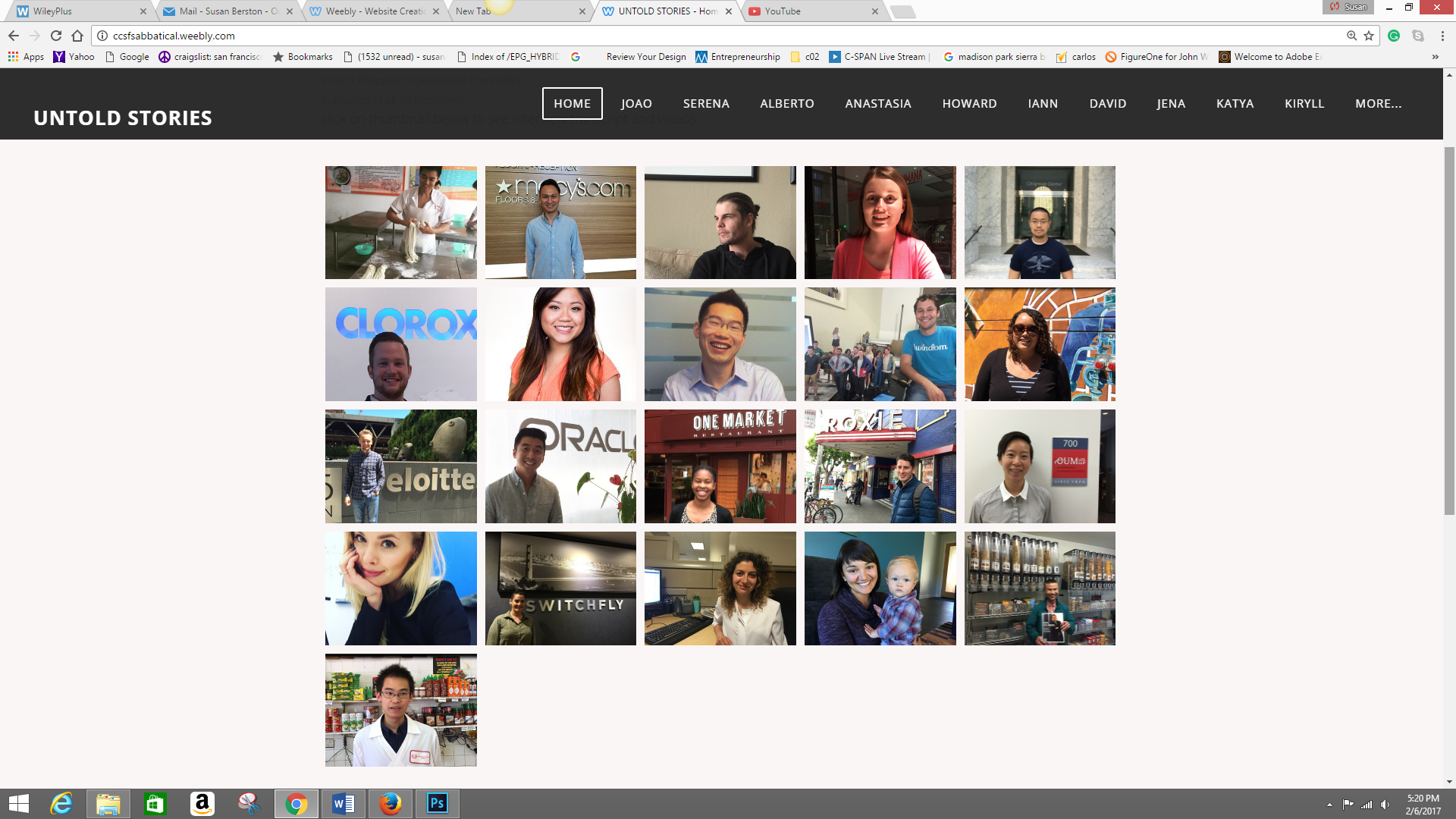
*Untold Stories*

21 City College of San Francisco Alumni Reflect  
 on the Impact of Community College

Fall 2016 Sabbatical Project

[www.ccsfsabbatical.weebly.com](http://www.ccsfsabbatical.weebly.com)



Susan Berston

Instructor, School of Business

City College of San Francisco   
sberston@ccsf.edu

I welcome all comments and feedback   
(415) 596-4900

Alberto W.

CCSF Class of 2013

SFSU Class of 2015

July 1, 2016



*I guess I want to ask you how you even knew about CCSF to begin attending.*

Actually, my sister recommend for me to go to City College. At the beginning, I was looking for a cheaper general college to take some of my regular, general classes. So City College was kind of cheaper among many of those and I also know it is a pretty good school because my sister went there too – so that is why I chose City College.

*What year did you arrive at CCSF and what did you think once you arrived? Did you have an idea of what you wanted to do?*

At the beginning, not quite, because it was my first time in college, so I was deciding between doing business or studying medicine to be a chiropractor. But then I realized that I like the business classes more than the science classes, so I decided to study business. Yes.

*What was your experience like at CCSF? How did you involved and engaged?*

Actually, it was fantastic and I like it because I especially enjoyed and joined many organizations such as ABG (Alpha Beta Gamma) and AGS. I was more active in ABG because it was a business honors society, so I like it because I make new friends and I was able to meet professionals and do extra activities.

The best part I enjoy about being in ABG is that there would be some fundraising activities, for example, I tried to organize the car wash, seeing the costs involved, the customers we had to serve to make a profit and the volunteers – kind of making money was kind of fun for me.

Also, the classes I enjoyed and actually, your class, the general business inspired me the most to take more risks. I remember taking the honors project and so I actually went to Las Vegas and invested in some real estate for the first time. I did put $50,000 and buying real estate, but I got $1,000 back, but I had to pay for traveling and stuff, but the experience was good, so I really didn’t spend money on that.

Susan: that was your honors project, right? I didn’t ask you to spend $50,000 on your honors project, right? So, it was kind of fun. I didn’t lose any money and make a little and the experience as more valuable. And the other classes kind of helped me with my background, for example, accounting, so thanks to my accounting classes, I remember a lot about how to run my new business, so it is all very helpful.

*What did you think about while at CCSF – your options for a four year school?*

I had an idea to go to SFSU and I did some research comparing UCs to State Universities and did an analysis of the cost of a four-year college, and realized that going to a state university would be way cheaper and that I could use that money to invest in some business. So, instead of spending $40,000 a year, I spend only $20,000 and save those $20,000 for something better.

So, that was a good economic decision. I finished school without any loans. Yes.

*How did your CCSF experience compare to the one at SFSU?*

Actually, it’s about the same for me. Back at City College I was very active with student organizations and working with people – and then it helped me have the courage to do the same at SFSU – and I actually did the same as I did at CCSF because I more committed to a degree and networking because I know that networking is very important to find a better job after graduation. So, not only having a good GPA, but also networking.

So then after I go to SF State, I join Ascend (for accountants) right away. I was still putting the professional events sponsored by Big Four companies and it helped me network with different people, and eventually, my social skills have improved. It helped me network with people who were working at First Republic Bank. So, after graduation from SFSU (2015) CCSF (2013). IT was kind of hard for me find a job the first month because I am still an international student.

I came from Venezuela with my student visa – and it was kind of hard. Every decision I make has an impact on the future. At the end, I tried to study Ba WITH A concentration in IS because it is more related to IT, and it will give me a better opportunity to work in the U.S. with a stem program, which is why I chose that degree. So, after graduation I networked with people from First Republic, and I met the VP of marketing and other managers, and they gave me a good referral to the IT department, so that is where I actually get a job through connections. I really didn’t apply for a job, but the connection that I had helped me go to the job. At that time, I didn’t ask for a sponsorship, because I wanted to just prove my potential. So, at the end of November, we wanted to open a business here in this are (mission and 23rd). We visited many businesses, ask about the price, see how their sales are, look at their accounting books. So this one, this one over here the Fresh Meat Market that we acquired – it is actually doing pretty good. So, I would say that last year they made $2.5 million in sales and right now next month at the beginning of next month, we are going to go to $1 million itself and in December, we should be close to $2 million a year and I hope for at least $2.5 million in sales. We have been able to break even every day and pay all of the expenses and I still have money to we have been able to pay off some of the loans that we took. I bought it from the previous owner of the business – he owns the whole building. His name is Ken Siu. It is an Asian guy from China. He came from China a long time ago. He sold it because he wanted to retire, and we are paying $11,000 a month for rent. We are able to pay for half profit.

What’s your role? I am pretty much the manager and I control inventory and I help with the IT part of the business – social media, marketing and sales. Actually, pretty much everything. I try to focus on stuff my parents cannot do – like talking to customers in English. They’re not really proficient in English so I deal with that part and also try to minimize expenses dealing with banks, point of sales, merchants and providers. There are 6-7 people working. They are all residents and citizens (including m parents) and I am the only non-citizen working here.

*Did your education prepare you for that? Did you dream that you’d be doing something like this? Was it your goal?*

Yes, opening a business was my goal -- even with studying in college.

Anastasia B.

Analyst, Analysis Group (Economic Consulting)

CCSF Class of 2010

UCLA Class of 2012

Duke University, Class of 2014 (Master’s Degree, Economics)

*Tell me about how you arrived at CCSF and a bit about your high school years*

I moved to SF with my family from Moscow when I had just turned 15 and I went to high school for one year with and it was not a match with the Russian education experience and I felt like I wasn’t able to get my education further. My parents had a temporary contract job and I wanted to do as much as possible while I was there and they wanted to support me.

I found out about CCSF and found out there was an opportunity to take a proficiency exam for high school and (inaudible) California High School Proficiency Exam and if I passed that that is something that would give me the equivalent of a high school diploma and I would be able to move forward with my education.

That’s what I decided to do and it was kind of a difficult decision at the time because I didn’t know if I was ready and if I wanted to go to a community college – it wasn’t what I thought of originally and I didn’t know how a community college works and it wasn’t like university and especially top name ones, but it was kind of a different change, but ultimately, I decided to do that – and then started at CCSF at 16, so that was how I got to community college and ultimately, looking back it was a great decision for me and something that I feel positively about and remember City College warmly and think highly of my experience.

*Did you think you would come to the U.S., finish high school, and then enter a top university? Is that what you thought about in your 15-year-old mind?*

Yeah, sort of. I was hopeful and planned to do high school, improve my English, get an educational experience in the U.S. and then get into a good university. At the time, I didn’t know anything about how admissions works or what are the qualifications that I would want to look at, but it was a lot of uncertainty.

*Were there schools you had heard of back home?*

Yes, Berkeley, Stanford, Columbia, Yale and top Ivy League Schools are the ones that had international prestige and the ones I always heard about. That would have been a dream for me at the time.

I didn’t specialize in my country, it was a standard school curriculum and we had lots of English classes and hours of instruction to that, so that was (inaudible) the specialization of my high school, but beyond that, I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I decided to study business and economics. I thought it was interesting and I could apply it to a lot of industries and thought that the foundation would be valid for me with whatever it is I chose to do ultimately.

*You arrive at CCSF. Where did you even begin? How did you decide which classes to take and how did you navigate your way around?*

I don’t remember the details, but what I do remember is that it was a big decision. Should I go to community college? Am I ready? Is this not the right place for me? So, I registered pretty late, and of course, many classes were filled and slots were taken by other students. I am not really sure I knew which classes to take. I think I might have found some materials like GE courses, Assist.org or transfer courses. I started to get some general classes like English and statistics my first semester. I know one thing. I was lucky somehow to sign up for Math and English 1A class and when I got there the first day, there were 20 or 30 people waiting or trying to get in, so that is something I felt that fortunate about.

*Did you ever see a counselor?*

I did. I saw a counselor when I first started. I don’t really remember her, her advice, or (inaudible).

*When you arrived, was your goal to see which disciplines were of interest?*

My goal was to begin the curriculum to transfer. One of the things that was interesting was that in Russia, you applied to a school, you get into a program and everything is dedicated to that major and you get into a program as a freshman and you study that for the whole period, whereas here, there is a lot of flexibility, you can take GEs, switch majors and figure out what you wanted to do. I didn’t know that would be possible. Kind of knowing those requirements and following them was a priority from the very beginning.

*How did it feel in the classroom for the very first time? What was the environment like as someone new to this country?*

Uh. Well, I think. I remember my first class was statistics and I didn’t know that the start time was ten minutes after the list time. I was certain that I was going to be late to my first class and it was so embarrassing and I got there and saw that people were still getting there, and I thought it was good and that I would be mindful of that for the future transportation. I remember the experience being very positive, made some friends in the class, got to know the people sitting next to me and I think there was some things where we were working together on some in-class assignments was encouraged and so I got to know some people. It was kind of hard to meet people in a commuter school environment, but in terms of classroom experience, I just remember it being very positive and the professors doing their jobs well and they are willing to share their knowledge and willing to be there, so that was a positive for me.

*What would you say the instruction was like at CCSF? How would you rate us now that you have a chance to compare to UCLA and Duke?*

Well, honestly, I must say that I have in general, very high opinions about the instructors that I have and I often remember my experience and whenever I talk to people about it, I always think and say that I had great instruction, small classes and the professors were willing to teach and do a good job. There were a few exceptions where things didn’t go as well, as always. (laughs). Having taken a lot of classes, there is going to be some variation, but I had a lot of great professors in an environment that works very well for me to have that small class size and have people be available. I can honestly say that I received great instruction that prepared me well, and I was challenged. I learned a lot. I didn’t have to just do anything and I can get As.

I know that one of my English professors taught me how to write and how to structure an essay. I got a couple of Cs, and I was completely shocked because I considered myself a good writer, but once I got feedback from the professor, Nicholas Smith, and I don’t know if he still teaches there, and I learned to structure my essays with a thesis, opening statements and how you transition, and I think that is something that has helped me, and it was valuable to be challenged and not just given grades. I can think of a lot of examples where there were really interesting projects and opportunities, of course with Susan and other professors – it’s been great.

*What were some of your greatest memories at CCSF?*

I think just kind of the environment, and learning and studying. Of course, all of the professors that I met. Everyone has been very supportive and gone the extra mile to help me learn and to help me develop my interests for the future. The professors like Susan and others in the business department and I will stay in touch with Susan and a few other people, and I think it is just very valuable to have that kind of connection and also the student environment and being a part of Alpha Beta Gamma and the people I met there, participating in those events and just really fascinating to see where people have ended up in their careers and to see what they are doing. It is an honor and privilege to see what people are doing and to be in touch with them throughout their careers. Having that kind of network of people that I am in contact with that are my mentors and friends.

*How did you build community at CCSF?*

That’s an interesting question. When I started it was difficult for me with City College being a commuter school and me kind of living with my parents. Everything just felt like there were so many people and everything was just moving so quickly. One minute I am in class with inaudible people, and the next minute I go to class and everyone is gone, going their separate ways. I kind of made friends in class talking to people sitting next to and those were some of the early connections just having someone to chat with. I didn’t really make great lifelong friendships from that and when the classes ended, I didn’t see the people after that.

After about a year or so, I don’t remember if it was Susan’s class or on campus advertising or what people might have said, but I decided to become involved and kind of see what it is about and I remember I came over and it was already late and they had elected officer positions, and I said that I wanted to get involved and asked if there were any positions that I might be able to help with, and they had an ICC rep available and I thought that it was great to become more involved and get to know these people and attend more events. I participated in the college-wide meetings and learned about what other clubs do and saw issues of student government and that was fascinating and I reached out to a counselor and she was able to come over for a presentation on applications or career. So, I think Alpha Beta Gamma was a big part of my community college experience and I guess the people I met through the business department or Susan’s introduction or people through the Russian community that spoke Russian as well. Looking back, I am still kind of in touch with a fair amount of people through social media and people that I see more often, Nara who was also a student (inaudible) and recently, she was able to visit LA for a few days and we made the time to connect and thought it was important to us and it’s just been amazing to look at so many years after to see where we all are and to cherish the connections.

I think you introduced me to Nara and said that this is somebody who is going to Berkeley, and you can talk to her and get more knowledge. We talked over Facebook and started communicating. She was there when I was there and then became friends on Facebook and now we are much better friends.

*Talk to me about transferring and what the application process was like and what your hopes were in terms of transferring.*

I also applied to business or economics programs, many in CA, Berkeley, LA, Santa Cruz, Davis and for some, I did the Transfer Admission Program, which was nice to have that security and it felt comforting to have that available and valuable. I applied to reach schools like Stanford and Columbia. I got into Davis, UCLA and Santa Cruz. At the time, it was difficult because I wanted to get into UC Berkeley and I didn’t get into Haas and it was a sad and difficult experience for me. I felt like something was wrong and that life was over, but ultimately, I am very happy with where I ended up. I loved UCLA, the culture, the city, the spirit and the environment and it was valuable to move there and move away from my family. That was difficult personally and financially and to kind of continue growing what I have there. I think ultimately, everything happens for a reason, and I couldn’t be happier or love my schools more, so that was kind of the experience for me.

*What was UCLA like coming from City College?*

I remember at city College when I was reading about college environment, I didn’t understand that. I thought it was normal, you just take classes and it is similar to high school. I guess that coming to UCLA, I really understood more about that college spirit, life and fun and making more connections and just having that large college experience. I lived in the dorms my first year as a transfer and I got to meet a lot of people. A little different coming in the first year as a transfer I think I didn’t have the full four-year experience and at the time, they didn’t have a lot of resources to kind of support or connect transfers. For the first time, you were the same age as the freshmen. All of my friends were a year or two older and connected with people in classes. I hung out with people I met in the dorms. I didn’t feel the difference between freshmen and juniors, and overall, people were younger than community college and it was nice to have that many young people. We all had a great experience at UCLA that was different…

*What was it like coming to City College at 16 years of age?*

Coming to college at 16 years of age was an interesting experience to start college at that time because I didn’t have a clear idea of what I wanted to do. I had less than other people, so many I didn’t have as great an understanding of what I wanted to do and future career goals.

*Tell me about your decision to go to graduate school.*

I wanted to get more experience in the field (economics in general) and try to figure it out more and see if I might be interested in research, pursuing an academic career or going into like a business world and I think I didn’t really get a sense of that in my undergraduate experience. Part of it might have been just taking more time to explore my interests and to get an education while I was still at the learning mindset and something I was used to. I was mindful of the different education requirements and in Russia, it is more valuable to have a master’s degree and our universities are five years, so when someone comes with a master’s degree, some companies are not sure how to treat that and right now, a lot of people are doing bachelors or masters.

I decided to apply to graduate programs in economics and fortunately, I had professors who were willing to help me out with the process. I did some research and came up with a personal statement about my accomplishments and interest and people in the career department, along with my professors were very helpful who took time to review and make sure that it was reasonable and ultimately, I was accepted to several programs at Duke, NYU, Georgetown and University of British Columbia in Canada. I think those are the ones I can remember off the top of my head. I ultimately decided to pick Duke because of the strength of the program and the strength of the school, and ultimately, I connected with the program director who was very open and very personable and helped me with the decision and clarifying anything that I needed. That flexibility and opportunity to focus on research or gain more applied skills and also kind of the people at Duke and how they were willing to outreach and explain anything – I really got the sense that people were trying to make this the best program, to be strong, and to make it the best that they could for their students. I found it very much as a place where I would be able to develop and not just have a degree as a check mark and to get that degree and be able to and that was how I made the decision.

*What did you think you were going to do after Duke?*

In general, when I started Duke, I didn’t know what was going to happen. I didn’t know if I wanted an academic career or whether I wanted to get a Ph.D. Right now I want to get work experience and with a good foundation or understanding or some of the issues. Having U.S. work experience is just so much more valuable than having some of those skills that foundation or something that is valuable for life. So, I was recruiting everywhere and ultimately, just ended up in Los Angeles recruiting with AG (Analysis Group) and where they had openings and it was kind of good for me because I knew the city, had some people that I knew and love Los Angeles for the city and the climate and it was a great place – I couldn’t ask for a better place to end up. Originally, I was on the student Visa and OPT and was fortunate to get a work visa in the lottery and am grateful to have this opportunity and to have the support of my firm.

I am analyst for an economic consulting firm and we work a lot with litigation and helping compare analyses to help support the arguments that our side is making.

In terms of day to day work, it is a lot of data analysis, working with data and analyzing and creating materials from that and creating in meetings and discussion as to how to move forward. We usually prepare some kinds of materials that will presented in litigation and it differs a lot by case and there is no typical day.

I get to work on different cases in different practice areas and experience different issues in different situations and also develop mind skills as I perform different analyses so it is a very interesting job.

I’ve been on calls or discussion of our results, but I haven’t sought out the client. We get a lot of case background and a lot of strategy on what points were trying to make. We are generous analysts and we move around. We don’t really have a specialty. I work a lot with finance like loans and fund fee (inaudible) I have tried some different things and work with different people, so I am not committed to one area, which is a good things. You get to develop your skills so you don’t get stuck in one area and you get to figure things out.

*What can CCSF do better?*

One of the things I wish there was more of was school spirit and that kind of college experience, so maybe it is more difficult to do that in more of a commuter settings, where people are coming from different paths and with different goals and somebody might be transferring and somebody might just be taking a few classes for personal interest, but I think focusing on school spirit or sporting events. I have heard that the football tea is pretty good, but I don’t know enough about that. Anything to create a more spirited community would be great and hopefully lead to more people being as proud and as fond of City College as I am.

I don’t have a good answer right now in terms of my future. I just want to see how my career is going to go and how I feel about that in a few years and whether I feel like I am still developing or if I want to move forward with an economic consulting career or explore academia and any other opportunities. For now, I am taking it day by day and trying to focus more on short term goals while learning as much as I can and grow and develop here. Ultimately, keeping that and the business situation and opportunities and all of that in mind to just see where that leads me.

*You arrive at CCSF in 2008 at the age of 15 and now you are 24. How does it feel to be where you are as a professional today and looking back at your 15 year old former self and what impact did CCSF have on you?*

Take me back to sort of the impact that CCSF had on you. I think CCSF prepared me very well for the path that I ultimately took with my education and my career and not only did I gain knowledge in the classes at a university level but also met a lot of people and learned about education and life and connected and saw what people were doing and how they were using this opportunity. It gave me a good education that I was able to apply in the future and allowed me to transfer to a top university with worldwide recognition which ultimately helped me accomplish my professional goals today and ultimately taught me about the kind of person and life in academic skills about in time management, experience or writing, and looking back, it has been fascinating about what a journey this has been and how things have fallen into place. For me, it has been very unexpected. It’s not like I planned my life at 15 and that was how it went. For me, the college that I went to and the graduate school and getting a job after grad school and moving back to LA and a lot of those I could not have predicted, and it is just fascinated to see how that has turned out . I always think of CCSF very fondly. I recently got back from a trip to Russia and talked to people are my educational experience and I mention City College, how people treated me, and what I was able to learn and accomplish. I think it has been a major part of where I am today and I consider it one of my alma maters, a place I will always cherish, remember well, and a place that I will always want to have a connection with, and be a part of if possible.

For me, I am very proud of CCSF and I am happy to bring up and share how much value that it given me.

*How did you change in the two years while at CCSF (15 years of age to 17 years of age?)*

I really opened up a lot and became more confident. Part of it was academic skills that are hard to describe how much I have moved from X to Y. I have learned a lot and it prepared me well for the challenges of UCLA and Duke courses. I learned a lot about the education system and I had a general understanding of people going to college and transferring, but I didn’t have the details of what you can do with that and what schools you can go to and you can have guaranteed admission and how the system works and you can take whatever classes you want within a requirement and explore different majors. It was really interesting for me to take a variety of classes from Shakespeare to French to dance and

I had a 3.92 and I got a B in something like international relations or some sort of class.

*What has been your biggest accomplishment to date?*

I think my biggest accomplishment to date was navigating the U.S. education system because when I moved with my parents we did our best to research and my parents were supportive both personally and financially and for that, I am blessed. All of us didn’t know what we could do and how to navigate admissions or what are the steps necessary to get from point A to point B to apply for college and what should I write about in my essays and how should I do that? What do I do when I am a student? Should I join clubs? What activities should I take advantage of and how should I structure my schedule? I think a lot of that was very new to us and with the support of my family I have been able to navigate that and research and say that’s what I should be doing and make those independent decisions and figure it out and I think that is an accomplishment that I am proud of to be able to figure things out and take advantages of opportunities and accomplish my career goals and kind of be in a great place right now with hard work.

*How does it feel to reflect?*

It was a big honor for me to be asked to participate [in your sabbatical project] and I am appreciative that you took the time to travel and meet me at my office environment after some scheduling issues and it was an honor to participate. It is great to reflect on what things have been and to really talk about how City College has added value to me and it has been a great experience and it is great that they can hear that (straight outta City College) and that it can be brought back to the college itself and to talk about everything that has happened and to and how things have worked out and to remember my whole journey and try to reflect on my past. I am happy to participate and honored and glad that I get to do this and to share the benefits of City College with others.

David N.

Enterprise Sales Lead and New Account Executive

Survey Monkey / Tech Validate

CCSF, 2013

San Francisco State University, Class of 2015

*What did you think when you arrive and why did you come to the U.S.?*

I came in 2009 when I was 18 years old. To be honest, I am from the Czech Republic and while I was there, I knew this lady from Texas. My parents ran a grocery store and she used to come there a lot. I didn’t speak English and I thought she could help me out and she offered help. I started going to her place every day to learn English. We didn’t have that available at our school. We only had French and German. I started picking things up and at the end, she suggested, “hey David, this is an opportunity – move to the states and stay with my family.” I proposed that to my parents and they approved it. They booked a ticket to the states and then I flew to Michigan. That’s how I ended up in the U.S. in the first place. I finished my senior year of high school in Michigan.

I honestly at that point realized “I love it.” I loved the people and the openness in the states and just the atmosphere. I felt like I belonged in the states and I fell in love. And then I thought, “I want to take it to the next level and do school here. I took out a map and said, where do I want to go next? Is it the west or East? I started doing research on schools and costs and I proposed that to my family and I flew to San Francisco in 2010.

*How did you find out about CCSF?*

First, I did online research – before I even thought about which school do I go to, I asked myself how much do I have? How much does my family have? How much can they afford to pay for me? Cost was a huge consideration for us. So, after doing my research and calling the schools around the Bay Area and around California, I found out that City College offered the best “Package,” for lack of a better word and cost wise and quality of education, so that’s why I decided to pursue City College.

*You arrive at CCSF (main campus), where did you start?*

I arrived July 15, 2010. I can’t forget that date. I came to the campus knowing nothing and knowing nobody there. But immediately when I came, I was introduced to a lot of folks and the advisors who helped me get around the campus. Everyone was open. What we wanted to figure out the first day was which classes I was going to begin taking in August. I took the placement test too, because out of the country, they wanted to figure out which English class to put me in. There was the orientation the first day as well – maps, where to buy books, the gym, and here is where you can socialize in terms of clubs and activities to help folks socialize and get to know each other and get resources. It was a very long day and I enjoyed every minute of it.

I was an international student and the tour and orientation was for international students and another for general students.

*How did you decided on classes and business as a major?*

My family and it all started with my grandpa. He is an inspiration to me. He is no longer with us, but at the same time, I think a lot of him and when I make a decision, I think about what he would say. He was a doctor and a businessman. He would say that you don’t have to pursue my career, being a doctor, but I want you to, but you don’t have to. But I want you to be a businessman. I wanted to make his dream come true and decided to pursue a career in business and specifically in marketing. When I came to CCSF, there was endless amount of focus when it came to classes and the major being offered. There were multiple programs that were designed to help us transfer to a four year college. I ended up at SFSU. The team at CCSF did a wonderful job to help us understand classes and transferring. I went to the advising center multiple times and understood what I had to take and got my classes. The team was really helpful (transfer center). They did a great job there.

*How was your CCSF experience? What was your most memorable CCSF experience?*

I would say, Susan that CCSF has been the foundation of where I am right now. The things I’ve been able to accomplish and the connections that I’ve made. I can’t recall a particular day or event that made this all happen, but I spent 2-1/2 years at CCSF and I can certainly vouch for it and a lot of other folks would be saying the same thing. In summary, a great education at an affordable price and the pricing was a consideration for me, so I appreciated that. And then just the overall connections that I was able to make which landed me a career here at Survey Monkey. I am still keeping in touch with a bunch of professors that I had – and they’re a great resource for future career and career help, such as Susan Berston. Miss Susan Berston is an awesome person who has always been my inspiration and somebody I can rely on for any type of help, so I do appreciate here help and I will always be looking up to her. In a nutshell, I enjoyed my experience at CCSF every minute and every hour. There have been challenges, but of course, nothing comes without challenges, but with my teacher and advisor, I was able to cope with all of these challenges and transfer to a career and University successfully and I have a lot of great stuff to say about CCSF and anybody who wishes to learn more, I am happy to do a sit down and share my experience and how it might relate to you particularly.

*What activities were you involved in during your 2.5 years at CCSF? What was the most valuable?*

To be honest, there are countless activities that I was involved in. I can’t say that I am always out there as much as others, but I took every opportunity I could – my first priority was connections – knowing other people. Getting out there and learning as much as I could from the experts in the field so that later on when I transitioned to a four-year university, I am going to have an easier time. And after that, career wise – right, in fact, Susan you were a big part of my job right now with all of the connections and the help I got when it comes to interview preparing. You introduced me to a bunch of folks who made a difference. You have helped so many folks and I love you. I love you for that. I was always interested in learning more about job fairs and there were plenty of opportunities at CCSF, connecting with recruiters and experts in their fields and their experiences and how it might relate to mine. We had huge soccer and basketball teams, the Rams. I am very proud of our teams. I did not play soccer for CCSF – I wish I did, but I always followed them. The other part was that I always took advantage of the tutoring services at the LAC. I think that was an awesome idea. I am sure other schools would have similar tools, but I found it extremely helpful making students understand and knowing they had the resources to succeed in their education and their career. There is a lot of things that I didn’t necessarily struggle, but there were classes where I needed help. I am not a strong physics person, especially coming from another country – especially when you have to translate all of the words in English, so I took advantage of the LAC and saw tutors and professors there who offered help at any time and at no cost. I mean, what more can you ask for? I was also an English and accounting tutor. It has been awhile, so I am still stumbling there to even remember what I did. I wanted to give back a little bit and help out the folks and get more out of the experience.

*Clubs? Yes, Susan!* You know that. Alpha Beta Gamma and Alpha Gamma Sigma. You were the advisor for ABG. So, yeah, when it comes to clubs, there are multiple clubs available at the school and the two I joined were ABG (business professional students and potentially professionals in their careers succeed and finding the right resources and folks to connect with and finding the right knowledge to help folks succeed in their career path and Susan was a big part of that. Susan was a big part of that organization there and everybody appreciated her presence there – she made a huge difference. The other one was AGS, focused on the overall – all majors at CCSF. There were always resources for folks in math, science or engineering. Anybody who needed help had at their disposal many resources. I was proud to be a member of those organizations/clubs, and I strongly recommend that everybody do the same.

*Where did you meet your best friends at CCSF?*

My parents knew Steven’s parents. Linh is someone I met here at CCSF, which is how we connected and how we are able to have the relationships that we have now. I met her randomly at the orientation, which linked us together – and other folks with whom I have stayed great friends with now.

*Tell me about your SFSU experience and how you chose SF State.*

That was a hard decision (getting into multiple schools, even received an admissions letter from UCLA and a few other universities and I took my time to really consider what the advantages were of attending a prestigious college or university – and what that would look like on my resume and for my future career. And at the same time, I was saying to myself: think about what your priorities are. They were #1- quality of education and #2 – the connections that I had at that particular school or the city. I had been living in SF for close to 7 years now. I am still in the same place. Think about the advantages about staying at SF State would give me, that includes being close to my connections and knowing all of these professors at the school and I know that I am in the Bay Area and am very close to Silicon Valley and all of these great companies that I envisioned myself working for in the long run. That was something I was not willing to forego. UC Berkeley, a wonderful school and UCLA also a fabulous university to be in. And had I gone to one of these schools, I might have been even, moved on to a different role now, or a more desired role, or it could have been the opposite, but at the end of the day, it’s all about what are you going to do with you degree? How are you going to approach opportunities and how are you going to, and what are the connections that you have? It’s all about what you do after, and not always about what school you go to. But still, it was a difficult situation to be in and I eventually saw the advantages of both worlds and you know, great schools and at the end of the day, it’s about what you do with it at the end. So, I decided to stick around SFSU and be around great people like yourself, Susan, and some of my great friends.

*How did your SFSU experience compare to that of CCSF?*

You know, I enjoyed my two years at SFSU. I had a wonderful experience at SFSU and the transition to SFSU from CCSF was a huge part of it. Folks always are wondering how they transfer – classes taking and what to do – but in this case, it was fluid and flawless. All I had to do was – I got the help and after all, I spent 2.5 years there. It would have been two years had I not had the surgery – scars make you stronger, I guess. Hopefully. Things that I learned from SF State is a much deeper understanding of marketing – definitely a field I wanted to go for and I connected with a lot of professionals in the marketing field and was able to extend that relationship and eventually materialize that into a career. Which is where I am now at Survey Monkey, as part of the sales and marketing team. So that was a part of it, both schools offered advantages and opportunities to pursue my career and make the most out of it.

*Tell me about the impact of CCSF in your current role at Survey Monkey. What did you take away from CCSF and how did it help shape you in your job today?*

I need a second to think about that. The one thing that helped me get to where I am right now that I learned from City College is communication skills. I was a very shy guy. I have always been, and I still am a shy person, but what CCSF allows me to do is interacting with folks that I don’t know – talking to a random person and eventually become their friends and colleagues. Taking communication classes and joining all of these clubs and organizations, I have been able to put myself out there and outside of comfort zone – by joining clubs and organizations – I was able to stand up and put myself out there without being afraid of how folks might perceive me – what’s this guy doing? How is he presenting? What kind of person is he? I am a lot more confident than before, and as a result, I have been offered a position here as an enterprise sales lead and new account executive and I am responsible for engaging our customers with our content. I conduct introductory calls every day – multiple calls a day – and I don’t think I would have made it without the impact that CCSF has provided for me and the communication skills that helped shape me. And again, that is the foundation of where I am right now and where I will be in the future.

*What are you doing in my day to day job? What product are you selling?*

I work for Tech Validate, a company acquired by Survey Monkey. Want my pitch? So, we are a software as a service platform that automates the process of creating custom evidence – things like case studies, testimonials, aerometric, and our customers have tried to create these materials in house, but they run into two challenges – there’s a shortage of customer evidence – could not get that because of legal and PR reasons – or a small marketing team that doesn’t have the time to go out and collect the voice of customers. We’re an enterprise solutions company as a subsidiary of Survey Monkey. Our customers range from IBM, Dell and HP and we are also working with smaller startups, 20 person companies and up to 100,000 employees. We used to be exclusively B2B and commercial, but we are expanding to serve the consumer side, or B2C.

*What can CCSF do better?*

Pondering. Hmmmm. Susan, I think that every company, every school, and educational institution – there is always room for improvement. No exception for City College and San Francisco State University. However, one thing I might suggest is providing a four year degree to its students. A lot of folks are going to be very intrigued about this, because I believe that if CCSF offered a four year degree, I would have stayed there. San Francisco is a great school and SFSU was a great school, but at the same time, if CCSF offered a similar degree, I would have taken advantage of that. Because that is where my foundation of success and career opportunity has been – because I wanted to take it to the next level at City College of San Francisco.

Hester L.

Marketing Solutions Consultant, LinkedIn

Business Leadership Program (BLP)

Lowell High School, Class of 2011

CCSF Class of 2013

UC Berkeley (Political Economies) Class of 2015



*When you were at Lowell, what were your thoughts about college?*

When I was at Lowell, I had two plans. I knew I wanted to go to a four year school, but my safety option was always to go to a community college. I had cousins and an older brother who had attended community college as well. When it came to decision time around spring, I realized the CC was probably a better choice for me because I really wanted to go to Berkeley or UCLA, so I made the decision around April of my senior year that I would go to CC. That’s where I left off, and it was great.

*Did you apply to four-year schools?*

I was on the wait list for UC Davis and I got in, and I was fighting to go to UC Davis, but I knew I could do better. And I’m glad I did this. I could have gone to UC Davis and have a lot of fun with my friends from high school and do well, but I don’t know what my job prospects will look like afterwards. OR I could wait two years and work really hard. I was a futurist and waiting and saving money would be a better option for me.

*You arrive at City College – huge school – where did you even start to navigate the system to know what to do first day?*

My first semester at CC – I am not going to lie. It was overwhelming in the beginning. I did not have that many friends from high school that came to community college, so it was a rough transition. I had two objectives, the first of which was to do well in school, so I made sure that I had my schedule of classes planned from the get-go – and then I spent some time by myself honestly just going around and looking at clubs, so I would stop by the student centers and talk to people. It was slow. But halfway through the semester, I started making more friends. Yeah.

*How did you develop community at City College of San Francisco?*

I developed a sense of community at CC through student organizations. So, I joined Alpha Gamma Sigma my first semester as well as Alpha Beta Gamma, and that’s where I started to build community. Friends were very genuine, and they just clicked with you, so that worked out very well for me because I was able to connect with people in those organization and the next semester, I was actually an office for Alpha Gamma Sigma – AGS, and then it kind of took off from there. I found a group of students who were likeminded and had the same ambitions that I did. It just worked out really well.

*What was your favorite part of City College of San Francisco?*

My favorite part was the community that I was very fortunate to be part of, and that just fostered. A lot of it had to do with my experience in AGS, all my friends were there, I became the president the second year, and I had the opportunity to be in an organization with students who were just like me and seeking the same types of goals and I mean, I just felt privileged to help lead that – and I had so many different types of friendships and relationships there that I am still holding now -- I think three or four years later, so it has been amazing.

*Talk to me about your goal early on at City College of San Francisco.*

My goal was to go to Berkeley, and I knew that even before I enrolled, and that drove me all two years. Because I had a former goal in mind, everything just fell into place and came out in many facets. First of all, I had to maintain my grades and I joined many organizations to make sure I was active in networking and speaking out to students who wanted to transfer, and to be the best version of myself – and because I had that ambition and goal in mind all throughout, it is so easy to just be discouraged at times, but that was never the case. I just had this goal and I never wanted to give up.

*What would you change about City College of San Francisco? What would you improve?*

There are a lot of things I would change – that’s the thing. Change needs to occur in different categories. You had to find your community, and a lot of that you can’t control because there’s an age demographic that is different and factors you can’t control. DVC has many students who are straight out of high school. What we can control, which are the classes and clubs and the way it is organized is that it can be more structured. It’s not very centric, so people who want to go towards a transfer route are often confused about what classes they want to take and the approach that CCSF takes when people first arrive is just to make it. The bar is not set so high, and they are not very encouraging in the counseling office. I remember my first counseling session. They were telling me to take one of the lower math sections and build up. They also told me to take an English class that was below my level and to just build up. I told them, “no. I want to transfer in two years.” They’re not really good at educational thing and goal setting and plan accordingly to match that, and there are people who have really strong ambitions and you should try to listen and get a gauge of where they currently are, and whether they are taking the placement exams.

*How did you even know where to start?*

I did a lot of my own research. If I have to give credit to myself and my success at CCSF is that I did a lot of research of my own, and spent hours and hours researching the summer before. I didn’t find the CCSF website very helpful. That’s the problem at CCSF. I think I was a fortunate one, as compared to other people because I came from Lowell, and I already had this mindset and resources. I knew what I wanted to do: clubs, I wanted to go to Berkeley, I went to the transfer center and planned out my 60 units ahead of time, and other people don’t know how to do that because they will come from a background that’s different from mine – they don’t know about career and college planning.

So when they come to community college, they listen to counselors, and that can offset them a couple of years from transferring. That’s why, for me, if there is a student, and I can only speak to this demographic, who wants to transfer to a UC or CSU, they should have a dedicated counselor who specializes in that. The thing I always thought at the transfer center was that the idea of people going to community college is that they didn’t have a good educational background, or something must have happened so that their expectations aren’t high, so every time I went there they told me that I should have a backup school and I don’t know if this will work – and they just catered to people and ended up setting up the bar really low.

We need to figure out how to have this community [of really motivated transfer students] built up and if the transfer center can work with organizations like AGS and professors like you, it’s truly a community effort.

*How did you know about the CCSF Honors Program?*

I did a lot of my own research and I found out about the TAP program myself. I did a lot of that kind of research and I also knew about assist.org. I would say that 90% of the time, I did my own research and it wasn’t easy and a lot of people don’t know about these resources, so I took a lot of my own time to do this research, and I do believe that this information needs to be more accessible. Something as easy as a pamphlet.

*How did you feel about the professors at City College of San Francisco overall?*

Professors are fine. I think for the most part, I did not find a lot of the classes challenging. If I can be completely honest, I think that the curriculum sometimes was not taught well. I had a handful of teachers who I thought taught the curriculum thoroughly and I learned a lot, but for the most part, it felt like this was a transfer institution, and it was temporary so the information was just kind of like… it just wasn’t thorough. I honestly to be frank don’t remember a lot of the stuff, but the classes where I did learn a lot where the professors were very passionate about what they were teaching – has stuck with me. A good example was -- I had this statistics teacher who I had and he was awesome and the funny this, I hated math before I took his class, but I thought he did an amazing job teaching and I actually did really well in his class and briefly considered learning a little bit more about statistics – but it just goes back to passion and how well they reach out to students and help them – and I don’t feel that a lot of teachers at community college have that passion and so because that lacks, and that outreach towards students is not always available, that’s one of the barriers that I see.

*Tell me about the adjustment to a four-year school and how it compared?*

So, my experience of two years at CCSF and two years at Berkeley – the way I live my life is always planning ahead. Two years, two years. When I first started at Berkeley, the first semester was difficult, but not too hard a transition. It is just that there are now lectures and you have to prepare ahead of time with a lot more material. You’re also competing with students who are just brilliant and really smart and people are head deep into the material and honestly, sometimes I just didn’t care. I don’t know if I am really passionate about this. But I think the difference between a two-year experience and a transfer is that you’re not used to the pace and not used to the load

You’re in a college setting now, everyone is hanging out and there are fraternities and the social aspect is broader and bigger – I guess the way to explain it is that it is a little overwhelming. There was a lot to do and a lot to choose from, but you have to apply to get into (clubs) – it’s funny, because when you first arrive, you start interviewing right away – for jobs and internships and for clubs, and then you have to settle into classes and meet new friends at the same time. It was a lot to handle at once, but again, my situation was a little unique because I had a lot of friends from high school who were there. I was really connected to Berkeley and my best friends went to Berkeley from Lowell. It was a lot easier for me to transition, and the material wasn’t too hard for me. I think yeah, the material is just a lot of reading. I did take classes I found interesting and I took a lot of healthcare classes at the time, and I took some Haas courses on the side – marketing credits and started out doing marketing my second semester there. I was taking courses with Haas people.

*What was the nature of your decision not to enter the Haas vacuum?*

I was not sure what I wanted to do. I think when you’re young you have this expectation of “you should know what you want to do and stick with it. You can do whatever you want, and you don’t have to have a decision, and that is an active conversation here at LinkedIn as well. I am glad I chose political economy, and I am actually really glad I did, because it is super holistic and I learned so much stuff and [inaudible] whatever I wanted to do. My personality, as I have gotten to know it better, is that I crave freedom and I hate it when I have to follow a routine – I don’t like it and it overwhelms me so anytime I have choice and the ability to make my own decisions, I actually thrive a lot better – I value diversity a lot and the circumstance I am in, and in business, I always thought it would be ABC – accounting, banking and consulting and I knew early on that I didn’t like any of them. That did not appeal to me at all. I don’t like numbers and I just don’t like that lifestyle, and for me I just don’t think I can do this, and I don’t think I will be happy in the very end. It was a tough decision to make, but I realize that in the end, political economy was the right move because I had so much time to explore different options and when I went to Berkeley, I ended up doing the Daily Californian, but to be frank, it was to get money at first, and it didn’t make that much money, and it was the basis of my career right now. I didn’t want to cold call people – but I remember my first two or three months doing it, I hated it. I had this unsettled feeling that I can’t leave if I didn’t try and give it my best, and because I have that natural inclination, I thought that I would just try and give it my best.

It doesn’t do justice for me to devote so much time to something and not really try. So, I ended up trying really hard and I actually did really well, and I significantly performed above quota every month and I was the first to hit quota – there were 16 on the team and every single month, I went over every single month and I realized that sales wasn’t only about cold calling but applying the right kinds of solutions to your clients and really be up front to them and consult with them along the way and that was something that I realized I liked, which is helping people and giving them the best sort of guidance and expertise – which is why I did sales. So, that’s how I view sales, and of course, money comes along the way. That’s how I built my skill set. I feel so comfortable on the phone right now.

*Tell me about your confidence before and after City College and your leadership abilities as a result*

My confidence level going into community college if I had to rank it, it would be 5 out of 10. I had just come from high school. I was confident in my ability to do well in school, but in terms of setting a presence for myself, I wasn’t too sure about that because I just wasn’t too comfortable and I didn’t know who to speak with. There was always this idea of observing from afar and admiring people who were in these leadership positions and say how can I get there? And the way to get there is to engage and talk to them, and it is such an easy solution to put yourself out there but it’s also the scariest and hardest part to do, but once you take that leap of faith and your true self, you start fitting into your group, if that makes sense. And because I took that leap of faith, I found community in AGS and the business community as well, and my confidence has increased and has been growing ever since because I know that no one can dictate who you are and I think that community really accepted that and it has carried all throughout Berkeley and all throughout job interviews, and even here at LinkedIn. I feel like I am thriving because I built that confidence early on in my college career, and now I can walk around confidently speaking to whomever and just going up to people randomly and talking to them. It’s not a big deal to me anymore.

Lowell High School, 2011; CCSF, 2013; UC Berkeley, 2015; LinkedIn – one year mark

*Tell me with those accomplishments and achievements, how City College has shaped you looking back from high school to where you are today*

Community college has shaped my achievements and who I am today in many ways. First off, the tenacity to always want more, to keep working hard and reaching for your goals – that mentality – you have to fight for what you want in community college because there aren’t many resources – and the goal is to transfer is not really in your favor and so that goal to stay hungry and to stay humble has carried on with me ever since because I know that in the day, if you just accept things and you’re complacent, then nothing is ever going to work for you because you need to fight for what you want and – and speaking from a community college perspective, I fought for the positions I won, the scholarships I wanted, jobs I wanted and to leave early to be on the team that I’m on and I know that my hunger has carried me really far and has developed from back. I want to be my personal best and know what it means to be successful. They picked five people out of Berkeley to come to LinkedIn. I think the way it worked out for me is that I fought to stick out in many capacities and my nature is that I am not very loud or outgoing right away – I am a little more quiet in the beginning until you get to know me and then I am outspoken. That didn’t work for me – especially in the beginning of a sales career and then I had to fight to show people, hey no, you don’t have to have that aggressive, loud, talkative person leading the pack – you can just say no – I came off as a person who worked really hard and who knew what I was doing. Even at Adobe, I worked with a team full of guys and I was the only girl so it was hard for me, but I build my relationships there and got a return offer (2 out of 5). There will always be things working against you and you will never realize that, and you have to always fight and show people otherwise. Even in the BLP program. It didn’t work in my favor right away – lots of Type A and I feel it, and I am a little different for myself and you want to be authentic and be who you are. Working in an environment like this, I love it to death. It’s so easy to be muffled out and you’re not an All-Star and I found different ways to really stick out and to be authentic while working really hard. At the end of the day, you are who you are and you can only be the best version of yourself.

*Where would you like to be in the next few years?*

I think about this all of the time, and a lot of this has to do with my own self-transformation. I think outside LinkedIn, they think Microsoft is a big impact. We are still LinkedIn and nothing has changed at all. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that I have changed a lot since I graduated and a lot of that was personal change – I definitely have a different type of …. My outlook on life is a lot different. It used to be centered on work and being successful. My mentality was always graduate, get a job, do well in my job, do well in my job, get promoted, do well in this company, get married, have a family and have kids. That’s always been my …. By 30.

The way I look at it right now is that I value so much my personal time. My life has always been around others – I valued so much my relationship with others – I valued so much about relationships and with Tim as well – I changed a lot in discovering yourself and using this time in my life to really explore the world from 23 to 27 because we are so silo’d in this one area of our life which is work and San Francisco. I just have had the time to explore and see what else is out there. I am open to the idea of moving. I am not going to move just for the sake of moving. That is not smart. If there’s an opportunity or the right opportunity comes along and I see a fit, I am totally open to it now – I think that is kind of my point. I can see myself staying in sales for a few years. I will stay in my job and kill it until the end of the year – it is not in our favor to leave in under 9 months, but I am doing really well right now, and I have built relationships with my account executives and my AE managers, so they know who I am and I am having a lot of meetings with them to construct better ways to do lead flow and I am always looking for new opportunities and to put a name for myself and after that, there are two options I am looking at and that may change. I want to go into more of an analytical role and do client support. I definitely like being in a client facing role, it can be monotonous and draining and you’re always on the phone and it is really draining, but I do see myself in a leadership role, and hopefully a management position, maybe in about five years. That’s where I see myself. Do I want to go to grad school? I don’t think I need an MBA. I do think that where I am very fortunate is that I’ve built a lot of relationships already, but they’re primarily based in the West Coast, so if I want to grow and expand and develop, and I want to join a good startup and have those connections, and if I want to branch elsewhere, for me, if there’s an opportunity for me to go to graduate school on the east coast. The way I look at my life right now is how do you really know? You’re looking at each moment and it changes all of the time. I really didn’t think I would be in sales – I had no idea that I was the type for sales --- you can make a lot of money when you go over. I am of the mindset that I am open to other opportunities and I am willing to grow and see other people’s perspectives – and I don’t know …. Embrace uncertainty and be comfortable with it. When I look at people I admire, and even our CEO, his outlook in life has always been to embrace what is happening right now and to always be a team player. To embrace what is going on in the world in which you’re involved – and so I want to do that as well. Yeah. I am just very fortunate in the position I am in right now.

*Tell me three things that you’re grateful about as it relates to CCSF?*

The relationships I built there, the professors, the clubs and the community – everything was awesome and it just carried me along the way – and that’s something I am very grateful for. A lot of people did not have opportunities – again, that is something I will carry on for a very long time. I am grateful for the support I got from my parents and my friends and the community in which I was involved. I remember going to community college and people would ask how I got to where I am and a lot of my answers were you and I not really that different, and you can do what I am doing if you just put your head in the game and work really hard. There’s nothing separating you from this secret sauce, right? The last thing I am appreciative of is just the experience that I had. I felt that I had this common sentiment that you’re almost an underachiever when you first arrive at a community college, and you have this hunger to prove them wrong, and because I have that mentality – it has carried on even to where I am here – that the odds are never in your favor and you can choose to get discouraged or to accept that or say no to work really hard to prove them wrong and become a success story in their eyes –Keep grounded. This is something I see a lot of people from City College do, and it messes them up. Once they transfer to Berkeley, they are so up in the clouds about this one accomplishment they’re not grounded and that is their safe haven – that they got to Berkeley – and so did 30,000 other people. So, you need to realize what made you successful and what made you stick out and continue to do that. So, with 30,000 other people, what can you do to land a job at LinkedIn and there are also other people in BLP (Business Leadership Program) and what can you do to get the next job? Stay humble, stay grounded and just keep working hard.

Howard L.

ETF Analyst, FactSet Financial Data

City College of San Francisco Class of 2011

Columbia University Class of 2013

*Tell me about your high school years:*

My single year of high school in 2001 was pretty miserable. My family moved to the states the summer before my senior year. By then, in high school there are groups and clicks – and as an immigrant, it is hard to fit in. It’s hard to even… you don’t have much resources. You don’t even know the questions to ask or the right person to ask. You just “welcome to the U.S., here’s your school district and good luck.”

*What were you thinking of doing after high school?*

After high school, I thought I would do something related to biotech or research. It was the only subject I was kind of good at – that’s why I thought I would pursue a degree in biotech or molecular biology – or something along that career path, and you know, be a typical, however you want to put it – Asian. Get married, buy a house, form a family, what have you. That was kind of what was expected of me.

Yes, I applied to college after high school – a couple UCs and Cal States, but because of lack of preparation and not being informed enough, I didn’t take the TOEFL and as a new immigrant, I missed the application deadline. I was ineligible for any admission for technicalities, if you would.

I spent one year at CCSF in 2002-2003 and a summer. My first day at CCSF was again, fairly miserable. CCSF is a commuter school and again, it’s.. unless you know what questions to ask or who to ask, you don’t really get the support that you need – unless you already have a group of friend or a support network. It’s difficult to know what questions to ask or even where to ask. I knew a few people from high school, but they weren’t friend. We’d run into each other in the hallways, but that’s about it.

During the first year at CCSF, my mindset was focused on transferring and I was working toward the biotech certificate, so I finished that in my first year, but it was very challenging. It’s a pretty good program and you get connected with a lot of industry professionals and the professors, many are from research institutions (Genentech) or UCSF. You get connected and a good taste of what it is like to be working in the field. For me, I was trying to transfer but I didn’t know what school I wanted and I didn’t know a lot of programs. I just wanted to get a four year degree, get into the field, earn a salary, form a family, the whole nine yards.

I guess life has a plan for me and I ended up going to the army because I was so burned out and so exhausted from being in SF and what have you and it was time for a change and I joined the army.

*How’d you get introduced to the military?*

It was a postcard in the mail, and it said you join the navy, we have money for you. I stopped by the recruiting station and the navy guy wasn’t there, but the army guy was – and everything else is history.

*Tell me about your experience in the military. What’d you do for the five years?*

I joined the army because it guarantees you the training and the job that you would do in the army, and I was trying to leverage the military training to help me to get a little further ahead in education and technical proficiencies, so I actually picked a medical job – a medical specialist, and so it was kind of in line with what I wanted to be – a biotech – you know, technician lab operator, or whatever you want to call it. So that is what I have done for five years – doing medical testing, what have you. I spent the majority of my first tour in Maryland with a few months in Texas for training.

*You’re out and it’s 2008. What next? What are you thinking?*

Yes, I came back to SF, but I knew medical or biotech just wasn’t for me. I’ve done it, I’ve seen it, and I was one of the lab managers and it is just not my cup of tea. I had it for five years and again, I knew it wasn’t for me, but I didn’t know what I wanted to be at the point. So, with the GI bill being available to me, I said I might as well go back to school fulltime and figure it out from there.

*What was different when you came back to CCSF?*

It was a totally different experience – I think…. Driven by two factors – for one, I was a different person after the military -- I had a chance to really integrate myself into the US culture or the system, or however you want to call it the network, to tap into the support network and I had the sense of okay – this is how to transfer, this is what you need to do or to whom I should ask those questions. I was more informed and that made things a lot easier and I think the second reason was that CCSF was also changing. Back in the early 2000s, City College was that “misfit central.” That’s where everyone who couldn’t cut it to the big league or the big school, the misfit go there or whatever. But I think in 2008 or 2009 – I don’t know when that change happened, I see a lot more students that were accepted to four year school that went to four year school, for whatever reasons – personal or financial didn’t fit that typical four year kind of model. They return or they started at CCSF and then transferred out. I think that is a cultural shift in City College. But definitely, there was a shift in the culture. It was no longer that misfit central. It was like, “oh you’re going to City College – you’re the smart one not to spend all that money on those courses you can take.” But back then, it was looked down upon like you were too dumb to get into another school.

*Did you see a counselor when you came back the second time?*

I tapped into a lot of support resources, especially I would say the veteran counselor at City College that is assigned to the veteran affair office or whatever the name is – he made it like a one stop or step-by-step checklist and he made things straightforward and simple.

*What activities were you engaged in?*

Me and a couple of my classmates William Do, Jessica Gong and Ksenia founded UIG the Undergraduate Investment Group. I met William in the intro to business class and Will met Ksenia and Jessica somewhere else. I didn’t know them before, but he came and asked me if I would be interested and I said, “Sure, why not,” and then everything again is history.

*Where did you develop your sense of community in CCSF?*

I would say that a lot has to do with UIG. Even there’s a cultural shift at CCSF and it’s no longer the misfit central, but it’s still very much a commuter school of get-in and get out, transfer, certificate and still have a mindset of get in, get out, transfer or get your certificate to move on to something else, so people seem to have a mindset of wanting to be there for the class, get home and then get on to the other job for income or salary or what have you. I think when you realize that a lot of those students probably feel the same questions, fear or uncertainty as you – when you realize that, you’re not really.. by helping those students, you can learn. You don’t have to do everything yourself. If you can organize certain events for these events students, you can learn from it too and that has a lot to do with developing a sense of community like when you have that common fear or uncertainty, I think that really helps.

*Did you ever imagine that you would end up at Columbia University and how did that happen?*

For my transfer school, I would say that it was a complete accident. I still remember that day it was a transfer fair and I wasn’t planning on attending that because I had a class during that timeframe, but for whatever reason the instructor was ill that day and the class was canceled, so I stopped by the transfer faire to talk to different people and just to get a sense of what was going on and I stopped by Columbia’s booth. I mean, I didn’t think.. I wasn’t planning on talking to that person, but he struck up a conversation and we got talking and he insist on giving me the fee waiver for application and said, “go ahead and apply, you don’t know and the School of General Studies is very forgiving in terms of what you’ve done in the past and they want to evaluate you at that time when you apply and what your future potential is – so they’re willing to overlook some of the academic mistakes that you’ve made in the past, especially if you can demonstrate that there’s a clear break in the pattern. So, I applied and I used the waiver and the rest is history.

I had heard of Columbia and I knew it was a very prestigious school and it wasn’t on my list and it was so prestigious and out of reach, why would you even waste time?

*Did you have your sights set on UC Berkeley when you first came back to CCSF?*

Realistically, I was hoping for UCLA, but realistically I was planning for UC San Diego or UC Davis in the same sort of academic ranking. Not Berkeley- something about the town and that school – we just didn’t match up that well. Let’s put it this way.

My experience of professors at City College – it was awesome. They truly care about the student. They know the student by name. Some of the classes like calculus, business and political science – they have small classes so you actually get to know the professor and sometimes just to say hi and meet up for coffee just to see how they’re doing. These things I sort of took for granted once you get into your four-year school – the professors have the office hours and they just want to answer your question, get you through and just forget about you. They wouldn’t even know you were in their class the next semester.

*What is your greatest memory of City College of San Francisco?*

My greatest memory of City College of San Francisco I would have to say is the Bay Area Honors Symposium – you have a lot of City College student that just produce phenomenal, brilliant research work and you just say “wow.” You actually present those things in Berkeley or in Stanford and it makes you feel like, “you know what – City College is not that bad. We can hang with the big league.”

*How’d you get into Columbia?*

I did five or six honors classes mainly for the UC honors contract. I think I was TAG for… I can’t remember – Davis or San Diego – either one of those. UCLA looks favorable for honors classes, but they don’t have a TAG. It enhance your chances, but it…. Honestly, I don’t know how I got into Columbia – and you know, for those private schools it is any guess what those admission officers are thinking because again, they have more latitude who they admit unlike, you know UCs or Cal State everything is much structured and portioned for your GPA and personal statement and what have you, but for private schools they can look at you as a person. I also applied to four UCs (UCLA, San Diego, Davis and Santa Barbara) and I also applied to SFSU and Cal Poly, which is actually really competitive.

Did you feel prepared for your four-year school once you arrived? Did CCSF prepare you? Was it intimidating?

It was intimidating from an academic level --- especially coming from a community college. It’s like you’re not just in the big league in a school that has some certified Macarthur award genius. They don’t seem to study but yet them just seem to get everything, But that to me is intimidating but at the same time, one of my mentors back in the day gave me some advice – which was to “just run your own race.” All it means is that you’re probably not going to be able to beat them on a one-on-one basis, but it does mean that you can be above average, or be the best you can and run your own race.

What was the experience like at Columbia? Was it a tough transition?

It was a tough transition. The academic demand was much more rigorous than San Francisco. The experience was very intense. We studied a lot – especially for Columbia. It’s known to be a very … the students there study a lot in general. It’s not just the school of General Studies or the engineering school. Students at Columbia just study a lot in general. But what it is, I can’t pinpoint to a specific event or incident that really, in the way liberated from what was expected of me. That I don’t have to be that kind of “perfect Asian that graduated from whatever school and making six-figures right off the bat or going to the investment bank and that sort of thing.”

*Had you talked yourself into being the perfect Asian Investment Banker and going to that perfect school?*

Going to Columbia, it crossed my mind that it is actually, how would you say.. the stereotypical Asian going to Harvard and the expectation of being a lawyer, an investment banker, a doctor – yeah, definitely but I would say after the first or second semester, I realized that I just don’t fit that mold. I’m not that… I don’t care about money enough. I don’t care about fame.

*How were the professors at Columbia as compared to your little community college environment?*

They’re knowledgeable and definitely a subject matter expert in their own field. Columbia has a couple Nobel Laureates so if you’re studying in that major, you’re talking with people who are the epitome in that field and people got recognized for it. It was definitely very intellectually rewarding because you can pick their brains, you just learn so much and one of those times Joseph Stickler actually stopped by our recitation and he was explaining his model of rationing and that’s how he got his Nobel prize, and he didn’t have any lecture notes because he didn’t need any. Everything is in his brain. He doesn’t need any paper or any material – he can just spit it all back out.

*Did you build community at Columbia in the same way you did at CCSF?*

I would say the friends I made at City College I keep in touch with – I am better friends with people that I met at City College because you realize that you have more in common and also you’re not competing with each other – you’re helping each other out. At Columbia it’s a very competitive environment, I mean people you met there, I met a lot of veterans, and the deciding factor that moved me from going to Davis or San Diego was the veteran support network and I really enjoy presence of other veterans because we speak the same language and we support each other and we also understand that we’re not that 22-year old college kids that just you know that was just legal to drink, so for us, we don’t care about the things that typical college students do and we try to help each other out in terms of academic study together, try to work out some of those mathematical models and things of that nature.

*You finish Columbia. What was your major?*

I double majored in Economics and Political Science. The classes at City College lay a good foundation, but it’s a different kind of economics. The classes can be broken into quantitative or liberal or classical. So, in City College, it’s more the liberal art that talk about that theoretical principles and at Columbia, it’s more quant and math-driven compare to the economics classes at City College.

*What could City College do better?*

Pause. Honestly, I don’t know at this point, but I would say definitely have some common first year classes for every student. You can say it’s a waste of time or whatever, but I think it is important for students to understand that they’re not alone. You can transfer things. Trust me, if you have question on a particular topic, more than likely other students will have the same questions too. It’s one of those things that common core that brings students together because it’s a commuter school and people don’t want to waste any time. I understand that people would say it’s a waste of time if I am not transferring toward a technical certificate – why should I waste time? But I think that – what that doesn’t address is that other aspect of the student, just being part of the student body. Not just get in, get what you want and get out. I understand that – if we can have something like that, it would be great. And instead of making it a traditional class, make it like a go or no go. If you want to transfer or get an associate’s degree, you have to take a class in some sort of organization building or something that makes you get out of your own shell – that’s the bottom line. Force students to get out of their own comfort zone. That’s what college is all about it’s not just studying but to push yourself out of your own comfort zone, but explore to learn not just knowledge, but who you are and what you want to do in life.

*How did you learn about the resources at CCSF?*

There’s a mandatory orientation for the matriculation process – I did it my first time around, but the second time around, I didn’t have to do it. When you have thousands of students, they just want to push you through and you only have 30 minutes with that … I mean it’s a long time, but when you are trying to figure out what you’ll do for your next two years and possibly the next four – it’s not enough. You feel like you’re being rushed and you have to know the right questions, and if you don’t know the right questions, how do you even know what to ask or who to ask.

*Was the world your oyster after graduating from Columbia? Was it the golden ticket?*

I definitely thought it would make my job search easier as a Columbia grad, but it was 2012, and for those that don’t remember that the economy was in the shitter and the job market was absolutely terrible. Nowadays, in order to get a good job, you have to get a good internship. The internship was competitive was competitive and it was brutal in the 2010 timeframe because the economy was in the shitter. Now you have masters graduates trying to do a bachelor degree holder’s job and you push the whole thing back – and now you have college grads trying to do internship work. As a City College student, it was difficult back then to get an internship. Absolutely terrible. But now, especially coming back from the East Coast with the name Columbia got me more interviews that I otherwise -- but what you do from there is otherwise up to you.

*How did you choose Factset and what is your role?*

So, let me back up. Factset acquired my old company, so I came along with the team from the old company. I am an ETF analyst. An Exchange Traded Fund is like a mutual fund with different features, some subtle, some legal that makes it, we believe more efficient, cheaper, more liquid. The next step of evolution like mutual fund 2.0 – so we analyze data, performance, trends in the industry, like the ETF industry, which is close to $3 trillion in assets and it’s growing exponentially, so yeah, that’s what me and my team do.

*Where do you see yourself in five years? Finance, entrepreneurial, Bay Area?*

It would be a lie if I said I see myself taking the CFA, getting a pay raise, etc. I just came back from a deployment so I am taking the next couple of months just being carefree for the net couple of months. I am not going to stress myself out just yet. My deployment was 9 months, and prior to that, I was at another 3-4 month training and I was gone for another 3-4 months give or take.

Deployment is one of those things where you don’t have the opportunity or time to think about it when you’re doing it, but when you come back, the first few weeks you take them just to unwind, but now most people will start to think about what exactly happened at deployment and what did you gain or lose from the deployment and that just kind of start happening because the first couple of weeks is like a honeymoon – you don’t have to do anything – you have the weekends and you don’t have to sleep in tents anymore and you sleep in your own bed. It was a honeymoon, but after a while things start to come back and you start to think about what if something did happen over there and think about whether you are still the same person.

*My last question. You came back to City College in 2008 and you went on to Columbia and began your career, you’ve been deployed. When you reflect back on your time at City College, how do you think that experience has shaped you to be the person that you are today?*

That’s actually a very good question. I didn’t really connect the dots that far back. But I would definitely say it’s more so City College as an institution, but I think it is the community as a friendship and it is competitive when you think about wanting to go to Berkeley or Haas or whatever school, but actually, compared to four-year schools, it is actually a very laid back environment. Most classes don’t grade on a curve – you score the points, you get an A, you get a B. So, there is enough to go around for everyone, so you end up making friends that’s not…. You want to be friends with. It’s not like you want to pick that person’s brain and get better at this. You end up just making friends and I think that friendship and support network is that really sort of what kind of gave me the confidence.

My narrative is geared more toward the immigrant, Asian American students. Do what makes you happy. So, what I am about to say is really more toward the Chinese American or immigrant student population. Do what makes you happy. If fulfilling your parents’ expectation makes you happy, great. But at the end of the day, your parents aren’t going to be there with you for your entire life, and to me, it would be an injustice if you wake up one night when you’re 40 or 50 years old and you look back you say, “Gosh, I wanted to do that so bad, but I couldn’t because of my parents, because of the expectation.” And that is actually putting the blame on them, but if you’re happy, fine, but to me, do what makes you happy, and of course, not breaking the laws or anything illegal, but in a reasonable, do what makes you happy – when you’re happy and you enjoy doing it, money will follow. You naturally get good at it, and when you get good at it, you get promotion, and the money will come. You don’t have to be.. I need to go to Haas and go to an investment bank and make six figures right off the bat and endure that 12-hours brutal work schedule everyday and getting shit on every day because that’s what my parents…. No, no. This is America. There are plenty of opportunities and all you have to do is take a step back, free yourself and look.

**Iann W.**

Product Manager, Macy’s

City College of San Francisco Class of 2011

UC Berkeley Haas School of Business Class of 2013

Jack Kent Cooke Recipient

*How did you get to San Francisco and where did you come from?*

I came here when I was almost 25 years old from Hong Kong. Back in Hong Kong, I had some college, but then I got kicked out. I didn’t finish college. I was a CS major. Before I came to the states, I was working in security and as a telemarketer at a magazine subscription company and because my dad had moved to the states, he contacted me and said, “Hey Iann, your green card is going to expire soon, so come check it out and maybe renew it. Come and don’t miss your chance.” So that’s how I decided to come to SF to see how it goes. I didn’t plan to even stay here for more than a month. I just wanted to come here to check in, kind of the process. My aunt and my dad were all in San Francisco.

So, after I came here at the beginning I didn’t even think about going back to school and I kind of swear that I wouldn’t go back to school. I had nightmares and actually as a matter of fact, I had nightmares about going to the examination venue and not knowing anything, just like blank paper and I used to have that nightmare before I went back to school at City College. So, after I came here, I started working at a sushi restaurant and eventually I had a friend who referred me to work at Bank of America at the check center to type checks and it was like 10,000 a night, and that job really made me think about whether I wanted to type checks for the rest of my life or do something else. And some friends encouraged me to go to City College to take some ESL classes and improve your English and maybe you can get a certificate or something – and that can improve your life, rather than typing checks.

I actually learned English since primary school, but my English was not that bad, but in Hong Kong, the way we learn English was multiple choices, doing it for exams, so my schooling was not that good and my (inaudible) was really bad, so I started taking noncredit ESL classes at the downtown campus. Then, eventually, I started taking credit ESL classes at the Ocean campus. That’s how I started my journey here.

*How is it you decided to pursue additional coursework?*

The ESL classes gave me confidence. While I was taking ESL classes, I thought hey, people were taking classes and transferring to a four year university and I really didn’t want to do it, because I still had that nightmare that I would mess up on my education, so I kind of hesitated, but then I was very fortunate to met Josie (Loo), because she was one of the counselors for the government funded ESL classes, and I got the chance to talk to her and she gave me the picture and guidance of what I should do with my opportunity at City College, and I said, I want to do business. I want to make good use of my life, and so she recommended me to go to Haas and what I should do if I want to make that happen. So, Josie was the counselor for the ESL classes I took, so I got a chance to talk to her, and that became a relationship to help me to get myself ready for transfer, so I didn’t expect to have that outcome. But I was looking to take an ESL class that was government funded that also had a counselor, so this was just like pure luck and random. Josie prepared me for my transfer to UC Berkeley

Who was one of the most inspirational people that you met at City College and how did they chance your trajectory?

I think one of the most influential people I met at City College Josie is one of them and I would say Susan, you as well.

*How did you begin taking business classes, and where did you start and what was that experience like?*

Because I knew I wanted to transfer to Berkeley, there was a list of classes I had to take.

Somehow (inaudible).

So, I didn’t do research on do any research on business classes because yeah, I think I spent most of the time researching for good professor on my English classes, and the other classes I didn’t worry about much because my biggest issue was English because I wanted to learn the most from it so I picked really hard classes and really good classes. For business classes, I just randomly picked and somehow I met Susan.

*How did you build community at CCSF and when you arrived, did you know anyone?*

I spent four years at CCSF and I must have started in 2008. I didn’t know anyone. I just wanted to pick some ESL classes and meet some friends, and that’s how I got started. I met Josie and she introduced me to a bunch of things and I can increase my chance of getting into Berkeley and do some extracurricular activities and honor society and try to get some (inaudible).

That’s how I started – some campus group communities for students who aspire to transfer to good schools.

*How did you become involved outside the Classroom?*

When you transfer to a good school, you need to join those honors societies and there was AGS and ABG and – and then I think after one semester I applied for an officer position for AGS and that’s how I started to gain some leadership experience – yeah. And then after a year, I can remember one semester one year, the president was about to transfer to UC Davis, and at the time, AGS was really really small and because the president was leaving, they had to have some pickup and to become the president – and then my club advisor, Mr. Cox asked me, “hey do you want to do that? Try to become president and lead the whole group?” I wasn’t sure if I should do that because I had no experience leading a huge team and it seemed intimidating to me and my English was really bad and I couldn’t do any public speaking I would just stutter. And my accent was so bad that no one could understand me. I thought yeah, I want to do that, but I don’t know if I was the right one. Then I realized that if I didn’t do it, the club would be dead and no one would be the president, so I thought, yeah, let me try it. Let me take that chance.

And then it could be a good way to run a business and help a company.

*What was it like to be the President of Alpha Gamma Sigma?*

Being the president of AGS Alpha Gamma Sigma was one of the most invaluable experiences for me. I was intimidated because I had no management experience, and I couldn’t speak good English. I wasn’t sure if I was the right person, and our club advisor, Mr. Cox told me, “Hey Iann, you have to be the president. The club is to die if no one will take the task.” I told myself maybe I should try and take that as a challenge and as a stepping stone of how to lead a business, how to lead a company and to gain more leadership skills. That’s how I got started.

*How did you feel when you won the Jack Kent Cooke scholarship award?*

When I won the JKC scholarship award, I was very emotional. It was beyond my imagination. I didn’t expect that I would be able to get that award because it is a full ride national scholarship. Why me, what have I done? There are many other students who are as smart and as hard working as me. I just felt so fortunate to be able to get that, and I think about how I got there, and all of the people who helped me to get there. I just felt emotional and very, very thankful. (emotional).

*What’s your most memorable experience at City College of San Francisco?*

The most memorable experience is probably the working as the president for AGS. I met so many very inspirational students and I learned how to become a good leader. Because I think being able to look at other people and give them a vision and give them passion is something that can the rest of your life. When you’re at work, let’s say I’m a product manager at Macy’s. I always have to give my team passion and reasons on the things that they do. It’s not just about building features, it’s about building a good experience for the customers, so that really requires good leadership skills and good communication skill. And how to inspire and lobby people to follow you, so AGS was one of my memorable experience because that opened my mind and my understanding on how to become a leader.

*What was your experience with CCSF professors like as compared to those at UC Berkeley?*

They’re good and bad at City College and I got lucky because I was able to pick the ones I like and the ones I knew that will have a huge impact to my learnings. I had pretty good experience and they inspired me to become who I am today, so….

*Was it a tough transition to Cal?*

At CCSF, IO worked part time, so I took classes slowly, so I didn’t try to cram things into two years, so I had time to study and to take things as my own pace. I slept four hours a night during my first semester and two months in, people were already starting to find internships and there are so many events and so many extracurricular activities that you should join at Cal. Also, the classes there actually were competitive, and if you’re not smarter you would be as smart as me, so it just a different environment, I wouldn’t say too much tougher. It’s just different. The GPA curve – trying to get above a certain threshold, because each class at Haas there is a very small who is trying to get an A, and even if they do pretty well, they will not get an A if they are beyond the threshold, they wouldn’t get an A, so it was just very tough.

*What activities did you pursue at Haas?*

At the beginning, I thought I would go into i-banking, so I knew that if you want to do i-banking, you should join the business frat, like the one Alex should joined. So, I tried to rush for that and didn’t get in, and so I was bummed (?), so people always mentioned that at Haas, you either go for accounting, banking or consulting (ABC), so if investment banking didn’t work, then what’s next, so I tried to do consulting. I knew I didn’t want to do accounting.

I rushed for two xxx clubs, during my freshman and I got into one and that is what is called Net Impact Berkeley, so I got to have a taste of what consulting was like and then I didn’t like it crunch your number, do a presentation and you don’t feel ownership of your work, so the firm can either take your recommendation or not, and when you want to do something, it depends on them, so I didn’t really like it, and then at the same time, I was taking some classes… ( we were interrupted).

At the time I had a couple classes that were related to tech. I took the tech entrepreneurship class at the industrial and operational – that department. And then I also took the mobile app entrepreneurship class, which I really liked, and that really opened my mind on doing something in the tech space and so I realized hmmmmm….. maybe I should find something in the tech space, so I should find an internship. I tried consulting and tech firms for a marketing job – I don’t know what I want to do. I remember I met one of my classmates at a Bain office visit and I remember I got an interview from Bain, and we had an office visit and so I went there and I saw someone I knew from Haas, and we became friends. Around April we were chatting on Facebook and he asked if I had gotten an internship yet, and he said he had gotten one from Macy’s and hopefully you can find something soon. A few weeks later, he messaged me that Macy’s was looking for an intern. If you still have nothing, do you want to try or are you interested in that. I said I would love to try and get an internship and see how it goes. I gave him my resume and he sent it over to the recruiters at Macys.com and that’s how I got my interview. And then I was lucky enough and I got the internship at Macys. It was just so random. It was an internship between my first and second years at Haas.

When I was looking for fulltime, I kind of hesitate to come back to Macys. I had the hope to return to more of a startup, and of course, at the end, we failed to do that. We worked on a mobile app project at Haas to connect the shopper to all the local stores to see what products those stores carry, but the hardest part was to find the data because many of the mom and pop stores don’t have the tech, so there is no way you can reference data, so it just didn’t work out. During the process, I kind of hesitate to sign the offer that Macys gave me – I was kind of thinking that maybe there’s a chance that… I don’t know if should sign or not. I keep holding and holding and then around February, a recruiter called me and asked to come back to Berkeley and help out with a career faire. During the career fair, I told him I hadn’t signed the offer yet. The recruiter told me that I should have a backup plan, and that made sense. I was just too naïve. I didn’t want to do project management (at Macy’s) and that is one of the reason I didn’t sign. I told the recruiter that I was more interested in doing product because I am creative – I love building things. So, would you want to help me transfer to that, and my recruiter helped me to transfer, and so I got the offer for product manager executive development program. I was an exception. They actually don’t hire two people for the same…

I knew I would stay here for at least two years, so I had planned to work at least two years in each firm to learn something new. Your career is like a “T.” When you first start, you want to expand the top of the “T” as much as possible so that you have a holistic view on it so you can pick the thing you’re most interested in. I knew I would be in business for two years and then work in a different firm just to expand my knowledge of things. So, I have been planning for my next move. To expand my knowledge… when I first graduated, I actually was auditing CS classes at Berkeley and when I got off work, I would rush back to Berkeley. I did that for a couple of months, and then I got sick and then I stopped. Since then, I try to work on – I was working with two friends on a new app as a side project because we think that there is no good news app that can actually cater to our preference – you always have to spend lots of time to find the articles you like. I rarely waste time and so we try to do something different and that’s a way for us to expand our skillset. So, I was working as a designer UX on that side project and it was really fun for me to learn the pain that my designers my User interface design would face. As a product manager here, I actually have to work with UX

I am working in a lab and what we do is expand with ideas and we keep shipping to get an idea of user behavior and whether it makes sense and would generate any more revenue for the company – on all areas within the mobile app experience from the home page to product page, from the back and anything that I see opportunities, I would try to dive in. So, yeah, working on the side project design helped me become a better product manager and understand some obstacle that my designers would face. And then I also try to learn coding to learn about front end, web development on the side – it has been really useful to go back home almost 7 and only 3-4 hours max per night to do something that you enjoy and I have so many interests – it’s just very hard to how do you say that… manage my time.

Nowadays, I am also trying to start writing blogpost because I knew that I am going to leave Macy’s and moving to something engineering and so I want to capture all of knowledge, all of my experience as a PM and use it as a way to get some exposure. Switching careers is a huge risk. I would love to work in New York for a year but if you’re in the tech space, there’s nowhere better than the Bay Area, so probably not, I wouldn’t leave San Francisco.

*What can we do better at City College of San Francisco?*

I think many students at City College, they OK. I will use myself as an example. So, when I first got to City College, I really didn’t know what to do and I tried to talk to a counselor and tell him that I wanted to study business and maybe Haas School of business and he was like, “Oh, if you’re not sure what you want to do, you’re probably too late.” That was before I met Josie (Loo). And so, I think students at City College have the potential to become great students – they just need to have someone to make

It made me going to Berkeley and I wouldn’t be the person I am today. And that happened and I was lucky that I met some influential professors who really inspired me to say, hey, we can make that happen and we can transfer into a good university and pursue our dreams. And so I … I think that if there is more channels and more ways for students to get exposed to that kind of mindset that they can actually do it, they can actually become great. Just to know that they can do that.

Actually, it (the incident with the counselor) pissed me off and I thought, I need to prove you wrong.

*What kind of impact has City College had on you if you look at yourself and where you are today?*

Let me think about that. I think a couple of things. One thing was that because City College is such a huge campus with so many resources and such great people that really opened up my mind that really made me believe that I have the potential to pursue my dream. So, that’s one thing. The other thing is that there are actually many xxx students on campus. You just need to find where they are. If you find them, it becomes your motivation to do better. It’s just like if you play sports and come up against really tough opponents, you will be more motivated to be as good. If you have a group of aspiring students around you, then you will kind of automatically try harder because you know that that people around you are also working as hard as you and then even others. So, that’s the second thing. And then the third thing I would say was the clubs there --- because if you are in a very small college, it may only have one honors society which is what you would have to transfer to the UCs. But one club there can only be one president and only 10-15 officers, and so city college as a big campus there are many opportunities to get that leadership skills and to get that extracurricular activities under their belt. And because of that opportunity I have a chance to become an OK president. I didn’t have any leadership experience. I wasn’t able to even do public speaking, but there were so many opportunities and I was able to do that and I was very lucky. If I was in a very small college with only one club, I wouldn’t get a chance, and so that has helped me to get a taste of what leadership is like and that really paved the road for me to be where I am today.

**Jeff W.**

Finance Director, Viceroy Hotel Group, Beverly Hills, CA

Lincoln High School, 2007

City College of San Francisco, 2009

University of Southern California, 2013

***Impetus to choose CCSF after Lincoln High?***

I actually emigrated from China to SF when I was 10. I started learning the alphabet when I came here and it took a few years, but it didn’t take me too long to start integrating since I quickly formed a group of friends. So, when I went to high school I think I was a point where I didn’t have a lot of direction as to what or where I wanted to go because my parents didn’t really have an education themselves. So, I took the AP classes but I didn’t have that focus and determination to push myself to attend a university. I actually hated the thought of going to community college because it seemed like a concept that was very taboo where people would deem us as something you only do as a last resort, so I was willing to go anywhere that I was accepted, but at the end of the day my mom who was actually a professor in China had that concept where you can do something better for yourself and that you can’t just settle for what you have today and that’s where she pushed me to go to community college and that’s where I ended up, so it’s more of a not knowing where I was going and a bit of an unknown for me – I didn’t know what to do and I just ended up there, but it all turned out good. However, at the end of the day, it set me back a couple of years. Because I did not graduate in the two years amount of time that I was supposed to (from USC). I graduated USC in 2013 and it wasn’t because of the courses that were hard, but again, not knowing where I want to go or what I wanted to do. I was jumping between running a startup in New York to doing investment banking to doing so many things in college that I never figured out until the end of the day – which is why I did not graduate (from USC) in two years.

I took the time to evaluate my opportunities and to evaluate different types of work out there and to come to a conclusion before I left school. That’s why it took me four years to graduate from USC.

***Fall of 2007, you arrive at CCSF. Where did you begin? How did you navigate your way around?***

When you first go to community college, you don’t know anything. I first went to a counselor and looked into the UC System and how you’re guaranteed acceptance into a UC School. I kind of just started learning and learning. The counselors were only a starting point. They can only give you 10% of what you need to know. From then on, you move on to professors like you who can provide more guidance. You can go to honors courses and join specific outside extracurricular activities. You build upon what you learn from day one and get from there. There is no playbook to go on. You have to be savvy and just kind of learn from yourself. I learned so many different things from City College – and even students today might not know the first day. For example, doing work study will give you early enrollment as compared to someone else. You can find certain professors that can give you better, not only learning, but potential to do something else besides school work. There are so many things you have to learn and figure out besides the school work. There were things I had to learn and figure out in order to get on with other things and start talking to people.

***What would you say was your favorite thing about CCSF?***

My favorite thing about CCSF would probably have to do with the people and resources available. I had a lot of friends who were willing to study with me, start a brand new fraternity, have the right teachers and all those resources helped. Without people around me, there’s nothing I can’t do without them.

***How did you build community at CCSF?***

I knew a bunch of folks from San Francisco. I had a solid base of people who were coming from my high school. After that, I started joining AGS, other organizations and making friends with classmates and doing outside class study sessions. You start doing organizations together and you start building those relationships on a day-to-day basis.

***How did you feel about the curriculum and the instruction at CCSF?***

I mean…. I guess looking back I can compare it to USC-level courses. The teachers at CCSF have the heart to teach, but I didn’t feel like they have all of the resources to connect the students to the real world. I mean, they have the background, and they have the textbooks, but at the end of the day, I didn’t feel like they were able to actually show what is being done in the real world. Bringing the expertise and speakers and those who can provide context to the textbooks – and not just recite the textbooks. I think that is where I felt like was missing at community college. But you have good people who can teach the material, but at the end of the day, I wanted real world understanding of where I could take what I was learning in the textbook and apply it to the real world and getting a job.

***What were your goals coming into City College of San Francisco?***

To transfer to a four-year university. At the end of the day, getting an education, not necessarily and AA degree, but enough credits to be successful at a university.

***How did you decide upon USC?***

The USC application process was not very difficult because I did the work to apply to a UC. I think USC likes people with unique backgrounds and attributes and I put unique answers that stood out to everyone else. Going through that process brings some research into looking into yourself and who you really are, how you’re like. I think USC was a good school for me because I had a strong interest in business, and the school provides a tremendous business network and school pride, but an undergraduate business program that gave me the courses to focus on building the fundamentals of valuation, corporate finance, government work and all that was a draw for me compared to the other schools.

***What could City College do better?***

We could do for days on this, you know. There is always room for improvement, and I think what I said, maybe connecting the students better to the real world. Connecting lessons with presentations, with case studies, with networking receptions and things like that to play more into doing testing with the material, but applying the material with different means of presentations, interview sessions, or even networking sessions and applying them to the real world.

***Tell me about the transition from CCSF to USC.***

It was definitely overwhelming in every single level. The courses available and basically, the lifestyle. The courses were less intense than I thought because you have so many spread out classes as compared to community college where you were trying to stuff everything into one. Whereas, at USC, you are trying to take it slow and trying to spread it out – you have more time, more freedom and you have more decisions to make – drinks with friends, do you want to join other inaudible. Back at community college, you just focused on studying and you didn’t really focus on school activities or school spirit activities. So, you really have to not commit yourself into focusing on just living but also just school, but when you go into that world, you forget about school a lot. It was balancing the world of school and being able to enjoy yourself or getting an education at the same time. It was a lot of fun, but it was hard to get that school mode going in the first few months, but you kind of learn to time manage and it was good.

*I want to show this clip to ABG and I want you to talk about why you decided to start ABG because it is one of the most successful clubs. I am going to send you the videos where people are talking about their most memorable experience at City College – because it is a club that has survived and thrived. I want the current students to understand the history of the club.*

Hi, my name is Jeff Wu. I graduated from Lincoln High school in 2007 and left CCSF in 2009 and then graduated from USC. When I first started at CCSF, I didn’t really feel like there was a focus on business students. I wanted to, at the end of the day, stand out in my applications. I wanted to combine my vision of how to help out students at CCSF who had a strong vision in business but also to help myself out in getting my reputation, getting my experience and I did a lot of research and found out about this organization called ABG and that it was an awesome organization that we should definitely start, and so I approached my friends and eventually found Peter Dang, Phil Pak and Rachel Posman as my posse. We all came together and all felt like it was a good organization for us. We felt it would make a good impact for the students at CCSF. It was not an easy route, nor was it a day 1, day 2 effort. It took us a long time and almost an entire year to really go from originating idea to having it implemented at City College and it was definitely a whirlwind of going to meeting after meeting talking to professors and administrators and really kind of nailing in why we should have it here and how it will really impact students. I am glad to hear it has done really well since the organization has started and I hope that it will continue the success that it has brought on. I started the idea at the end of 2007, and early 2008 where I started the idea, finalized and implemented in 2008. I was actually not the first president because I did not want to put myself into an organization where I felt like I didn’t have a full commitment after I first started it. I was leaving shortly after starting it, so I wanted to appoint someone who was not leaving CCSF and someone who could make the commitment to make the club successful and I left Peter as president so that he could continue to establish the foundation of the club and lead the success for one more year after handing it off to someone else. He was the president and I was the co-founder of the club.

***What was your USC experience like?***

USC experience as a unique one where there were so many options to take on that I didn’t even know where to begin. But it was definitely a good experience where I not only tried so many different organizations and learned so many thing in classes, but also tried to meet a lot of great people at the university. Throughout my career, I went from doing private wealth management at Bank of America to financial analysis at Southern California Edison and Walt Disney to doing investment banking at multiple boutique firms to even running a startup in New York and flying back and forth. So, I did a range of things and did all that – the reason I did all that is because I wanted to try out different areas of business. It really gave me that whole understanding to be out there in the world, and at the end of the day, the reason I chose investment banking come out of college is because of what it can teach me and what can have today, still, I am the only person who does the pitch decks and all of the Excel spreadsheets and all of these internships have led me to what I really want to do, and now it has given me the skill set to be successful in my career.

***How did you end up at Viceroy Hotel Group?***

I quite GE Capital, traveled for 3 weeks, came to LA not having a job and within a few weeks, I was able to interview and have a job within a few weeks. It was easy and fast for me and I felt like after talking to just a few people, it was the perfect opportunity.

***Tell me about Viceroy Hotel Group***

OK. Viceroy Hotel Group is a luxury hotel lifestyle brand and we manage hotels for private investors to REITS to wealthy individuals. We provide the brand name, the operation excellence and that whole marketing to help the hotel become the best place for people to come and stay. What distinguishes Viceroy is that it has a unique destination approach to its hotel instead of having box like Marriott, Hilton, or Hyatt, we really tailor each hotel to its destination. For example, at LErmitage where you just stayed, we really focused on what it is to become Hollywood. Like the Beverly Hills is who stays there are celebrities or wealthy individuals who come here who want to experience that lifestyle. We have Tom Cruise, Cher, and a bunch of people who stay at the hotel. In SF, we have Hotel Zeta which follows that technology, latest trends, and playful vibe. In the Hotel Zeppelin, it’s that unique 70s music, that retro feeling and so every hotel has that personality that is on its own and you cannot find that across any other hotel portfolio out there, so that is what we are focusing on. For me, in particularly, work on three different aspects at the hotel: I work on the finance, strategy and business development. For finance, I work with the banking relationships, with the treasury management, forecasting how our finances are going to be for the next year and five years for the business – and communicating all of this material to our board of directors. From a strategy point of view, I work with the senior management team, the CEO and CFO, the senior marketing officer in developing the strategy that we want to implement on a yearly and five-year basis. So, developing and executing that vision. Business development, something I recently joined, is to help them in researching where the next best hotel locations might be, how we might make that hotel successful and how do we win over the business at the next hotel that a REIT is opening. So, understanding new markets, understanding the business, and pitching Viceroy as a team and why we should be the operator for that property.

***How did City College change you, and what did you learn there?***

During the years at City College, it taught me to be savvy. Thousands of students, thousands of competitions of where we all try to compete for the same spots. It really taught you to understand to get out of your comfort zone and to talk to people and get out there and really fight for yourself.

***What is your proudest accomplishment to date?***

I don’t know. What could that be? Proudest accomplishment. That’s a tough one.

Can you really say that a twenty-something year-old sat with the Board of Directors? I sat with the Chairman of the Board the other day and these guys run a multi-billion dollar business. They are a public firm in the Emerities. They manage from oil to real estate to tech, and they own a bunch of businesses, and we are simply a small portion of that. Because of their size and expertise, we use them as funding and expertise. We have a parent company to fall back on and working with these folks has had a tremendous impact on my learing.

***Where do you see yourself in the future in terms of your career? What else would you like to pursue?***

Right now, I am comfortable and feel like I have accomplished a lot already in this role. I want to continue down the road strategy. I like to think big picture and lead a group of people and to understand every aspect of a business, so I would like to one day become a Chief Strategy Officer for a company and right now, for me to be continue to be savvy and right now, I am trying to join the board of the USC Marshall School of business. I was on the board of a nonprofit and I am trying to be out there, network, and help out other classmates. I know a bunch of people who are out there either in accounting firms or startups and I am trying to bring them all to my circle and helping them with my businesses. I just gave a contract to a friend at KPMG and I am potentially giving a contract to another service firm and I have another friend with a startup and I am pitching his idea to my marketing team. So, just really getting out there, expanding my network and really to follow

The impact of community college on my life has been a great option for me to really build a foundation to become who I am today. Going through the process really taught me to, you know, be able to adapt in ways that I never thought I could. So, becoming who I am today definitely led me to trying out all of the things in community college that I would not have tried out. Because trying those things has led me to develop a new perspective, develop a new skillset and then taking all that and taking that to the next level, to either do university or even today or every day in your career.

Jena M.

CCSF, Class of 2011

UC Berkeley, Class of 2014 Environmental Economics

Yelp! (19 months)

Marlon’s Mom (career)

***What brought you to CCSF?***

It was the start of the economic crisis, and I used to just work at coffee shops or whatever. I was 22 and I had been skating along pretty good in San Francisco and living the party life and doing my random waiting jobs and stuff and when the economic downturn hit, I tried to get two jobs that I thought would seem pretty easy to get. One was at a coffee shop as a barista and they were like, oh, do you have 10 years of barista experience, and I also applied at a co-op down by ocean beach and they were like, “have you worked at a grocery store before?” And I said, “yes, I have!.” Then they asked if I had co-op experience and I did not. So, I didn’t get the job. It was also at that time that I realized that it was a tough job market and I needed to increase my skills. I didn’t know exactly what I wanted to study, but I knew I needed more education.

***Where did you go to high school?***   
I went to high school in Colfax, which is a rural town on the way to Reno – in the middle of nowhere, CA.

When I was in high school, the closest city to anything happening was San Francisco – sometimes we would go to Sacramento, but it’s not that great there. So, whenever we would come to a concert, show or party, it would be in SF. So, finally I just moved here. That was where my people were.

In high school, I was kind of like a rebel. I didn’t think I needed to go to college and not a lot of people in that area did go to college. The richest people were construction or contractors or real estate people, before the crisis of course. Then all of those people – I don’t even know what happened to them now.

***You arrive at CCSF. Where did you begin? Did you have any ideas what you would do?***

I knew I wanted to take and I was really following the elections and I got really into it listening on NPR and thought I should learn more about political science because I didn’t understand things that were going on in the news. I wanted to also study economics so that I could be informed about all of the issues that were going on in the election. I got to city college, talked to a counselor, took a placement test and they kind of just… the counselors didn’t push me into anything, but they did ask what I was interested in. I said I was interested in kids and they encouraged me to take a child development class. So, I signed up for a child development class, political science, econ and all of the beginning stuff, English and math. Took a full load.

***Did you know you wanted to transfer to a four-year school?***

No. I just wanted to increase my job potential and feel like a more educated citizen. Especially in San Francisco where so many people are educated. I kind of felt like I was in the minority.

***How did you find and build community?***

During my first semester, fall of 2008, I was surprised how easy the classes were for me and I felt I needed more stimulation. I was having trouble in Spanish and I met Jesse Clayburgh. He was a Spanish tutor or maybe he was just one of the nice people and he said he would tutor me. He started talking about the club – ABG. He said it was about business and stuff. I started looking into the clubs and decided not to pursue that club right away. But I went instead to UIG (Undergraduate Investment Group) and they were meeting the following week. So, I went right away. I didn’t know I wanted to be part of a club but someone just mentioned it to me so that’s how I decided to go.

***How did you end up becoming president of UIG?***

I started going to the meetings and after 3 or 4 meetings, the officers said they were all moving on. It was a big club. It had 50 or 60 members at the time. I thought what the heck. I will apply for something. I am not that organized so I probably shouldn’t be treasurer or secretary. I guess I could do VP, but someone else was running for VP who had been there for a long time.

***When did it dawn on you that you could transfer to a four year school?***

It dawned on my first semester when I realized that. Compared to other students, I felt like I was more interested in what I was learning. And I think it was Ms. Goodman and she said, “what are you going to do next?” Then I met you and the clubs and you were the advocate for transferring and you were like the Berkeley prep class. I remember when Jesse got into Stanford and you said, “well, I guess that’s okay.”

***How did you know what to take?***

I think I put together an ed plan with a counselor, but even then, I wasn’t exactly sure what to take because my first few semesters I didn’t know whether I wanted to go to a UC or a CSU. I took a bunch of classes that didn’t count, which is why I was there for three years. Once I decided I wanted to go to a UC, I realized that about 20 credits did not count. The counselors…. I felt like they didn’t guide me that much, but it might have been just because they didn’t want to push me in a certain direction. I changed my mind three times. First I thought business Haas and then towards the end, I met with one of the Berkeley counselors who told me about environmental economics and since I was interested in environmental issues and business that might be a good crossover.

***What’ your experience with CCSF instructors?***

Amazing! I had better instructors at City College than I did at Berkeley. I’m sure the instructors were a lot more accolades at Berkeley, but they were so busy it was like they didn’t have time for you. The teachers at CCSF really cared. You were the only student there, and they would be elated and give you the whole hour if you came to their office hours.

***How did your CCSF experience compare to your Berkeley experience?***

They were so different. They were like night and day. At CCSF, I felt it was really hard to find community, but the teachers were amazing. The teachers were very accessible and the other students not so accessible and I felt like it flipped at Berkeley. There were tons of social stuff to get involved in at Berkeley but not a lot of teacher support.

***Looking back on things now, what you say was your greatest memory of CCSF?***

My greatest memory of City College would probably be. Well, it was definitely the clubs, but more specifically, I went to a conference at ABG at Cozumel and it was an all-inclusive hotel and activities planned for us and other students all over the country that were part of the same club and both of us presented and even though I have been the president of ABG at CCSF, presenting in a room of 500 people instead of 50 was a growth experience.

***What was your experience like at Berkeley?***

Fun, but kind of a struggle. Academically I went from CCSF where I felt like a rock star to Berkeley where I felt more like middle of the road. And then I joined the Berkeley snowboard team and that took up a lot of my time. I became the president of that. I was putting a little bit too much of my focus on that and my grades started to slip a little bit. I was already at Berkeley and that was my goal – but I didn’t put a lot of effort into my academics once I got to Berkeley. I thought, “time to relax.”

What advice would you give to someone like yourself who was working for a while and later discovered that hmmmm….. I think I may need to get myself to change course?

The advice I would give to a person in that situation would be…. Don’t wait. If you’re feeling that way now, it’s only going to get worse probably. The longer you wait, the longer you put off going after your real dream or your real goals. I’ve done that lately with relationships or old jobs I have had before college and you just end up wasting months or years of your life on jobs that aren’t going anywhere. Take a risk and jump in both feet, and go for what you really want.

***What did you think you would do after Berkeley?***

After I graduated from Berkeley, I thought I would work for the Public Utilities Commission. I wanted to do energy policy. The government moves slowly, but I just waited and waited and waited, and meanwhile, life was moving on and I lived in the most expensive city in the world with no income. So, in the meanwhile, I took a job at Yelp on more of like a fun social level. Meanwhile, I got a call back from the PUC, but I had already been at Yelp for a few years and decided not to go.

***What do you think is the most misunderstood things or misperceived about community college or City College?***

I think most people assume that CCSF is a place where people are just going and that’s the end of the line and that they’re going to linger around there taking art and random classes and get an AA degree, and then they’re done. That’s what I thought in high school, too. That they were going to get a two-year degree instead of a four-year degree.

***Did you feel prepared for Berkeley after CCSF?***

I felt prepared. The only thing that was shocking to me was the class size and that that the teachers and professors had absolutely no time for you. You had to schedule office hours and you could be there with 20 other people and you had to answer a lot of question on a board. He never got real personal. I guess somebody could have told me that at City College, but it wasn’t like it was going to stop me from going to Berkeley?

***What can CCSF do better?***

I think they could probably help you right when you get to City College – to see beyond just City College. To get you on the track for transferring. Nobody sat me down and talked to me about the difference between UC and CSU. That would have helped me. And I probably would have been out in two years instead of three.

I don’t think I ever went to, or even knew about the transfer center. But I might have met a transfer counselor just for Berkeley.

***Did you try to figure out what you would do once at CCSF?***

I was living with my boyfriend at the time and I had saved up money. Max encouraged me to go to school. He just wanted me to get your AA and that would be good enough for my family to accept you.

I thought I would work at the PUC, be a consultant or be an economist for the government. Then when I got the job at Yelp, I felt that I loved sales and thought I would ride the tech wave and be a downtown SF workaholic. I was at Yelp for a year and a half.

***How did you decide to forego your career to stay home with Marlon?***

After I got married, I felt the next chapter in my life would be moving to the suburbs – well, maybe not the moving to the suburbs part. I then got pregnant with this guy and thought I would launch my career first and then have kids down the line. I got pregnant with him after only being at Yelp! For eight months. I loved Yelp and I loved the environment. I got four months off, came back and went back for a week and just missed this little guy so much and didn’t want to miss a single milestone and I will be a stay at home mom until he goes to school.

***How did CCSF shape you? What impact did CCSF have on you?***

City College has had a huge impact on my life and on my career. If it wasn’t for City College, I don’t think I would have stayed in San Francisco. My whole life would have been different and it’s hard to think of exactly how, because I would have been a completely different person. All of the political science I took helped shape me.

When I first started going to City College, I had never given a public speech, I had never taken a math class above beginning algebra, I had never been to Mexico. I had a pretty sheltered life and coming to SF and CCSF and meeting all of the people in the clubs and the faculty really opened up my eyes to people around me and made me want to learn more. I thought that is what I should do to get a job and I thought that maybe if I had an AA they would hire me at the grocery store. I never thought I could consider becoming an economist or working at a startup. It really made me dream bigger and I have achieved my dreams.

***What would you have done differently?***

I probably would have gotten started at City College sooner and I probably would have taken classes that counted toward something. I think I got pretty lucky, but I know there were a lot of people out there who weren’t as lucky as me – who didn’t know they could achieve those things. I know a lot of people at City College were bright, but they didn’t get enough direction.

I didn’t realize that joining a club would be a really enriching experience that – I thought it was just a box that you check off. I got an opportunity to present in front of people, get outside my comfort zone and hang out with people who had different backgrounds than me and organize events. I felt like I had 20 different jobs in one – just organizing events.

**Joao P.**

Terra Nova High School, Class of 2010

CCSF Class of 2013

UC Berkeley Class of 2016

July 7, 2016



*Tell me about your high school years:*

I came to HS a year after being in the U.S. and I didn’t speak much English, and wasn’t very comfortable with the American culture. Plus, my high school had some people who were a little racist, so I didn’t really get along with these people.

I always played soccer, so I joined a group of soccer people there. We were mostly Latinos and I would hang out with them, and my life was all about soccer. I wanted to be a professional soccer player. All of my energy went into that, so I didn’t study very much. I did apply myself a little bit, but the crowd that I was with didn’t apply themselves, so I did a little bit – but just didn’t worry about it too much. All of my effort was put into soccer and I got C’s just to pass. Not a very good high school experience because I think I had a little bit of a problem with my identity because I had just come back from Brazil, and I didn’t speak much English.

*How did you discover CCSF?*

So, in my junior year, my peers were taking the SAT. I didn’t take it because I didn’t feel prepared at all. I thought I would just not take the SATs and get out in my senior year. In my senior year, kids were taking the SATs again, and that’s when I could go to a community college and transfer to another university – and NOT have to take the SATs. So, I thought I would do that instead.

At the time, I researched universities for international business and soccer and San Diego State was a good school. I thought I would go to CCSF and then transfer to San Diego State. I just came into City College in 2009 and walked in – a long time ago – definitely a long time ago -- came in and didn’t know where anything was. Yes, I saw a counselor to take an assessment test to see like my level of English writing and math writing.

I saw a counselor, talked to a counselor and had a negative experience. I told her my plans to transfer to San Diego State and she said, “no, it’s a competitive school. It’s a hard school.” Transfer to SF State. She pushed me like so hard to SF State. She said not to think about San Diego State. “You’re going to SF State.” Even that school is hard to get in, she said. That was pretty sad, and then I saw another counselor, told her my plans to do business and then just went and picked all my classes and then I picked your class to get an introduction to business and I took your general business class.

*What do you remember most about your time at CCSF? What comes to mind when you reflect on the 3.5 years spent at CCSF?*

What I remember most is was meeting Jesse (Clayburgh). That was the pivoting point, no doubt. I saw him in your class, he walked in, and he had a lot of confidence and he had a conversation with you and he was able to communicate really well, and I admired that so much. I said, “I want to be like that guy.” He was doing so well, and you used to call on him for things, and like Jesse, look this up, Jesse do this and that. And I said, “this guy knows everything and he even gets along with the professor. I couldn’t even look in your eyes. I was so intimidated.” Me: you were shy. I was so shy and we had one conversation on campus and I was so shy. The moment I met him and then I had him in another class and met him, and after that he introduced me to the honors program and we went to Sami Kudsi’s office and met him there. All of a sudden, my eyes opened and I felt like I could reach higher. Higher opportunities. Don’t settle for like just mediocre path which was laid out in front of me. That’s what is most memorable. After that, I became a senator and made a lot of friends that way. I was also part of AGS as the ICC representative and a lot of people in student government body there made a lot of friends and I started Club Brazil and we had four people working with us – four students and a lot of people working together for the Brazilian community. We set up a website of resources and went to speak to the Brazilian Consulate – the club no longer exists, but now I am part of the Brazilian consulate for the public community. The Brazilian Consulate works with business, education and helps immigrants. I worked with the BC to improve the BC and reach out the community that it targets with the services it makes available.

So, the most memorable experience at CCSF would have to be meeting Jesse and joining extracurricular activities and finding myself. Like, I remember that I remember that I made a transition from going out with this little Brazilian group I had where we would go out and party on Friday nights to studying at the Rosenberg library. I remember that the library would close at CCSF, but SF State would stay open 24/7, and I would go and study like Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday. I had to study so much because it didn’t come easy to me – the material – you know. Yeah, it never came easy to me. I had to put a lot of work every time. So then I was studying with groups of friends I met through the extracurricular activities like Sparsh and I would bring Eliza [former GF] to study with me all of the time until she got tired and left, so yeah, City College is amazing.

After a year or two at CCSF, did your confidence level increase, and thus your trajectory and thoughts of going to San Diego change? How did that materialize and when was it that you realized that you could do a lot more?

After the first semester was when I met Jesse. That winter break, we went to Mexico together and spent a lot of time. We hitchhiked through the Baja peninsula and we had great experiences and I learned so much from him. I learned that I could put forth all this work and that there were all of these resources at City College like (inaudible). One that helped me was VITA which helped minorities.

After the first year and getting better grades (that I had never gotten before in my life), I thought it was possible to… you know have a chance of going to a UC. And then I found out that I could do IGETC and do this TAG and TAP at Davis and UCLA. So, tried to get into TAP. I couldn’t – but I got into TAP. And I thought, “I could go to UC Santa Barbara and UC Davis.” Some UC – that’s amazing.

My confidence became really high and I became part of AGS and I was standing in front of students and telling them – that was the biggest transition for me – that leadership – all of a sudden I was in front of other students who I knew from the previous year – to speak to them to tell them about things. After that, I started meeting more and applied maybe to UCLA and a semester passed, that spring passed and the fall came and I started that business with Jesse – high hopes and dreams. Growing a business and I started having thoughts and aspirations – and then I thought it was just a matter of applying myself more. So I think that the confidence level and that switch of sitting down and looking up as opposed to sitting up and being a source for students to look up to and gaining a sense of responsibility and a sense that I am able to do this. It was achievable because you saw other people do it. I thought it was not accessible. I saw Alex Hudzilin and thought, “this guy is hot. He is a god. I could never speak in front of people. These guys are super stars and I remember seeing William Do on campus and he asked me a bunch of questions about what I was thinking, and I didn’t even know how to answer. I couldn’t even speak to him and I didn’t know what to say.

*What would you say about the professors at CCSF and access?*

It had a big impact and also an eye opener – it was a bigger transition – I was in the dark before I started studying at CCSF. I was living so passively and not understanding how things worked. When I started reading and studying and trying to complete assignments and in my English class, for example, I had a couple of assignments that were hard to complete and that was a big transition – just understanding society and what was going on with me. Kind of like previously living in the shadows.

I had one instructor for English 1A, Maggie was her name, I think. She gave us assignments – writing assignments and I would have conversations with her and I was really xxx and she would ask me questions to make me think and express my thoughts – I don’t know – she was able to make me think – and also the leadership was a big change in my life. And becoming intellectually stimulated – and that’s what Maggie gave to me. Before Maggie, I had an English 96, or whatever comes before English 1A and I had a professor that was a sub, and he was very like – he taught with conviction – and he had an impact on me, but I can’t be too descriptive because it was so long ago but it was one of those moments that I opened my eyes and thought “whoa – what’s going on here?” and became more interested in thoughts I was having --- but he never got back to me (via email), which was sad – but maybe he saw that I got it, and decided not to get back to me.

*Why did you decide to go to China?*

Yeah, so I decided to go to China because that was right after I sold the business to Jesse and I had money to do something like that – to travel. And I felt like I had been surrounded by people who had the chance to travel – Jesse lived in France for a year and Jenna lived in Puerto Rico or something or somewhere – for one year and we would talk and she was so interested and so intelligent and Wes would talk about his travels, too. And I felt like I was lacking – and I thought that I would just take a break from University and I had been taking Chinese courses for a year and a half and I wanted to immerse myself in culture and language and need to speak it so I could get it in my brain and I just wanted a little break from going to City. And go somewhere where I could find a challenge. I spent six months, including a summer. My life changed in China too and I became so much more intellectually curious – and I came back to CCSF that fall with so much of a desire to learn. I would see Jenna in the library.

That was also a memorable experience – spending all of that time in the LAC (Learning Assistance Center). The LAC was a great resource – one of the best. I saw Jenna and I talked with her and “catched up with her” and said, “Are you so excited for the semester?” She said, “Yeah, kind of, you know…”

I told her that I was so excited and so ready to study. I was so ready the whole time in China to read more about business, politics and economics. And she was taken back and said, “why do you want to do that?” So, yeah. I came back with that desire to learn more. To figure things out. So, yeah. China had a big impact – being on my own, having many challenges and finding a job, because I wanted to find a job to learn more about import/export in China, so I found a job at an exporting company that manufactured garments and shipped them. I would see the factories and go to trade shows and yeah, I would attend business meetings. I ate sea cucumber in a business meeting. I couldn’t say no. I had to eat raw, and it didn’t taste very good. Yeah, China is a place that really opened my mind.

*Do you think the experience in China helped you get into Berkeley?*

I think so. By far. My business experience and my China experience as the best thing I had going for me. My business experience of starting a van rental company. Just having that shows a lot of initiative, which I have and so that helped a lot. Leadership and initiative. In China it was great because it really out there and it takes a lot more courage It felt a little bit surreal that I got into a school that I never thought was possible to get into before City College. But after putting in 3.5 of years into work – most days, about 90% of my days, putting work into improving myself and struggling to improve in courses – I felt like I deserved it.

*How was your experience at Berkeley?*

Really – it was like walking in from the airport to China. There were so many things going on. I walked into Sproul Hall on the first day and there were around 50 stands of fraternities and all of these other types of clubs – business clubs, music clubs and all these things. And I didn’t know what to do for. It was overwhelming and I didn’t have any guidance in Berkeley and I didn’t know what I path should be. There was a problem of too many choices. What do I do? I banking, sales, marketing….

Did you background and time at CCSF help you? I felt intimidated a little bit when I was in the class and the students next to me were asking questions that I thought I would need three other books to understand what they were talking about because they were just geniuses. But after a couple of months, I saw that it wasn’t like that “big monster” that I made in my mind, and that I was able to do just as well as they were. And my writing was solid. I got an A in my English course in the course I took the first semester and I was able to network and get/understand the social hierarchies and ladders within Berkeley – because I had experience with the student council at City College – being senators – and knowing how that worked. Starting a club and being an officer in other clubs – so I had an understanding of how that worked and after the first couple months I wasn’t intimidated at all and I saw that I could just do this -- I could choose something that I wanted to do professionally – choose a path – and I knew I could easily go down that path – by taking a certain type of courses that would lead me to that professional path. Yeah, Berkeley was another experience that changed my life completely.

*What did you study at Berkeley?*

Interdisciplinary studies – so, I focus and created a focus called international trade and development – so that allowed me to take courses in economics, business sand international area studies and that’s exactly what I wanted to do going into City College. In the first year, I wanted to do international business. I didn’t want to do business. I thought I wanted to do something a little bit more meaningful – and that’s where Berkeley kind of kicked in. That I needed to add money to society in some way – not just i-banking and go for profits my whole life. I mean, “what value are you generating to society?”

Then I thought international trade and development would be perfect. I could do more courses on the liberal side – a course, let’s say a sociology course studying globalization and developments and so I studied many theories like neo-liberal theories and their impact from the 1970s, and what economic theories had in Latin American countries and it was a very holisitic approach that I took to learning about international business and economics. sociology course studying so I studied many theories like neo-liberal theories

*How did the community at City College compare to the community that you became a part of at Berkeley?*

So, what helped me in Berkeley and made things a little level overwhelming was my City College alums. I talked to Alexander Ioch and he broke it down and told me how Haas worked and what opportunities students were looking for at Haas and I talked to many other City College students who told me what I should be doing, and what I would want to be focusing on. Kiryll helped me a lot and City College gave me this community of friends that were a year, two years and one year below me that I am still in touch with -- and we were able to help each other through many different things – especially the application process and the day-to-day at Berkeley. We always came to each other fast and running with all this help, and we were never busy to help each other. No, I was never busy. I was able to schedule a coffee date with these guys and ask questions when I needed help at Berkeley. We stayed as a tight community and always helped each other.

*Do you think those friendships are more meaningful than your Berkeley friendships?*

Yeah, so yeah. The difference between CCSF and Berkeley is that CCSF is a more tight community as compared to a community with an individualistic community. So yeah, the friendships I developed at City College were way stronger than the ones I developed at Berkeley.

*When you look back now after your recent graduation from Berkeley, and you look ahead, what do you see for yourself in the future? What would you like to do as you look around now?*

As I look around now, I’ve become …. Specific career? Yeah, so I would like to begin my career in technology and after doing internships out of college in finance, marketing and sales, and what I liked the most was sales – a lot of people give me feedback and say I am very good at it. I like to talk to and engage people – yeah, I love people. So, I want to do sales for a couple of years and then transition into a more entrepreneuristic lifestyle, so right now I have an ecommerce business going on the side which I started three months ago, and I am looking to grow it in the next few months – and eventually make a transition out of being an employee in sales at a tech company into licensing products and selling in Latin America or licensing products and selling across the world somewhere. So, yeah. My goals are to integrate, take more technology to Latin America and take technologies to Latin America that can help Latin American companies compete with American companies. There’s a big disparity in how advanced Latin American companies are compared to American companies. A lot of that comes down to having the technology that allows you to lower your costs so much. This is a complex topic and there are so many technical aspects – like yeah.

So, it’s kind of where I’m at now. My first job is to get a job at a technology company and work very hard these next couple of years, develop a lot of contacts and transition into a new role that is more Latin American focused where I could lead a startup or work with a director of a startup that is working in Latin America – and then transition into starting my own company next – in three or four years that is going to be a technical company and I will be doing the distribution channel aspect of it in Latin America where I’ll have some knowledge of how companies enter Latin America, because I will be doing sales in Latin America. It’s just an idea and a plan. I don’t know how it works.

**Katya L.**

Marketing Manager, Switchfly

Lick-Wilmerding High School

University of California, Santa Cruz, Class of 2005

City College of San Francisco 2013

University of San Francisco, MBA, Class of 2015

August 1, 2016



*Where did you begin?*

I was in a unique position because at the time, I was pursuing a science degree. And I came from a four year college, so I had the mindset of “here’s the formula for getting the goal, and it was a very cookie-cutter approach to getting a degree.” And so I started taking more science classes, but then I realized that oh, I don’t have to just stick to this cookie cutter formula. I can take classes for fun and that interest me, and that just opened up a lot of possibilities for me.

I think that is important for students to realize that there is not one way of succeeding and there is not one path to success, and if you are in a situation where you… if you don’t know what you want to do, you have to ask yourself “what is the best situation for me to be in where I can succeed?” So, if it is a four-year college, you know exactly what you want to do and finances are not an issue, that’s fine, that’s great, and there are a lot of benefits to that. But City College is equally, if not more empowering because it’s giving the student the ability to really discover what they’re interested in, engage with the community and what works in the real world. It’s not just an academic isolated bubble. You’re actually involved in the real world, and I think you come out of City College with a very different mindset that is very applicable to the real world and to succeeding.

*What happened after Lick-Wilmerding High School?*

I went to UC Santa Cruz right after Lick-Wilmerding. I really liked biology and I also loved music, and I didn’t know what the heck I wanted to do --- but I thought science was really good and intriguing to me, and I’m good at it and excited about it, and I did AP bio class, and my first job, at 15, I worked at the Exploratorium as an explainer – cow eyeballs and all that stuff – and so after immediately, I went straight to UC Santa Cruz – I wanted to stay local. It may be a cultural thing. Hispanic families --- were all up in each other’s business, so it’s a cultural thing too. I wasn’t that far and I’d come home every weekend, bring my laundry and hang out with my family. It’s what you do. I wasn’t into the fraternity thing – that just wasn’t my thing. But yeah, it was far enough that I felt like I was on my own, but family is right there. You know, when you’re 18, you’re still a kid – you’re still a baby. At least I was. I wasn’t… I didn’t. It is crazy to me kids that can go off. That’s good that they can do that, but I knew it was going to be too much for me. It was the right balance, and I knew immediately like I applied to the college I was associated with – Merrill College, and it was a chemistry honors group, and you know, that place is huge so I found my little niche and was okay, that’s where I am going to be and this is who I am going to hang out with – this little nerdy community and I was right at home. But I did feel a little bit lost. I think there were times when I wasn’t sure if this was the right fit for me and it was costing me a fortune and I think if I knew now what I knew then, I would have done it a little bit differently. Its different – like my brother, who you have met has been struggling. He has had a different experience because academics have always been a struggle for him, but in a way, City College has been the perfect fit for him because it is taking him more time to figure it out – so why put all this pressure on yourself to go to a four year school and get a four year degree when you’re still really confused about what you want to do. So, you know, tomorrow is the beginning of the next semester, and he said, “I don’t know. I’m kind of interested in this.” So, I told him that this is your opportunity. Don’t get stuck in some little mentality that “I need to take this in order to transfer here,” unless you really want to transfer to pursue something. If you feel lost, this is the time. He is a sweetheart, but he struggles and math is a big one for him.

*What did you do after UC Santa Cruz?*

After Santa Cruz, I went to Notre Dame Demur, and I was like, ok, I don’t have, because my degree was in anthropology and I missing some of the harder math classes, and I thought, I’m not going to spend all this money on this. I can go to City College and take the same classes there. I can be closer to my family and the teachers are more approachable and it made sense. Notre Dame did serve its purpose and I did connect with a few key important professors there, but ultimately going from there to City College is where I really formed who I want to be and what I want to do. But, yeah. After that… I came to City College in 2009.

*How did you find community at City College?*

I didn’t do clubs or extracurricular activities. I was just focused on academics and I spent a lot of time in the learning assistance center – which is where I did my math tutoring stuff. I went for tutoring and then I did tutoring with a company called TutorCorp. And then I did a little bit at City College for a nutrition class.

*How did the experience differ from Santa Cruz?*

At Santa Cruz, there’s the orientation process and the family is involved. You’re paying so much money so it’s almost like this customer mentality of you know what I mean. You want to be wined and dined. At City College, it was a confusing process, but now it seems like it is easier to find things – even the website. Like before, I didn’t even know where to start – like where do I go for this? Where do I go for that? Where is this building? It was just kind of a confusing and chaotic process.

I do remember having to show up to do the placement test, and that’s it. There was no orientation. Even here – we’ve had issues with onboarding and what is going to be the process. How are you new hires and what is going to be their experience. A huge part of retention in general is creating that sense of community, and a lot of companies will say, “hey welcome to our company. Here’s a bag and a pen and a t-shirt or whatever, you know. It would be cool if City College kind of adopts that same mentality.

I think it would be great if City College could adopt the same kind of practices that certain companies do – especially successful tech companies – you know in San Francisco, we are now the new Silicon Valley. We are in the hub of it, so I think City College is in a unique opportunity to break that mold and welcome new students in the same way that companies welcome new hires. Here’s a guide to help you navigate through your journey here to help you succeed and here’s your support system. If we set something like that up at City College, the community, the retention rate would probably be improved greatly, and letting students know that there is a support system I think is a huge benefit.

*Coursework*

I started with sciences and math. I took physics with Trudy who was Indian. Shruti something.

Then I took the small business class, introduction to business, accounting class and another professor who also went to USF – personal finance. I had a degree and my aha moment was when I was taking the MCAT for medical school – it’s now three hours long and in my time, it was 8 hours long, and I remember sitting there being surrounded by people who felt as if this was their life and this is what they wanted to do. They wanted to be a doctor, and I felt like… this isn’t for me, and I could not dedicate the next 10 years of my life to this. That’s when I thought, I need to put the brakes, reexamine my life and my priorities and what’s important to me, and I think the stress of being in a situation where you’re paying hundreds of thousands of dollars and being in that situation – I couldn’t even put myself in that situation.

You were a huge influence because I think you were the first teacher that really explained things how the world works to me in a way that I felt like “I get it.” It makes sense and this is something that I can apply to my everyday life. With a lot of the liberal arts colleges, it’s about your feelings and this, and I just wanted to know how to understand what a mortgage is, whether I am getting ripped off my bank or the terms of a contract. It had always been so daunting to me and I thought it was so complicated. But then I realized that if I could understand how the human body works, I can understand how finance works. I can understand that. It’s just the same process of breaking it down and understanding it piece by piece. So then when I found out that business makes sense – what’s the next step? What can I do? MBA. What can I do with an MBA. And then having a science background with an MBA it was a limitless source of opportunities And between you and the other teachers who did personal finance and the statistics teacher who also taught at SF State, I realized there was a correlation between me and the professors who taught business – and realized that this is what I’ve got to do. It just made sense, and then I realized do I want to go to SF State or USF? USF was a great program and the networking alone was well worth it.

I started as an intern in Silicon Valley and it was through my networking and my music – one of the girls who was in the video was a dancer and she also did marketing, so I asked her and told her I was looking for a job and that I had just graduated and wanted to get my feet wet and just see what it’s like. She had an intern job and I started there, and it was a company that wasn’t doing too great. A few months after I started, the marketing team just left. A contractor was left assuming the role of marketing, and I was automatically promoted and learned how to do everything -- webinars, advertising, website, how to work with vendors and how to talk with third-party vendors and events and all these things I had never been exposed to.

Once I discovered that I could get into a tech company, which I always thought would be a daunting thing, that was it – you know. And how I ended up here was again through my network of friends. I ran into the recruiter at a mutual friend’s wedding. I was actually poached by a startup and it was such a risky thing – but then I thought to myself that I don’t have any kids to feed or anything and that if I am going to take a risk, I am going to try it now. And I did, and it wasn’t what I had signed up for, but at least I could say I tried it and it wasn’t what that world was like, and so I was looking for another job and I ran into the recruiter at a wedding and she said she was looking for a sales job and I thought that I could do sales. I sold paint jobs door-to-door in San Francisco (free estimate). I started at Switchfly in sales and our VP Marketing had a baby and decided she wanted to do freelance work and have her own schedule and spend more time at home. I was asked to join the marketing team – I will be brought on permanently with a promotion to follow at a good, solid company.

Switchfly is an ecommerce SAAS travel platform for travel enterprises – our clients are major airlines, hotel chains and financial service. Any company with a loyalty program offering travel as a redemption option we power the booking and the inventory – we connect everything in the background. It’s white label, so you don’t even see that it’s Switchfly. Like United or American Express. We have a global headcount of 250 and in SF, probably about 100.

*Where do you see yourself in the future?*

I think I’m in a – sort of going through a growth spurt, and I’ve learned a lot and I see that if I were to go another company – or if I leave Switchfly, what do I want to take with me – there is, in marketing, metrics are everything and it’s not just about “I can do this. I can do that” and waving your hands. It’s more about “here is a very concrete roadmap that I’ve developed and I can measure my success, the company’s success, I can show wherever I go, what are you starting with and where do you want to go? I can then facilitate getting from A to B. So, I’ve learned all these pieces and now I am figuring out how to put them together, so if I am managing other people, there is that framework that I can build on. I am sort of trying to put myself in a position where one day I can manage others or can someday mentor somebody or run a team. So, that’s my goal. It’s not like… oh, I plan to be VP Marketing, but hey, one day maybe I will be VP of marketing.

I am still very active in the music community and now that I have more of this marketing background, I am trying to help people in a different way using those metrics instead of like just looking at descriptive characteristics – looking at quantities vs. qualitative, especially with artists – everything is about feelings and emotions – so it’s nice to see how many tweaks did you do and how much engagement did you have? OK, so maybe what you’re talking about on your social media site isn’t appealing to your audience. Who is your audience? Then changing the way artists – it’s the part of music that artists don’t like to deal with – but it’s the reality like everything else. I know too much about what happens at companies like LiveNation, and I can’t and wouldn’t be able to do the good that I would want to do if I worked there. having the freedom to partner with whom I want to – for example, demystifying the process of releasing your own album, and monetizing your own work and music and why playing for free is bad for the whole music industry – for the venue, and for the band and these pay-to-play scams that are constantly coming out where they reach out to bands and say “we will do all the promoting for you. All you have to do is show up.” My goal is just trying to keep the music scene here from turning into L.A. It’s become very predatory – the music scene. And if people just had a little bit more common sense and knowledge about what things are, I think that would alleviate a lot of these horror stories that I hear.

*What advice would you offer others returning to City College with four-year degrees?*

I would examine what your goals are, what your priorities are and if you feel unsure about what you want to have a career in or what your life goals are – even that’s okay. I think City College is the place to figure that out, and I think it’s important that you just make the most out of what’s available at City College and give yourself permission to explore. Because whatever your four year degree is, it’s not going to be the end-all be-all – it can be complimentary to what you want to pursue, and that’s ok. The degree isn’t what makes you – it’s what you decide is important to you that really shapes who you are.

*What are the three best things about City College?*

The three best things about City College are the freedom to choose your classes, the variety of classes that are offered, and there is virtually any kind of community available to you at City College. You can share the things are important to you.

Kelly H.,   
Tax Supervisor

OUM, Inc.

Lowell High School, Class of 2009

CCSF Class of 2011

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Class of 2013



*After you graduated from Lowell in 2007, what were you thinking?*

I applied to several of the UC colleges and I think some of the state colleges, but I wasn’t really happy with where I got in, and at the same time, I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do, so I said, let’s spend some time at City College and experiment with some classes and figure out what I wanted to go – and go from there. That’s how I ended up at City College.

*What was your CCSF experience like?*

I spent two years at City College. It was great. I actually really loved my time at City College. I felt like I made a lot of good friends and made a lot of connections. I found that a lot of the professors that I had at City College. I felt that a lot of the professors that I had at City College really cared about your growth and they could that if you were putting in the effort to learn and be better, they would help you as much as they could.

*What activities were you involved in while at CCSF?*

I joined a couple of clubs. I don’t remember exactly… I wasn’t active in the clubs, but I took part (English tutor) in the writing lab. I took advantage of all of the resources in the writing lab. I made good connections with my fellow tutors and tutees. It was just fun meeting people from all different backgrounds, which is a big thing going for City College.

*What were your thoughts about transferring while at CCSF?*

I didn’t know that was one of the areas (that I wanted to explore). I was leaning toward business or computer science – so I took a little bit of both and decided that I liked business more. It was all the math for computer science that I did not want to take – so I went the business route – accounting. City College – they have a lot of introductory courses – and the class you teach – the general business course is a good opener for business. Yes, we met in general business class.

*How do CCSF professors compare to the ones you had at Cal Poly?*

I honestly feel like the City College professors care a lot more about you individually. The classes are smaller at City College, so I think the professors will remember you more. They know who is there to learn and who is there just to sit there. I definitely feel like I had more of a connection with my professors at City College. With classes of 30-40 vs. 50-100, you can’t get individual time with professors at a four year school. In every class, there are the few who get the connection with the professor, but it is not…..

All that pressure at Lowell – and that’s the one thing about Lowell that I didn’t like. Because it is such a high caliber school and you are with students who are above average – you have to kill yourself to be better than everyone else. Too much focus on academics without time to grow other parts of yourself. That was one of the downfalls about Lowell. Which is why I am glad I went to City College – because at City College, it really opened my eyes to how much more there is – and all of the different types of people that I went to school with – different ages and backgrounds – and you can make a connection with everyone.

*What was your Cal Poly experience like?*

I didn’t get into Berkeley – even with a 4.0. I am really bad at writing those personal statements. I tried for Haas. It was good. I got into a bunch of local schools, but wanted to get further away from home. Cal Poly had a good business program. It was a different environment. It was hard at first – especially coming from San Francisco. The majority of SLO (at the time) was all Caucasian and it was singular. It was good exposure to the rest of the world and other things out there. It was still fun and still a good experience and good getting out of my comfort zone, learning how to be more independent outside of home. Growing up in a really sheltered Asian family and getting away was good.

*Most memorable CCSF experience*

That’s a tough one. I have had so many. Believe it or not, I think it is the time that I spent in the writing lab both tutoring and you know, just meeting all the new people and all of the other people, chatting it up with my tutees and everyone was just so welcoming and it was just … I don’t really know how to say it, but it was just a good place to be. It really felt like a community there.

It was crazy because we were all tutors down there, but we were all so different. We had old people, young people, people from different ethnicities – yet, we were all doing the same thing. Whenever I would go down there, it was like a community.

*What would you say about where you are today – five years into your career – and if you can look back, and do you ever think about the impact, if any of your community college experience on what you are today as part of your trajectory?*

I definitely feel that CCSF had more of an impact than Cal Poly. There, it felt a lot more like just the classes and learning the material. City College – their sense of community made me realize that that’s also what I am looking for in a career. Because when I was researching different companies and career paths, at Cal Poly, a lot of them push BIG FOUR (accounting firms). They basically say that if you don’t do Big Four, you’re set up to fail. It strikes the fear in you and you say, “If I don’t get into Big Four, what will I do?” I realize the environment and the feel of these firms, they were a lot more – I don’t want to say cut throat, but everyone is thinking about themselves and how they can move up for themselves, which I think is great for some people who want to do that, but I was looking more for a firm where I really liked the people who I worked with in terms of colleagues and bosses – and I feel like that’s what I found here at OUM -- which is why I decided on a smaller firm as opposed to the Big Four.

I haven’t completely decided yet if I’ll stay in public accounting. I told myself that I would leave public accounting once I am not learning anymore – or if I come to a standstill or wake up one day and hate going to work. I love the people here, the work is interesting – you know, it’s not always like the most fascinating work in the world, but I run into different problems that I haven’t before, and it makes it interesting. I am keeping my options open, and I am pretty happy with where I am right now. No, I have thought about that (going to a Big Four) a couple of times, they do pay better at the higher levels, but when you’re starting out, it’s all about the same. Some people I know who have gone to Big Four are doing well and some are not.

*What could CCSF do better?*

I don’t think it was anything… my challenges were my personal challenges of getting myself out there and coming out of my shell, but there wasn’t anything in particular about City College that I thought was a roadblock to me. I see several clubs that you’re doing now, and I see you posting them on social media, and that was started the year I was there. I would have loved to get involved in that. What you have right now reminds me a lot of… at Cal Poly when they bring in alumni at different firms to speak about the real world. I guess that would be the one thing (CCSF could do better).

There was a lot of stigma (from Lowell) of people going to CCSF. When my classmates from Lowell found out I was going there… I knew more people going to four year schools than City College. I loved my time there. I always tell people that I loved my time there. I heard there are a bunch of new buildings there too. I saw the new MUB building being built.

*What would you have done differently in terms of your education?*

I would have tried to have gotten involved in more club activities (there weren’t as many clubs as there are today). There wasn’t a lot to do for AGS when I was there. I mean clubs just in terms of meeting new people and again, being part of that community of people. I focused a lot on my academics and I wish I had maybe taken it a bit slower. Maybe five years (in total) instead of four.

That’s the only thing I would change. Just getting out there more.

*Did you ever see a counselor? Or did you just figure it out on your own?*

I think the only time I saw a counselor was to talk about transferring. They were really helpful, but for the most part I figured it out on my own -- and took my stuff to them to make sure that I didn’t screw anything up (chuckle).

*Do you feel like the accounting courses you took at CCSF gave you a basis or opened your eyes to the profession where you said, “yes,” this is it*?

I had Barbara Cutten, blonde, short hair. I really like her though. She was a tough teacher, but she is very…. She is also another one I think of where if (both you and her) they see you trying and putting in the effort, they will too.

*Any other thoughts about CCSF?*

I like City College.Anytime I see CCSF in the news, I have to read the article. Because you know, there was a time where they almost lost their accreditation.

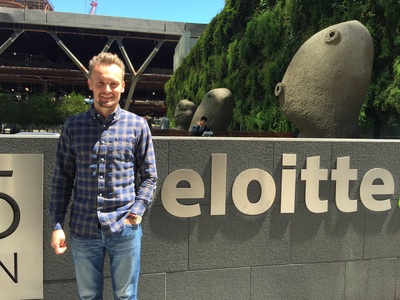
Kirill I.,

Business Technology Analyst

Deloitte Consulting

CCSF Class of 2011

UC Berkeley, Haas School of Business, Class of 2013

Walking into the office…. “The first client that I had was here in Richmond, CA and it was a genetic disease screening program and we were helping them analyze blood specimens of newborns and pregnant women and based upon certain values and thresholds can predict the outcome of the pregnancy. The core software provides analysis and notifications.”

***Tell me about your high school years, where you grew up and what motivated you to come to the United States.***

I grew up in Belarus, a former Soviet Union country and moved here when I was 21 years old. I was already studying back home for three years. One day I had this opportunity to come to the U.S. to work and travel for 6 months (2008). While I was here, I thought I should stay longer and truly use the opportunity to grow and go to school and try getting a good job and good growth.

The way I stayed in the United States was based upon political asylum. I had to prove that it was dangerous for me to go back home. I was an activist and against the current government regime and supporting opposition forces and until today the president is still the same and he has been the president since 1991 and the country is a dictatorship regime and it is common for people from my country to come on asylum. I do like to share that story to open people’s eyes – and those who have no idea that the problem exists. I do get appreciation from people who tell the story.

I find telling the story a benefit – and I don’t mind telling it to people. It is beneficial. Most of my peers know that and have more admiration for me because I went through that.

For about a year, after arriving in 2008, I came with $300 and had to support myself. I worked for a year. I arrived in North Carolina for the first three months of my U.S. life and then moved to California. I started at CCSF in 2009 while working – and where I met you and how it all started. I worked, grew professionally and personally.

***How did you choose CCSF?***

When I moved to San Francisco, I had a friend here and I knew a few people from Belarus where I used to live on Treasure Island there was a community. They would give advice about best options to stay in the Bay Area. I didn’t have an option for college – some people went to SFSU or Berkeley, but for community college – since everyone I knew went through community college, it was kind of a no-brainer.

**You arrive at CCSF. How did you decide upon classes? Who helped you?**

I think I started taking classes at CCSF (ESL) while I didn’t have papers for six months, and I didn’t speak English that well. For some reason, it didn’t require proof of your legal status, so I could start attending those classes. I remember being the only Russian-speaking person in the room and the others were Spanish. It was night school and most were workers in low-paid jobs who were there to learn English.

Almost from the beginning, I knew people who went to Berkeley and almost from the year 1, I set my goal that I wanted to do that as well. It was helpful to know someone who could give me the best advices what needs to be done. I kind of already had all of this career planning. It wasn’t take this class and take that class, but more of a general approach. I think I saw a counselor, but my peers were the best counselors for me. Since I didn’t know anything about the educational system in America – I never had a counselor back home, so it was alien to go to a person and ask for advice. So, I would just talk to my peers and learn that way.

***How would you describe your City College experience if someone were to ask you?***

I think City College was – it’s a great platform for people with different backgrounds for people who came from outside and can’t go straight to university – they have to have some kind of education – I think City College is a great place to go. I don’t know what other kind of stories – if you grew up in American and finished high school and weren’t able to get in, this is still a great way to keep your education at a high level and have an opportunity to transfer. I know it is harder, but it is definitely possible. Most of my peers were planning on transferring went to the university and were able to do that. It’s hard work, plan ahead, and do everything possible, plan ahead, and do everything that depends on you – and you will be able to get anywhere you want.

City College gives you everything you need to succeed – it’s just a matter of you taking it and using the opportunity for you to leverage it.

***What was your most memorable part of City College?***

I really like their swimming pool, actually. Their brand new facility that they built. I would go swimming and go there twice a week. I love that place. I think about it sometimes. I didn’t have a chance to go there after leaving City College, but it is definitely one of the best pools that I have seen in the Bay Area.

***What were some of the extracurricular activities that you participated in? How did they provide value to you?***

Yeah, so there were a few clubs that I was a part of. Undergraduate Investment Group was one – it’s been awhile – four or five years now. Great speakers from industry to inspire students to share their story about their career, prospects and give us advice – I think that was useful as well. Started my own startup club where we would get people together to share ideas or new things that people discovered approached to starting their own business – not a particular industry, but generally innovative ideas for business.

You’re at CCSF for three years – On24 is where I worked during my last year at CCSF and the first years I was a security guard and then worked at a restaurant. You can read at work (security guard), so that was helpful.

***What was the most memorable thing at CCSF with regard to the instructors or instruction?***

I definitely think that without you Susan, I wouldn’t be able to get anywhere since you were able to connect us with a lot of our people to get internships or to get advice to connect us with students also. So, I think that was probably kind of the main factor of why I was able to get into UC Berkeley. I didn’t apply to any other schools because I didn’t want to leave the Bay Area. I realize that it was a risk not to apply to anywhere else, but I did the best with what I could. If I didn’t get in, I would have figured something out later, but that has kind of been my strategy in life – work as hard as you can, don’t focus your attention on other things and don’t ask yourself too much “what if” because all of those doubts will not help you in the future. If the problem comes, sure, you can solve it. Sure – you can try to predict the problem – but it hasn’t been helpful to me that way. You can be stupid sometimes – if you see that you have a good chance of achieving something, just go there.

***What would you say about the two year experience at Berkeley vs. CCSF?***

Definitely very different and much more competitive – it has a lot to do with being at Haas and not being an econ major. Haas is much more competitive than any other major at UC Berkeley. Overall, I didn’t quite try to play the same game of compete with each other and not care about personal relationship, because a lot of people can forget that personal relationship is more important than performing better than the rest. I was doing my own thing. I was doing my best at school, but if I couldn’t get an A, I didn’t care that much. I truly would care about meeting interesting people, making friends and getting knowledge. Overall, I really enjoyed the UCB experience. There are so many other classes you can take on top of your core classes at Haas. The business classes aren’t that exciting or interesting – I have actually noticed that classes like accounting or finance are not that much harder than the ones at City College. The cases may have been more up to date or interesting, but the knowledge used for those cases was almost identical. Berkeley wasn’t much harder, but it was harder to get a good grade. They graded on the curve, and it would get very ridiculous. Once on a test – accounting – I got 13/15 and got a B-, but there are so many people with a perfect score. I don’t think that’s exactly fair, or the right approach to grade students. You still have to separate the top, top students from the rest. Maybe instead of implementing.. lower performing even though it is high performing students. With the curve, it is going to be challenging to get a good grade.

***How can we improve at CCSF? What things were bothersome?***

I don’t remember anything that bothered me. I was just doing my thing and I don’t think I was complaining at any point. It’s hard for me to find something that didn’t work for me because everything kind of worked. I knew what was expected, I would do my best, and usually get an expected result out of it. So, I don’t know something that didn’t work for me, perse. English was hard – 1A,B,C. It wasn’t a CCSF problem, but more my own skill problem. I was able to pass the class and it was tougher for me. I’m not the best writer, so that didn’t help. I do remember now. Sometimes it is harder to enroll in the required classes – sometimes they were just more challenging – it was harder to select the better professor who was either easier or more interesting.

***What were the three best things about CCSF?***

Financial aid was great, and I didn’t have to pretty much pay for my tuitions. CCSF gives all classes that you need to take in order to transfer to schools Berkeley. I realize that not all community college provide needed or prerequisite classes. I didn’t really have that problem. One summer I remember that CCSF was closed, and I didn’t want to lose any units to transfer, so I took English at Laney. It was much easier to pass that English and that worked out for me. Other than that, all of the classes that I needed I was able to get. I will say that sometimes it hard to enroll in classes because everyone is trying to take the same classes that are more popular and core classes required for higher education. Some of those classes were a little more challenging.

***2008 you arrive. Fast forward to July 20, 2016. When you look at yourself today and try to look at yourself today, what shaped you?***

I think what really shaped me as a person was tough moments at the beginning where I had to struggle a little in terms of supporting myself and not having anyone to be there – and I was able to figure that out. Find a way to support myself, at the same time, have fun and meet people. The best thing in my personality is openness, curiosity and friendliness. There were so many times where I would get help, support or advice from people where I didn’t expect to get help from. It usually comes from me just being friendly to everyone and don’t really judge. Curiosity is another thing – just by being curious lets me learn about interesting facts, interesting people, interesting place – and then having that interesting knowledge – a feedback loop attracts other people. Then when I meet other people, they say, “you should meet that person – you would really love, because he is just like you – very curious about things – and I love it.

***If you had not been part of the community of folks that you knew from back home that it would have been more difficult?***

I still stay in touch with folks at CCSF. I do stay in touch with some of the real good friends from UC Berkeley as well. All of my friends that I was surrounded by at UC Berkeley were transfer student. With that community, it would be much, much harder and I don’t know if I would even apply to UC Berkeley – being an outsider and I don’t know. It would be much harder and I would have much more mental blocks inside of me and it would be harder to achieve everything and get all the steps in? Did City College give you a lot more confidence? I think just by deciding to come alone to the United States early, and even that information in my head would give me much more confidence that I am much more comfortable and I don’t have to rely on anyone. Any person with a lot of confidence – the difference is that a piece of information that a confidence has inside is just a memory or some information stored in your head that makes you feel that confident. Why can’t we just imagine we have the information in our heads to truly believe it to make us become more confident? I always think about it – two people with same body parts and one is more confident and the other is not.

***How did you land this job at Deloitte and why do you think you got picked?***

I did apply for an internship, and again, my kind of community helped me learn that once you get into Berkeley, you have to start looking for a job right away. And it’s so much harder for you to be a transfer student because kids that have been there already for two years when you get there – a lot of them already had internships and you’re competing with kids from Berkeley who already had internships. I didn’t get an internship at Deloitte and also applied to the same program, but I did introduce myself to a lot of people who were doing the recruiting and it will be the same people next year, and I think I left a good impression. It’s harder to get an internship because they are taking much less people for it. Much fewer spots, and it is more competitive. For full time, it is slightly less competitive. What helped me, I think, was some of my experience doing IT work and technology consulting, so I already had some relevant experience. If you just take all these students, you would say UC Berkeley degree is a competitive advantage, but they all have that, so I wouldn’t just mention having a degree from UC Berkeley. But more so, just experience working On24 (previous job), and I definitely studied for the interview a lot. There is a certain kind of way consultant interviews go. There’s a case study and they ask you a specific way of approaching a problem. You can’t just be super smart. You have to know the framework for it and they ask questions and just go and do the interview perfectly. They are looking for a certain way of thinking. And you know, when I was prepping for an internship and I really didn’t study enough. I just wasn’t as ready as other kids. So, for fulltime, I made sure that I was ready and I studied much more and prepared myself better. Yeah.

***Where do you see yourself in the next decade? Any thoughts?***

Yeah, after working for about two years after school in the corporate world, I am getting slightly kind of, I won’t say tired, but realizing more and more that I need something maybe where I have more responsibility working towards my personal goal instead of me being a very small piece of…. Like a screw in the big machine…. I’d actually like to drive the innovation or drive whatever I am working on or working on my passion. So, most likely, it is my big hope that I will start something soon. Something that I am passionate about and something that I would consider not working for it, it would be like my dream job doing my hobby 24/7. I think I want to stay in the Bay Area. Have you met Monica? My fiancé and future wife? She is originally from, she was born in Peru and she grew up in Florida, and she still thinks it is a little too cold for her, and she wants tropical warm ocean where she can swim. I don’t blame her. I do like that type of environment where it is warm and you can swim. But I do like the Bay Area, I have a lot of friends here and it is beautiful. I like the nature. We live in Lake Merritt now. So, yeah, we will see. Ideally, I could live a few places throughout the year – six months here, six months somewhere else. That kind of scenario.

Lena C.,

CCSF Class of 2011

UC Berkeley, Haas School of Business, Class of 2013

University of Michigan, Rackham Graduate School, Master’s Degree in Digital Education, Class of 2015



***What brought you to CCSF and a little about your high school years?***

Oooh. Ok. Laughs. I came to CCSF in the fall of 2006 and I had basically been let go in a job that I hated (laughs) and since then I have never been let go – and it was one of those moments where it gave me an opportunity to return to school because I was actually on unemployment from that job and it gave me the opportunity to come back as a full time student and see if that would work for me. So, my very first semester I had you for business (General Business 119), and I would say that very first semester getting a 4.0 for my very first time in college or at any point in my academic history was really transformative – because I knew I could do it, and I continued to get 4.0 and to achieve consistently from that point on. I think it would have been hard had I just taken one class to get my feet wet. I think I was ready to dive into an immersive experience.

I was in my mid-20s and I had been working in retail management coffee for a long time. I dropped out of school when I was 19 – right when I lost my mom. I wasn’t committed and I wasn’t going to class (laughs) and wasn’t doing any of it – I was doing it just to fulfill my parents’ expectations. Right out of high school (Los Angeles), I went to San Francisco State, so from LA up to San Francisco. Stayed for a semester, but my mom was really sick. I was there with my sister as well. So, we both flew back to LA (that was spring 2001), to be with my mom – I went to Santa Monica College, the community college there (great school), and I was 19 and watching my mom die. It became easy to look for reasons not to participate and school became this thing not to go to and to get my parents off my back as a 19 year old and also, not to upset my mom. It was a moment that I knew that it wasn’t right for me at the time. Summer of 2001, I made a decision after my mom died, to take time off. I had moved back down to LA at this point – and now in hindsight, what I understand to be transformative in terms of social impact – I was 19 and running my own store -- and I became a manager at Ben and Jerry’s – and that was also really transformative because I understand in hindsight. It was a corporate Ben and Jerry’s and I did a lot of regional training, great staff and great mentorship from the corporate owners who took me under their wing and supported my development. So, I was there for a couple of years and I have to say that it was really great to have such a… responsibility like that at a young age. It was really important. While I was out of school at that point, I was always really productive and always interested in leadership.

In high school, I was an athlete, and I played on three varsity teams (Campbell Hall in Los Angeles/North Hollywood). I went to private school. I went to pretty high-achieving, competitive schools and I never saw myself as high achieving or academic. It was mostly white and mostly Jewish and pretty privileged. There were a lot of benefits to that, meaning that I was college bound because it had a 100% graduation rate. I was never not going to succeed, but I wasn’t necessarily challenged either. I’ve been reflecting on that experience a little bit and my intellectual curiosity and it wasn’t necessarily harnessed – which kept me doing okay, but what kept me in the game was sports. That’s where I excelled, and that’s where I excelled in my leadership as a team captain for varsity teams for school and that meant a lot to me. So, I had to pass my classes in order to play the game (laughs) and be a leader – you have to be a leader on and off the court – so I took that really seriously and I think that.. I liked leading and I knew that I liked leading teams and I like growing and learning from others – and I carried that on in some way – either consciously or subconsciously. But when I came to City College, it was such a different experience. It was good in the sense that I didn’t need someone to hold my hand at that point in my education because I was so ready to come back as a young adult and to really take ownership in my own learning in a way that I had never done before.

***You arrive at CCSF in the fall of 2006 – where did you begin? How did you know where to start?***

I went to campus – I went to the admissions and records department and I got a hard copy of the schedule (laughs) and asked many questions about placement because I knew I wanted to jump back into math and English. I scheduled an appointment to take my placement test which was at 8 in the morning, and I didn’t prepare at all, hadn’t taken a test in a long time, was really tired and had no idea at that time how important that test would be in terms of the length of time you have to spend at City College of San Francisco. So, I placed into remedial English and math, which was really frustrating for me at the time because math was my strongest subject. I took math in college when I went to SF State – and I placed below college level. Now I have done a lot of work around that to resolve that issue, which is really exciting (laughs), but at that time, I just kind of went with the program -- that’s what I was told to do, so I registered for those classes. I did go to a counselor right away once I had my placement test in hand, and I registered for classes with them.

I didn’t have a great experience with new student counseling. It wasn’t very good. They recommended that I take Spanish when I didn’t need a foreign language. It was recommended that I take classes that I didn’t need, and there was very little time to engage in a conversation about what my goals are.

***How did you build community at CCSF?***

It took a long time for me to build community at City College. A really long time. I went for three years before I got plugged in. I spent about three years taking full time and part time classes and went back to work, so I couldn’t take as many classes then – I was very much a commuter student – not engaging with on campus activities, but it got to the point where I knew I wanted to find out more about what was going on, and so I decided to transition out of work and instead look for jobs on campus. So, perhaps it was divine intervention. An opportunity that went out to all students came to my email. The Associated Student Council was hiring for participatory governance coordinator, so I applied, had no idea what it was, didn’t know what shared governance was at the time, and all I really knew was that it required to take leadership and to coordinate student voices on various committees, so I make the pitch that I could do that, so I get the job. All of a sudden, I am working on campus. I made connections with the student trustee at the time, Joshua Neilsen, and him and I became great buddies and almost immediately, I get plugged into political conversations particularly centered around student equity for students of color – which was a very contentious debate at the time as to whether or not there was an achievement gap at City College of San Francisco – which low and behold, there was unfortunately, and continues to be. So, I learned so much in my time as a shared governance coordinator and really got to understand deeply the structure of City College and the ways in which students are (or are not) included in real decision making.

***What were your most memorable times at CCSF?***

As a student, working as a mentor for students supporting students where I got to host workshops for writing personal statement and resumes as well as giving individual guidance around picking classes and picking classes that help get students to their goals. Consulting and talking through the day in and day out challenges of being a student. Students supporting Students – we work mostly with underrepresented students and students of color on campus. That was an opportunity to build my own leadership in supporting the agency of others. One thing that has also been valuable and probably transformative for me is understanding where people are and meeting them where they are with the end result in mind. People come to CCSF with all different backgrounds and have a variety of different challenges – and I think something that I’ve seen over time is students that spend 5 or 6 years at City College really trying to make it and then seeing some of them not make it – and then finding ways for them to make it outside of City College. Send a text and tell them you’re thinking of them. It’s easy for us to tell them to hurry up and take all the classes – but they can’t – they’re supporting a family and they have real life day to day obligations – and most of the time when they’re hanging out in the Student Union all day it is because they don’t have a safe space to be. So, for me, understanding how City College is one of the only places for people to be, excel, grow and challenge, it’s certainly been that place for me and one thing I have become good at is developing the leadership of others.

***How did CCSF shape you into the person you are today?***

The impact that City College has had on me has been a deeply transformative, not just as an academic, but definitely as a conscious person. I have been deeply politicized at City College as a learner, as a leader and I have also challenged what my passions are and those passions have been clearly about serving community. I am deeply invested in the success of City College students in particular. It has broadened and deepened my network – not just at City, but at community based organizations where their constituents go to City. Where they provide services, they do service learning opportunities for internship for students. So, really it has transformed me in the classroom as a student where I’ve gained confidence in myself – I used to have such a hard time just asking questions in class. And now that is not the case (laughs). There’s how to be successful and there’s how to take ownership in agency, and to be successful as City College students it is about non-cognitive skills. The semesters are long and a lot can happen, especially for students who live in high poverty where a lot can happen in that period of time. The quarter system demonstrates to be better because there is less opportunity for trauma. Imagine your brother goes to jail or someone gets shot – or someone gets sick, or someone has just had a baby and so all of these life things, and of course, education is situation in a context where students are experiencing poverty and everyday trauma – not all of them, but some people are in those environment and so people are coming with that to the classroom and to the computer lab. It’s interesting to think about structural opportunities where we can think differently about meeting the students’ needs and just the semester – it’s long and there’s something about an immersive experience where there are less roles and certain weeks where students are pushed to keep up and not slack off and you provide them with support on top of that, and they really do better.

***Tell me about the difference between the curriculum at Berkeley and Michigan***

My experience with instruction at City College was varied and I have had some professors where I continue to have deep and meaningful relationships with – and some professors who clearly are not passionate anymore about their practice. And this is very much so in hindsight, because I have studied education at the master’s level at the University of Michigan. I am really inspired at those professors who take their practice so seriously and continue to innovate on their own – otherwise institutions that don’t support that meaningful work. At City College, I had professors who

It was really all over the place – I have to be honest. I had some professors who were just like… I had to help them track what we were doing. Some weren’t necessarily inspiring, but you got through it. I was so hyper focused on my grades that I just did what I needed to do to get an A. There’s this lofty idea that I would consider myself a lifelong learner and I always want to take something away from a course – that’s why I am there. I’d feel frustrated when a teacher was unprepared, for example. It’s not very clear where you’re headed and how does this link to this and it’s not clear what we are learning.

Compared to Haas, it was very different in that way. Every professor was extremely well prepared and everything was very, very clear. It also means it was more rigid and meant that teachers were a bit less accessible. I felt like I could talk to my teachers at City College online and offline – access at City was much better as compared to Haas. There were some exceptions. I did make some connections, but for the most part, you’re in very large lectures and everyone is very high achieving – a rush to the front of the room after class. There wasn’t much opportunity in lecture to talk to the professor unless you went to office hours – and still, especially in the class you really need like finance or accounting, the tougher classes (mathematical modeling) and at that level, your success depends upon the competency of your TAs because the teachers are just much less accessible.

***What was your initial goal upon arriving to CCSF in Fall of 2006?***

It became clear to me that I could transfer to Haas – potentially a year later. It took a few semesters for me to get a few units under my belt, achieve a 4.0 – I convinced myself at that point that there was nothing that could be taught at City College that I couldn’t understand (laughs). And I knew that it was up to me to excel and do my work – and Haas is such a…. if you talk to any CCSF student who studies business, they want to go to Haas. It becomes this thing that is so ominous and so out of reach, so definitely, I feel like there was a mental game that you have to play with yourself where you say that I’ll still be successful even if I don’t achieve that goal – so I spent four or five years with that in mind.

I knew I wanted to do business because I knew.. I had worked Ben and Jerry’s and I had done Tully’s Coffee for six years and then I went to Ghirardelli and there was a culture that was too corporate and it was problematic – there were people above me that had left the company. But I also knew that there was a ceiling. Without a degree, I was just going to be this low-level manager.

***What can CCSF do better?***

I am going to start from the top level. I am not going to go into the variety of things or the nuts and bolts of that. I think there is a great opportunity for a culture shift. I think a culture shift is probably the most significant thing that needs to happen. A culture to allow for innovation and experimentation. I can understand and appreciate that schools move like molasses intentionally (laughs). They do this to stabilize so that people always have an institution to come to – they don’t want to fluctuate with the markets. However, they have to strike a much better balance around encouraging new ways, new practices and new research. How do we bridge what’s being done – evidence-based research and practice into our daily programs? I think City College is really behind in that way in that that is not encouraged on any level. Even with the new restructuring, there is still a culture around status quo and maintaining power among those that have had (inaudible).

What can we be doing better? So, I really believe that there is an opportunity first around this 21st century support – I am using the broad term, “21st century” because digital literacy might be a little too restrictive – but really around the nuts and bolts of being a student – so, how do you sign in and get your RAM ID? How do you get into certain classes? What are the resources for preparing for placement testing? All of these are around the business of being a student – and so there is a variety of opportunities for this to happen. This can be centralized and we can develop a model that can scale and be taken to every single center and adapted for the population for each – because the populations can be very different from center to center. So, I think there is an opportunity for that direct student service around the business of being a student. You have to be an insider to know what is going on. You have to talk to this person or that person. I would say that student services is important. I would say that another thing is – and this can be controversial – but I think this is important – the relevance of the classes. I have always believed that when you see certain courses packed and the same course has 5 people in it, there is obviously something wrong. It’s not always about the instruction because that is tricky and I am not going to get into that too much, but how do we get into and how are we meeting the market demand and what is the job market requiring and what are the skills people need? I think CTE does really well around this, but what about the broad curriculum?

***Tell me about your extracurricular and community-based activities***

As a City college student, once I became involved, I formed a student club called Students Making a Change (SMAC), and we are still going. We are actually a fiscally sponsored project by Coleman Advocates which serves youth of San Francisco. What we do is we organize underrepresented students of color to advocate on their own behalf around policy reform. So, a couple examples of the work that we had done is to improve placement testing across the policies. So, when we first started the advocacy students would come to City College of San Francisco and take the placement test and say that they needed to prepare and they didn’t know what they were getting themselves into, and say that it wasn’t really a great demonstration of what I can do. You would have to wait six months before you could retake the test and at the time, we asked Chancellor Griffin why it took six months – just kind of naively. Essentially, there we no reason, and it was arbitrarily made, so we pushed back on that and we brought in best practices from City College research center and Columbia University – brought in a variety of educators who were thinking about this particular issue/area and how it impacts disproportionately students of color who place into really low levels of English and math. And then what happens, it is not just about the placement testing itself – but more the trajectory for college. The lower you place, the more exit points there are, and the harder it is to get to college level coursework – so it makes it so much easier – they can re-take it after two weeks. So, right now the policy is such that you can re-take it within two weeks and you can do that twice within one testing cycle. And actually, we have gone a step further to add what is called the Multiple Measures Reform. So, you just take this test and counselors use your test score and that’s the only thing that is practically speaking to advise your counseling into whatever – you’re going to schedule into this class or that class. So, now they’re bringing in so a student can take the test, use the score to register for classes, or you can go in and take your GPA from high school, which is the last math class you took, or an SAT (I took an SAT. Why didn’t they ever use that?), or your attendance rate, so there are other indicators that are actually *better* at predicting where a student should be and how successful they will be than this one test score.

I never got involved in Alpha Beta Gamma (business honors society). It was interesting because the one thing I will say is that with SMAC it was certainly the policy advocacy, developing my peers and leaders and working together on initiatives. We worked on a proposal for launch a program for Associated Students now called VIDA which is Voices of Immigrants Demonstrating Achievement – which is a resource program for undocumented and all students, but focuses on the issues of undocumented students – so that was really transformative for me.

I ran for student trustee and lost to Jeffrey Fang (laughs), and it was the first and only time student activities tried to do online voting. This was in 2010. So, it was kind of a sh\*t-show and it really discouraged me to ever campaign for anything again (laughs). I really pushed myself out of my comfort zone to do that, so you know, a real learning experience, and it probably better that I didn’t… easy to say now, but I was able to continue to do what I wanted to do regardless. And actually, SMAC provided an avenue for connecting with community based organizations – SMAC formed as a fiscal sponsored project, but later we became a project of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth which brought me on to the staff of a community based organization and really continuing to develop as a program director and working around being in this kind of corner of City College but it helped me deepened my understanding of City College’s role in the city. I worked on different collectives. I worked with jobs of justice and STIU, the accreditation, we really shouldn’t talk about the accreditation stuff (laughs), but that really also has been caused so much challenge around student organizing and has changed the landscape in a lot of ways for students.

It has been a challenge for student organizing. There are less students there, and it is a challenging time. Student needs are still there, and I feel like the people who are still there really need support, even more so and that there are no other options.

**Nara B.,**

CCSF Class of 2011

UC Berkeley, Political Economies, Class of 2013

July 14, 2016

***When did you arrive in SF?*** How did you get to SF? Where did you come from?

I had just turned 16 in 2005 – that is when I arrived in the United States. I am now 27.

I grew up in Armenia, but grew up in Russia and in 2005, immigrated to the U.S.

I finished Lowell High and applied to City College and after that, I went on to a university path, and now I am in the workforce.

I had always wanted to get a college education – it was never a question, and I was determined to get an education in the U.S., a competitive education so that I could move on with my life and career and when I was in Lowell High School in general what I heard was a negative reputation about CCSF in general – about students, about instruction, and I did not succumb to that view and I wasn’t sure what it meant, and I always loved public education, and City College was the way for me to go.

I chose that path and it was one of the best decisions of my life – I can say that wholeheartedly. The instruction was amazing. I met dedicated and amazing instructors that I still love, remember and keep in touch with, and they all touch my heart and I think it’s special when you have someone like that in your life – and even comparing City College and later my education in Berkeley – City College definitely has a special place and City College for me was a foundational step. Even though I went to a good high school – it was Lowell High School in San Francisco, I did not feel that it has prepared us enough in a sense, for example, UC Berkeley was where I went, even in the English perspective, even though we had (at Lowell) great classes and great teachers, I felt that City College truly prepared me for college in Berkeley – writing, economic concepts and every class was instrumental in my success at UC Berkeley and beyond.

For me as an immigrant, I did not know what path I would take – 2 year or 4 year, and when I was in Lowell, I did not consider applying straight – many were applying to Yale and competitive schools, but I considered it to a small extend because everyone was talking about it, but I knew I wanted to go to City college first. There was just this determination there. I was basically having to rely on myself and knew that I would have to support myself through whatever decision I was to make. I wasn’t sure still to apply straight or not to a four year school, and I thought I would have to use more time to get acquainted with the United States as a country as well, and of course economically, I would be able to support myself through City College as compared to a four year college. I wasn’t sure exactly how I would work that out, but I hadn’t explored those options.

***You arrive at CCSF in 2007. Where did you go, what did you do, where did you even start? Did you talk to a counselor? Orientation.***

My major was economics before I came in because that was something I considered in Moscow where I grew up, so the first thing I did was visit a few counselors to determine what my academic plan would be and what classes I would need to take in order to transfer later to a four year institution. Counselors have been very helpful and I went through several of them and also through the transfer center who were very helpful to determine which classes I have to take and how it all works. I went through other counseling sessions like EOP counseling sessions (extended opportunity learning services), so I was utilizing a lot of resources on campus and learning about resources, academic support and academic planning.

I think by myself (finding out about resources) – by visiting different offices and trying out by myself.

I did not know anyone at City College – I was a total stranger at the beginning – I just took my classes at the beginning and I met my best friends actually at City College who I still keep in touch with and even transferred to four-year institutions with – so, yeah.

***How did you develop a sense of community at CCSF?***

First, it was a very diverse environment and people had not talked about that before in terms of CCSF – I had thought it was a homogenous environment. But, contrary to what I have experienced, I have so many diverse people from very diverse backgrounds – culture, socioeconomic situation and just a very multi-faceted background. So, I just developed friendships with a lot of different people from all over the world. Some of whom grew up here, some who did not – along with the Russian community as well, Russian speaking community. I became involved with clubs and different extracurricular activities on campus and that has helped me develop and expand my network and expand and broaden my relationships and friendships and give back to City College as a community.

***What clubs were you involved with?***

There were a lot of clubs I was involved in. One was AGS, and another was the business and technology society. I was also president of the EOP club that we had. There were much more. I wish I could remember. I was on the planning and budget committee, a subsection of student government.

***What was your experience with instructors and how did that compare to your experience upon arrival at UC Berkeley?***

I think City College instructors in my opinion, and I wholeheartedly say this, I think they are amazing people and amazing professors. They are so committed to teaching and not just teach because it’s their profession – but because it’s their passion. They are wholeheartedly committed to student success and they’re all well versed in their subject and they’re so knowledgeable. They are dedicated to their career and they love their work and profession because they wholeheartedly believe in what they do. They are passionate and well versed with great expertise in their fields and they always want to see students succeed.

At UC Berkeley, instructors are wonderful – but they do have a lot of research projects that they work on. They are very involved in their research projects that they have rather than teaching – I had a mixed feeling about it and I felt like all of the instructors that I had were very passionate and very educated in their field, but of course, with City College instructors they’re more approachable, they’re very invested—they have more time. Berkeley professors are amazing and wonderful – but they’re busy but of course, if you utilize office hours, they are always available for you and if you develop the right relationship that you would want to have, I think you’ll have the right opportunity.

***Was it scary coming to CCSF at first? Being at such a big place?***

I wasn’t scared, but I felt as if I would need to figure it all out by myself. It was a new place and I did not know anything about City College and I just decided to take it one step at a time, and gradually, I would accomplish anything that I could.

***During your time, were you able to you gain confidence? Through club leadership?***

I think CCSF has allowed me to expand my opportunities as well as build a lot of different leadership skills and help me to develop professionally and also academically in many different respects. Speaking up in classes and leading projects, being in group settings, being involved in honors program and doing research projects was one of the greatest programs that I was a part of. City College has so many wonderful resources – you just have to search out for them and talk to the professors to make them work.

***How did you determine what you wanted to study?***

I did not take econ at Lowell, but while growing up in Russia, within my family, we had decided that [economics] was a great path to take, and my mom was an economist – I was supposed to go to finance academy in Moscow so kind of like that step was predetermined for me and I was always interested in economics. I started taking classes while at CCSF and I had wonderful professors in statistics, calculus and economics and did some research projects – and it was such an interesting field. Even though I had a pre-determination about economics, I think taking classes at CCSF and doing research in those fields has helped me to find that for myself and settle on it for my major.

I heard about UC Berkeley when I first came to the United States, but it was out of reach for me. Just as thought, I heard no one could get in. I looked into other UC colleges, so I applied, and thankful to my education, academic background and leadership qualities, I got into every UC to which I applied. I only applied to UCs – “thank you colleges for accepting me – and I choose UC Berkeley for my top choice.”

***What did you think at the point in 2009 upon arrival at UC Berkeley?***

I wanted to continue with economics, but I also realized that I longed for more academic and writing and research, so I switched from economics to political economy later. Because that gave me an opportunity to do research and also apply economic concepts to it as well. I think it was a good decision because it gave me a lot of possibilities and learning more research, writing and doing more reading.

Berkeley experience was great – I enjoyed it. I commuted from San Francisco. It gave me great background and possibilities based upon my interest to continue academically and professionally.

After I graduated, I thought I might be going to law school – that was one of the things I was consideration. After graduating from college, I started working at a nonprofit and that’s how I decided I would switch my interest from law to something else. My first nonprofit job title was Work Readiness Instructor and Employment Specialist and I did some case management on the side as well. It was a nonprofit that provided educational opportunities in SF and with the immigrant population that come to the U.S. social services needed and help them to develop their language skills and employment. I was involved with Project Shine, a wonderful opportunity that I treasure to this day. At that nonprofit I was there for 2.5 years, my longest employment and after that I was working for the govt. for a human services agency, and now I am at the office of workforce and economic developments to do workforce development services in the city, so we are doing workforce development in four different sectors: hospitality, construction, tech and healthcare.

My title is employment liaison, but what I do mostly is work on development strategies and program development. We manage a construction training program called City Build here in San Francisco so we train academy students to be employed for the construction projects we have in the city and we have a professional administration program for those who want to be project managers and accountants on the project sites, so I do program development, academies, grant research, grant development, workforce strategies and communication – working with collaborators who want to develop leadership programs and just thinking of innovative things to help the population at large and of course, marketing communications.

We constantly keep exploring and make sure we provide the best technical training to upskill to train and employ the appropriate jobs and progress in a career, and not just a job.

Yes, I have always considered graduate school. In terms of opportunity, it is a difficult question and it has been on my mind for such a long time. Even in promotional trajectory, I don’t know how much is needed, and of course more training in a few different field. I think I have deviated from a law degree, but I have always been interested in business and economic business since it was my major and I’ve been thinking education, public policy and government. I am thinking about grad school, but I haven’t determined it yet, but it is very costly. I want to make sure that the education I get will be relevant to what I will be doing in the future and I want to supplement my career with the education I will be pursuing.

I have friends at CCSF and Berkeley and the CCSF friends – I made my best friends at City College, and we do keep in touch and some of them we went to college together and City College is and has been there and has been expanding -- [woman nearby saying she also went to CCSF].

How did City College shape you? City College has allowed me to search for opportunities and to learn how to do it myself and that skill has really allowed me to get acquainted and find my path at UC Berkeley and not be afraid to approach different people, including counselors to navigate your path and shape your career the way you want it.

***What do you remember most about your time at CCSF?***

I remember instruction. I think instruction is superb at City and as stated, how instructors are dedicated and invested professor who love what they do and want students to succeed. That is the pivotal moment of City College for me and that has shaped me as person, as a human being and as professional as well. And of course, the opportunities that I had with leadership roles and being involved in different community organizations and campus clubs activities and developing long lasting friendships.

It is unfortunate that CCSF has a stigma and as the school has gone through different stages in the last few years – to me, City College is instrumental and whoever I talk to and whoever goes through this experience all loves CCSF so much and this experience is treasured – and it is pivotal and it was a foundation in the United States – and again, I went to high school here, but I feel that City College was this rock needed in order to move on into the future.

I wanted to join the student government, but by the time I learned about it, it was too late.

**Patrick P.**

Antioch High School, Class of 2006

CCSF Class of 2013

UC Berkeley, Haas School of Business, Class of 2015

Clorox Corporate Finance

November 1, 2016



*Tell me about your high school years and how to felt about college, and whether you went straight to college.*

High school for me in Antioch, CA, was interesting and I was still trying to figure out who I was. I pulled As and Bs my freshman and sophomore years. My sophomore year, I had some parent problems and there was a lot of stuff there, so my grades really dropped. My senior year I kind of evened out and got Bs and Cs. Just wanted to get done with school. I am from Antioch, all over the East Bay and then moved to a small city in the woods with my mom and then my dad came and got us, so there was a lot of that stuff going on.

College for me wasn’t something I wanted to do. I graduated high school in 2006 and he graduated college in 2006, so I was kind of like watching him go through it when I was in high school and I don’t know. I didn’t really feel like I wanted to go to college. I knew college was a good idea, but I didn’t want to do it right then. My dad went to Berkeley, but I didn’t want to go right away. I didn’t really like school. It wasn’t hard, it just wasn’t stimulating, so I decided that I wanted to go to school, but not right now and I wanted to get away from all that parent stuff. So, I joined the Navy in 2006. I went over there in July and then I got out in 2010 right before I started CCSF and then spent a year in Chicago, three years in San Diego and then decided that if I wanted to stay in the navy, I wanted to do it with a college degree (to become an officer), but I also knew that if I wanted to be home and be near my family, and so I moved back to the Bay Area and that’s when I started at CCSF.

I wanted to live in SF when I got out of the navy. I kind of knew I wanted to live in SF and do the “big old” financial hub and there would be more opportunities in SF as compared to living at home in Antioch. SF was a real treat, plus I was 22 when I got out of the navy and I wanted to be young in a big city.

*You arrive at CCSF. Where did you begin and how did you navigate?*

I just did everything online. I joined in Spring of 2010 and took your business class and one other computer class. I just did everything online. It wasn’t that hard. I had to take the placement test to find out what math I was going to be in. It wasn’t too bad. I went on assist.org and self-navigated. There was Christina Tinsley when I was trying to transfer into Berkeley. Because when I first got to CCSF, I knew I wanted to transfer to a four-year, but I didn’t have that four-year in mind. But I think when I got in your class when I was doing good in the business class, and you were like: “Go to Berkeley.” That’s a really good school around here. I had never even thought about going to Berkeley. I had thought about Cal State East Bay or something closer. Once I had that in mind, I used assist.org to plan out all of my classes. I might have visited with a counselor once or twice, but they use a computer, too. When I was transferring, Christina Tinsley from the TAPs program at Cal helped a lot with essay writing and making sure I was doing the club and all that sort of stuff. I got into TAP because I didn’t have any money (laughs).

The GI bill took care of three years and I spent three years at CCSF. They expect you to complete four years in three. When I got to Berkeley, I had already used that all up. I was just paying for academic scholarships. I wanted to live at college (I-house). I wanted the college experience?

*How did you build community at CCSF?*

There was a lot of club and I got a lot of community out of the classes I went to because people were doing study groups and that kind of thing. There was a lot of after school clubs that we were part of. One that I was a part of was ABG, Alpha Beta Gamma that you were the sponsor of. That was really cool. You get to meet a lot of people and figure out what you want to do and talk to other people about that and see what they think. That was something that was really good for me. I had never tried to get into Berkeley and I was still learning as I went. So, it was nice to be able to bounce ideas off of other people.

*How was the transition from the navy to CCSF?*

The transition was a little different. I was a little scared when I first went back to school. I had done well in high school when I wanted to, but I wasn’t good at studying and all that stuff. But one thing the navy taught me was discipline, you work hard, you get up early, and I put all those principles into use at CCSF. The hardest thing for me overall was just being older than everyone and being a nontraditional student. Even when I transferred into CCSF, Cal, or even Clorox, all of my peers were 4-5 years younger than me – and that is kind of hard. It’s not the worst thing ever but it is a little different because they are going through a totally different life experience than I am. The studying at first was a little difficult, but it was easy to pick up. I took two classes when I first started just to make sure I could get good grades and get back into the flow of college. After that, I took a full load the whole time and I think I graduated with something like a 3.9, so it wasn’t too hard to keep your grade up, but it was more a confidence thing. Was I going to be good enough to ace these classes just like these other college kids in college are. But that would have been the same had I gone into CCSF or had I gone into Berkeley.

*What’s your best memory of CCSF?*

I could start with my worst memory. Calculus. I hated it. I was not very good at it. I worked my butt off to do that. It was just something I couldn’t pick up – the second part. The first part was pretty easy – derivatives and all that, but the second part, integrals, was pretty tough. My best part was probably split between the classes I took and the teachers. There were a lot of good classes – your business class and Hege’s accounting class. There were a lot of classes I really enjoyed. Read the book, take a test and get an A. And I thought, this is awesome. This is something I am good at, and something I can do. Outside of the classes the teachers and the people were the clubs. That’s where I really got a feel for a lot of student life at CCSF. ABG was my big one. I went to a couple of meetings of the undergraduate investment club, but ABG is the one I really became a part of and I ended up being an officer during my last year. It was cool. Like I said earlier – to talk to people about what they wanted to do, to be collaborative and to talk to people not only about what they wanted to do at CCSF and after, but what they wanted to do in higher education – so between the professor and the classes and the clubs. Those were my highlights at CCSF.

*How did you feel about the curriculum and the instructors?*

I did learn a lot. Especially in my finance and business classes – those are the ones that I took to Haas with me and I had to basically do all of those classes again, but I had a head start because I had it at junior college. The book was different, but all of the classes I had at CCSF, we went over again at Berkeley. It was really beneficial for me to have done it twice. I didn’t have to learn the concepts over and I just had to go back and get the details and apply it. I loved all of the random electives – for example, one poli sci class where the professor printed out all of these really cool excerpts – like government, and we just really talked about each one and you didn’t have to read the whole book, but he gave us like ten pages and told us that it was the core of the book. There were a couple of really good classes. Outside of the calculus class, I don’t remember anything that was out of control. All of the writing classes were pretty easy. So, yeah, I think the instruction was as good as what I got at Berkeley.

The education that I got at CCSF was applicable to the one I received at Berkeley and even on par with Berkeley education.

*Tell me how your CCSF experience compared to Berkeley and what the transition was like.*

I feel like the big difference between City College and Berkeley was that at City College, everybody is working just to transfer. So everybody is like, “I just need to knock out all these classes.” Everybody is just working on where they need to go. At Berkeley, it is like, you made it into Berkeley, so you spread out and start building your group of friends, so CCSF has just a transitory feel to it and it is easier to make friends and everybody wants to be friends with others who have worked so hard, whereas at CCSF, definitely has that community of helping each other, but it is more of “I just want to get out of here,” whereas Berkeley has more of a homely [homey] feeling versus “you’re trying to get through it.”

What did you think you would do with your career during your time at Berkeley?

When I first started at Berkeley, you pretty much have three options at Haas. Accounting, banking and consulting. I didn’t want to do accounting because it was just too boring. Banking seemed high stress and consulting was a bunch of smart people doing interesting business cases, and so when I first started Berkeley I thought that I would be a consultant after – and I kind of had that set. But I wanted to see what banking was like. When I first started I wanted to interview for a ton of banking jobs because I wanted to get that experience and be sure I wasn’t making the wrong choice by choosing consulting so I did an internship in baking at Wells Fargo in their commercial bank and I really didn’t like that. It already confirmed a lot of what I didn’t like about banking and so I was like. Well, I want to go into consulting and I noticed that a lot of the people interviewing me and a lot of the people in my class going into these consulting jobs were a lot of the people that I didn’t want to work with – people I didn’t want to study with in my classes and I didn’t want to work with them in the real world, so I had to take a second to step back and think about what I really wanted to do and what I really wanted out of a job, and what I really wanted out of a job was you know… stable learning environment where I can go in and say, hey I am a college grad, I have never done finance before, can you teach me (and I want to be able to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes) so I wanted to be in an environment where I could come in and they wouldn’t say, “hey you made a mistake, you’re fired.” I wanted an environment where they could coach you and if you make a small mistake it’s fine. Everything will work out and they will fix it. That’s eventually why I went to Clorox. I wanted a stable working environment where I could learn and people I could work alongside. Consulting would have been more high stakes – you make one mistake and you’re out and I knew I would make mistakes – everyone does, but I didn’t want to have that level of stress about it. I wanted to work with people I liked and people I wanted to work with, so when I was doing the consulting interviews, I figured OK, this is not something I want to do long-term. I was looking for roles that were complex, analytical and challenging in a great work environment and I found that at Clorox in Corporate Finance, so that’s what I have been doing for the last, over a year now. I really like it. Corporate finance is really cool. It’s a stable job. You come in, you do your job and you don’t have to worry about it anymore. The most important thing that I got out of Clorox is the people that I have met here. Everybody is really smart, motivated, but no on is… At Haas, one of our principles are confidence without attitude, I find out a lot here. Everyone is confident about what they’re doing and everyone is confident about getting the job done, but they don’t have the attitude that says I am better than everyone because I can do this. They all have this confidence without attitude that I really want at a company that Haas put into all of us, and I find it here.

*What is your role at Clorox?*

Clorox is organized by brand. I am a budget coordinator and I work with manage marketing spend. Any kind of coupons that we put out, any advertising or media on TV, radio, or through ads, and anything sales promotion-based like shelf toppers, or an end cap at the end of an aisle that says “try Clorox II.”

There are coupons with higher redemption rates than others. A FSI (free standing insert) that you get in the newspaper, says the value of the coupon, the redemption rate (FSIs are 1-2%) and IRCs (insert redeemable coupons) if you buy right now on the bottle of bleach – is not 100%. It’s less than 60%. All the coupon, advertising, TV, radio, print, fees for talent and such.

We have the Pine Sol lady who was here for a long time, and Steph Curry, too. He has been doing all of our commercials. We own Clorox, Clorox II, a lot of cleaning products with the Clorox name on it. Things that are interesting are: Soy Vey, KC Masterpiece, BBQ Sauce, Bert’s Bees, personal care items, Glad trash bags and food containers and Kingsford charcoal. Our newest edition is Renew life, a probiotics company.

*What can CCSF do better?*

I would say, I think it up to the students ultimately. I think City College gives a lot of spaces ultimately for people to gather and get together like the clubs – but ultimately, it is up to the student and I think engaging the students more would be top priority for me. Changing the paradigm of just trying to get in, get out and not spend too much time on campus like a lot of commuters do. Whereas, “I want to go to City College because I want to go there, I want to meet professors and hang out on campus and meet students – the same kind of stuff that I got out of Berkeley when I first went there – I would love to see that at CCSF.”

*How did CCSF change you?*

I think the confidence stuff really helped me a lot. When I first got out of the navy, the technical stuff – I knew I was good at it, and I knew I could do the analytics. But I was not so sure I could do the business stuff. And I wasn’t confident enough in myself to put my ideas out there. And in your class in particular, when I first started, I was really quiet, I didn’t want to say anything, I didn’t feel like I had the authority to say anything, because I didn’t feel like I knew anything, so I kind of find that as like a pattern in my life that I always do. I work really hard to try to figure it out, gain the confidence, and then I can start talking like I know what I am saying, but I think it took City college to actually say hey, I know what I am doing and you can do well, you know the stuff because you work hard to do it, and start speaking up. I still have problems with trying to speak more, but I think I figured that out at City College. So, I just keep that with me when I go to new situations. I tell people that I tend to be on the quiet side even though I am a pretty smart guy and I can usually figure stuff out – so just keep that at the back of my mind. Make sure you put yourself out there a little bit more.

*What did you think CCSF would be like? What was your perception before you arrived?*

The junior college that I grew up around was Los Medonas College in Pittsburg, a lot of the students went there because they had to, and they didn’t really want to. There is a lot of like, “I’m not going to go to class.” And they just stay there for years and years and years. So that was my perception of a junior college – it’s not a place where you go to excel. Maybe it’s a place to learn something, but basically to waste time. When I was growing up, the people who graduated ahead of me and went to JCs were not motivated or intelligent enough to hack it, they couldn’t figure it out in high school so they went there to hang out – kind of like a continuation of high school.

So, that was my ideas of JCs when I went to CCSF. That changed a lot – and it all comes down the person. People that want to go to JCs, there’s always going to be the people who want to come in here and work hard, get everything out of it, be part of the clubs, network with professor and people outside in whatever the chosen field is, and then there are going to be others who are just kind of there. I don’t know if that is the stereotype of community college, and I still get a lot of that even to this day. When I went to a resume building workshop one of my first months are Haas, I had JC on my resume, and they said, “just take it off, just drop it right off.”

When I went to a resume workshop, I was actually asked, actually persuaded to take the JC off my resume and to just have the Berkeley on there. I think it is because JCs have a lot of stereotypes about the people who go there right out of high school instead of people who go straight to college.

So, it is something that we need to work on and the quality of candidates that come out of JCs, especially CCSF is really high, especially ones that are going to the Berkeleys, Stanfords and Ivy Leagues and all that stuff. They’re great students, they just took a different path, and I don’t think everybody recognizes that yet.

*Did you take it off your resume?*

Yes.

Where do you see yourself in the future?  
I have my five year plan which I want to update. When I first started college, it was about getting into Berkeley and getting this first job. Now that I have this first job, it’s more about exploring my options and now I have a pretty stable base and I know a lot of what I don’t like, so now it is about trying to find better flavors of what I do like – so finance is something that I really enjoy and trying to figure out what specifically I enjoy about finance and trying to do more of that. I know I enjoy strategy aspects of finance, so that is something that I would like to get into.

Where do I see myself in ten years? I can see myself in management at some kind of Fortune 500 company in a finance role. That is something I can really get behind, and #2, something more risky and something I am a bit more scared of would be like running my own business of some sort. Later down the road, my own consulting business of some sort. Using what I have learned over 30-40 kids and turn it into consulting.

[discussion about the number of kids Patrick and his girlfriend want – he wants six, she wants four]

Tell me how this interview has felt – talking about your past and your life at CCSF. What’s it feel like to reflect on things? It is nice to reflect on things. It is kind of like a warm, glowing feeling. I really enjoyed my time at CCSF and the people that I met at CCSF and it helped me for the better in the long run. Like I said, when I first took your class, I didn’t have any idea of what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to transfer to a four year, but I didn’t know what four year or what major I would do. I got to travel to Korea for a semester and do that. There are a lot of opportunities and resources at CCSF that are not readily apparent, so you have to scout out for them, because they are not readily apparent. You have to ask around. There are a lot of people who are doing some really cool stuff there. I mean, it’s nice to be able to talk. I want to be able to change that stereotype of JC students, and how people perceive junior college in general. Most of my family has gone through JCs at one time or another, it’s cheaper, you get a really great education, you get to learn a lot of things and explore things and you’re not necessarily on the hook thousands of dollars worth of bills.

It is nice to sit down and talk to you because I hope that it is something that people get to try and enjoy, and hopefully get some benefit out of.

*What advice would you give someone entering CC today?*

Try a lot of stuff first. You have to try things to figure out where you’re going. Take a lot of exploratory classes in subject you might want to major in. Find out who you have the best relationships with. Which classes are you most driven in? Once you find it, go 110% after it. Join clubs that are a part of it. Not only for your resume, but for your application building – be around other people reinforced me to make the right decision. Do everything you can and start working on it as early as you can so that you can see yourself being the person you want to be in five years, or as a college graduate. Start doing that stuff now.

I know when I first got out of the navy, I wrote down a bunch of stuff about the person I wanted to be in five years, and I started using adjectives used to describe that person, and start trying to put those into your everyday right there. I knew I wanted to be working at a big company and what does a person at a big company do? They’re organized, they think logically through things, they’re concise. If you know that maybe those are not the personality traits that you have, try to figure out how to put those into action in your everyday life. Start early.

*How did you feel when you got into Haas?*

I was really happy. I had been working on it for a long time. It was the culmination of all my work in just one letter. I was excited to be moving on. The JC is great, but I had been there for three years when I transferred so I had seen people go on, so I got a year to do the coaching and teaching stuff and helping people with what they were doing, which I really enjoyed, but I really wanted to get on to my next step of that five-year plan, so I was very happy and proud (inaudible) of the experience that the JC gave that to me.

*What advice do you have for students that don’t get into Haas?*

A lot of what I figured out… So, when I first got into Haas, a lot of people were like… Oh, we figured it out. We don’t have to work hard anymore. There’s a lot of those people that I met just the first few weeks. What I’ve learned since graduating is that the name doesn’t really matter. It’s what you do and what you can talk about in interviews and how you can sell yourself. So, yeah, maybe having the Haas title on your resume is a benefit, but if you have nothing underneath that, or just a person who doesn’t work hard because you got into Haas, that’s not going to fly and it is going to come out in the first 30-minute phone interview that someone has with you. The people that do really, really well not only in college, but also here at work are people that, regardless of where they came from, are people who know what they want, and they organize and prioritize things that need to get done. So, if you don’t get into Haas, don’t worry about that. I would just say kick butt in whatever you’re doing. That will come out in your resumes, it will come out in interviews, and that is ultimately what is going to get you the job.

*Anything else?*

Take Susan Berston’s Business 101 class. One thing I would definitively recommend to everybody is to take Susan Berston’s Business 101. I got a lot out of it, it was really transformative, and she is a great lady.

Peter D., Oracle

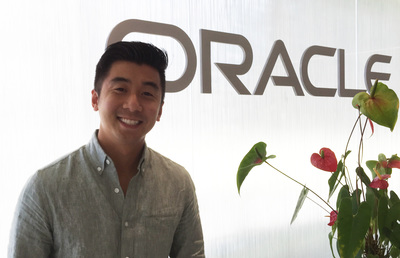
Business Development Manager

Oracle Data Cloud

Lincoln High School, Class of 2008

City College of San Francisco, Class of 2010

University of California, Davis, Class of 2012



Business Development Manager Oracle Data Cloud (advertising technology space)

Responsible for driving revenue and data partnerships world-wide with our most strategic partners and clients for the BlueKai Marketplace and Oracle Data Cloud.

*How did you choose CCSF and tell me about your background in HS (Lincoln High).*

*Why did you choose not to go to a four year school? Your high school background. How did you decide to go to CCSF from Lincoln.*

To be honest, in high school, I was not a good student at all. Barely graduated and that type of crowd, so I did not think about four-year university at all – until my senior year in high school when I realized, “Oh, people are going to college.” My parents hadn’t really given me much guidance. They’re first generation here and came over when they were 20 or something. No guidance at home, hung out with the bad crowd. I think it was a 2.0 at graduation when I graduated. I couldn’t even get into SFSU – which was easier to get into. So, CCSF was the next step, you know. I think that is a turning point in my education – when I realized that I have to try a little harder and figure out what I am doing. So, that’s how I know CCSF was for me – it’s near home, cheap and my only option.

*How did you feel upon entering CCSF and what was your first touchpoint? Did you see a counselor? Or did you just sign up for classes? Did you know what your path was going to be? Did you have any direction or idea at all when arrived at this large, large institution?*

I don’t think I had much direction the first year. I signed up for general education classes and I had a few business classes. I was kind of always naturally interested in business, so that is what I decided to pursue. But yeah, I don’t think I saw a counselor early on at all. So, it was a matter of just starting to take classes and figure out what I was interested in, which is how I ended up in your class (kakkle), and figure things out from there. It was useful having other friends around who were majoring in business and see what they were busy doing and what other schools had business majors – and not all of the UCs have business majors – just Berkeley and Irvine, I guess. So, I guess I just kind of followed [www.assist.org](http://www.assist.org) and word of mouth. Pretty much self-managed most of the time.

I was born and raised in CCSF, and I had a lot of friends who came from Lincoln and other local San Francisco high schools at CCSF. There are two crowds. There is the one crowd, my high school groups, that wasn’t very driven in education and those sort of things – and there are the others who also started ABG with me and they know

Jeff Wu is the one who came up to me and asked me if I wanted to start ABG – he came from Lincoln and was doing really good already back then and wanted to go to CCSF for two years to get into an even better UC. I learned a lot from him about navigating the application and college process and what to look out for.

Was he your mentor?

Unofficially, he and a few other peers who knew what they were doing in terms of how to get into a UC, what classes to take and what to look out for and study buddies. So, I hung out with them a lot studying nights and weekends and starting clubs, getting involved and doing things I just hadn’t thought about doing in high school. That was the turning point – knowing how to join/start clubs and study well -- I joined the other club first – AGS – the community service one – just to get involved and see what other people were doing – and essentially, that is when I figured things out.

*Did you ever visit the transfer center?*

I’ve been to the counselor once or twice, but that was more toward the middle or end of my time at CCSF. I was not part of the honors program.

*What was the experience like at CCSF in terms of community and classroom environment?*

Obviously vs. a four-year, the biggest difference was the class size. I actually told a friend of mine that I have a college professor coming to visit me and she said, “Oh, UC Davis or community college?” At a four-year university you never know your professors. I actually changed my major to OB because I didn’t like economics – and at Davis, some of those classes were a little bit smaller with one-on-one but in terms of community, going from HS, you’re surrounded by friends all of the time, but going to CC was hard, because everyone takes all these classes

It was hard to be a part of a community unless you actually seek it – a good amount aren’t, they just go to class, study and go on their way. You see people during passing, but you actually do not see them all of the time, so I don’t – it was hard to become part of a community unless you actually seek it – such as starting and joining clubs and creating study sessions with other people. I knew Jeff and big group of other people from high school, and actually I studied a lot with him because I can’t study at home. It was the first time I joined a club and met random people, and it was the first time I socialized with other “groups” if you will. If you’re not seeking it, a good amount of people just go to class and then go home, and it’s not really there unless you seek it.

I did absolutely nothing in high school – no sports, no extracurriculars . I did not study at all. I just got by. So, I didn’t discover any of that until community college. College was the first time I joined a club and met random people.

*So, what changed? Did CCSF seem like a new chapter, or did you have the perception that it would be an extension of high school?*

It was a new chapter – in high school I just got in trouble a lot, and I even got arrested once, so that was the turning point (shoplifting). I wasn’t a bad kid. I just hung out with a bad crowd and didn’t have the proper motivation or guidance – and just didn’t know what to do. I just floated a lot. Community college was my second chance to turn things around. I discovered studying my senior year of high school – like, “hey, if I read this book, I can actually get an A.” So, that kind of carried over to CCSF. I still wasn’t a perfect student, but I was a 3.3 or 3.4 when I transferred over to Davis, which was significantly higher than high school.

*What was your experience like at CCSF in terms of professors?*

I mean there are both sides of it – those who are way more connected to their students like you and Dennis Mullen – involved and care for you. And there are some that are also “in and out.” There were both, but that comes with any school. The professors and resources are there, but only if you seek it – you have to want to seek it out.

*What was it like at Davis as a transfer student as compared to the folks who had been there for a few years?*

The biggest part from CCSF to Davis was the semester vs. quarter. Pace as one factor, and difficulty and a harder level. Davis was definitely harder. And then the third item, I was also pledging my fraternity of my first quarter and everything stacked on top of each other, so I definitely didn’t do as well as I would have like my first quarter. In terms of comparing a person coming in from a two-year university to someone who can in from the start, you miss out on the excitement of the freshman experience, including the dorm. They might not know what they’re doing the first year, and so you miss out on that “real” college experience. In community college, people come in and out there’s no real formal plan. It felt like an extension of… the mentality was like an extension of high school… same classes, lunch, and the social aspect actually went down – so it was harder in terms of the social aspect.

I only had two years at Davis, so I definitely made the best out of it. I didn’t do any transfer programs dorm or anything like that, only because it wasn’t a very nice apartment, so I lived in an apartment. I did do the business fraternity though – and I met other likeminded people who were pursuing business and kind of those endeavors in the future.

What were your interests while at Davis in terms of classes? At CCSF, I was more interested in general business and at Davis, there wasn’t a formal business program – the closest thing was managerial economics and business economics – so I did that for a quarter or two, but I am just not that good at math and quantitative economics in general, so I just didn’t do well. I wasn’t very “businessy” in mind at that point. It was different than what I originally thought or wanted, so organizational behavior was another option for me. It was definitely more of the liberal arts and less quantitative aspect, but I ended up in a business and tech function, which I developed an interest in at the end of my college career – just tech in general.

*How did you develop your interest in tech while still in college and how did you pursue your first job in tech?*

I think just technology was always an interest of mine. I was always a first adopter like MySpace and with mobile phones, I was always the first and at the forefront with my friends. And also just joining that business fraternity it was nice to see what other people were interested in – some were interested in finance, some were interested in tech and you see what other jobs people are applying to and what majors they were interested in just kind of gives you a bigger sense of what’s out there.

Recruitment presence wasn’t super big at Davis, but none of them are companies that you would line up for – not like the ones at Berkeley – the Googles and Facebooks of the world – a lot of random company names, so my first experience getting a job or internship was after my junior year, I had a small entry level internship position. Morgan Stanley had a program where they had 100 people come in. It was a classroom setting internship kind of not like a typical internship – summer in Sacramento. A good name for the resume, but it wasn’t like doing any crazy financial analysis or investing. It was more a classroom type of setting. It was unpaid.

The downfall of coming from a two year university, you’re slower at the game of getting job and internship experience. I feel like if you’re at a four-year university, you start a little bit earlier. Coming in from a two-year university, not many people seek out internships, so I feel like they’re a little bit more behind than those at a four-year. There was a career center which I did not take advantage of. I did go to a few recruitment events just to check out and see what was there, but I didn’t go to a counselor or anything. The business fraternity I joined helped with that a lot – workshops and prep workshops and that was another resource, I guess.

Did you think you would enter the field of finance after Morgan Stanley?

Definitely no! My second internship was after I graduated. I didn’t have that much internship experience in general. In early college I worked at an after school program so it was totally irrelevant, so I tried getting a full time job lined up before I graduated, during my senior year of college, but it was also very hard, so I was open to internship opportunities. I did that for six months at Radium One as a Business Development intern while living at home, so the easy foot in the door for me while living in SF (paid intern), not a full time, 6 month program. It was an online advertising company so my job was to go out there and look for new data partnerships or online publisher partnerships to work with us and help show our advertising, essentially. So that was my foot in the advertising technology space. I got converted to full time there in like two years.

What made you decide to transition away from Radium One?

The company wasn’t doing that great, and I was a little bored and wasn’t learning too much anymore, which is when I started passively looking. I came across the role at Oracle and this one presented itself. It was a natural stepping stone in the advertising technology space and also business development, so it was the next level up from my previous role. I was still doing something similar, but it was on a higher level, more strategic point of view. I have been at Oracle for about two years now. I definitely would not have gotten this as my first job. When this job listing was posted, it asked for 5-7 years of experience and at the time I only had two, but while at Radium One, my BD experience was similar to what they were seeking here, that even though I didn’t have the years of experience, they were willing to make an exception and train me up there. I came in at the right time as they were in desperate need of someone.

While you were a student, could you have anticipated what it would be like to work for a big company?

Back at City College, I would not have imagined that I’d work at such a big, well-known established company like Oracle. Back at CCSF and high school, I don’t think I would ever have imagined that I’d be sitting here right now. In high school, I never thought about it and my first year at City College was more focused on transferring to a good school or decent school moreso than thinking about career at that point.

*Can you think of any skills or what you took away from your City College experience? Friendships?  
Or would you say that what brought you here today was more a result of an accumulation of other types of experiences?*

In terms of classroom education, not so much. I think what was most memorable about CCSF was just having that second chance of figuring out -- working hard, studying hard does kind of pay back – there are rewards -- working hard does payoff. That’s when I actually started working hard and studying and locking myself in libraries for finals and things like that.

*What was most memorable about City College?*

City College for me personally, was not so much the classroom education – obviously general education courses and business classes tailor to everybody’s needs. But for me personally, learning that working hard does pay off and that’s essentially when I began to study, push myself, branch out to create new clubs and getting involved in extracurricular activities and really trying to utilize the resources that were in front of me.

Where do you see yourself after two years here, where do you think this experience might take you? In two years, I will probably still be here. I definitely don’t want to be here…. I don’t shouldn’t say it too loud… for life. Speaking of. I am currently transitioning to another role internally to focus on our international efforts --- still the same broader business development. The opportunity came up BD efforts and data partnerships for advertising and marketers solutions – what were essentially doing is providing data for marketers to target advertisements. So, if you see ads online sometimes you may wonder, “Oh, why am I seeing these ads for shoes sometimes that I did not decide to buy?” People give us that data – so, we use data to target ads. It is distracting and sometimes can get creepy. The idea of it is to tailor the ad to you. All of the ads online, we power and get them out there. In my new role, I would be doing the same thing but focus on Asia region, Latin America to do the same thing there that we did here. Those markets are a little bit behind the U.S. and UK, so we are kind of trying to bring our efforts there. Bring data to markets and advertisers who want relevant advertisements, essentially.

We provide the technology to serve these ads and there are the agencies that work with these types of technology partners to serve these ads for their brands and marketer clients like Verizons and Disneys of the world – so people kind of jump back and forth between advertisers and technology partners.

As you, as an Asian American, do you feel like you fit into the culture and the environment? Is there diversity as an Asian man?

Hmmmm. It has not been a problem – I think being in SF and the Bay Area, it’s very diverse. Our San Francisco office has the most Asians, but our senior director is also Asian as well and it’s a pretty diverse team, so no problems here. Pretty good mix of males and females as well.

Is Oracle a young company? I forgot, but I remember seeing the statistics on this as compared to Google, Snapchat, Instagram – and the median age here is late 30s, and those companies are mid-20s.

In your new role, will you continue to contribute to a business unit in terms of revenue responsibilities? It is a team revenue we have to hit. Not a frontline salesperson – we do have to think about business as a partnership and where they are signing on and how we work without partners is a revenue share and if they don’t make money, then we don’t make money and if they’re not a good brand or someone that marketers are going to want to buy their data, then – my role is to get that data on to their platform.

My role is to kind of get that data onto our platform. Imagine an eBay marketplace for data where people can come in and buy and sell data for advertising purposes – so I am just trying to get more data and data inventory into the platform. We have sales people out there trying to sell this data.

I am definitely more in touch with the UC Davis people – many of whom moved to the Bay Area. The fraternity does a good job of facilitating keeping in touch not just with alumni and the people who are still in school, the undergrads, but I think people just hang out more in general.

Did you know there was a career center while at CCSF? Yes, I did. I just not take advantage of it.

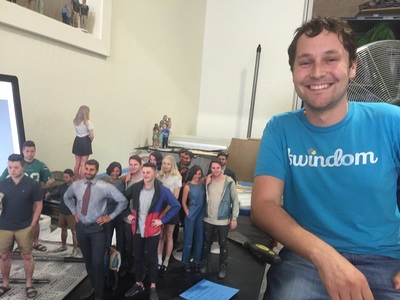
That’s the thing with me too – no one really speaks about all of the CCSF resources. When I got there, I just took random classes and follow IGETC. I could see how some people might say, “I am going to take these random classes” and find out later a semester or two later that it is a complete waste of time and doesn’t help them transfer somewhere.

I don’t remember seeing a counselor. I got out in three years, because I was still making up a lot of my English and math courses from high school. I never took the SATs – and I’m not sure how I would have performed. At the transfer orientation at UC Davis, you did have to do a sit down with a counselor to kind of figure out what classes you’re taking I think.

*So, you did a lot of that engineering on your own?* The takeaway is joining a club – for those who join a club – they’re actively seeking opportunities to push themselves and learn and to take away at CCSF that they didn’t’ know existed. I would not know that there are these opportunities—even at UC Davis, they can just fall into taking classes online and come out with a worst job as compared to someone who went to a CSU. You are one of the most successful CCSF alums to date and working for a corporation. In terms of corporate, a few of you have really climbed the quintessential corporate ladder. Yeah.

Rick B.,

Co-Founder, Twindom   
Lowell High School class of 2008  
CCSF Class of 2010  
UC Berkeley Haas Class of 2012



Co-founder, Twindom.com (3D printing figurines)

*Tell me about your high school years and what prompted you to come to CCSF?*

My original plan coming out of HS was actually to go work for Google. I had a one year internship that I was supposed to be doing that was part of something called the LEAD program. I had done a lot of community service in high school, so I applied and I got in. I was told as of sometime in December that I got into a one year program, which would have been a gap year. I would have applied to college during that time and gone back after that. To be fair, I hadn’t completely weighed all of my options, so I knew that an internship with Google would be an amazing experience, so I kind of took it and ran. Then in April, after I got rejection letters from the two schools that I applied to as kind of my ideal backups – Harvard and UC Berkeley – I got those rejection letters and then two weeks later received an email saying, “sorry, the Google intern program has been cancelled.” So, I immediately threw my arms up in the air and realized that I had to figure out what I was going to do with my life. I looked around and tried to figure out what are my options. I had already visited CCSF and understood the community college system – visiting Canada as well – I knew the program was going to be very much different than a four year program if I were to come in and do two years and transfer out – or even come in and do two years and get back into another internship or something like that – and then go on to work – given the options, I looked at it and knew that CCSF was going to be a great place with amazing professors. There were a lot more resources and a lot more opportunities than there would have been anywhere else and with any other options. That’s how I ended up choosing CCSF for two years. It was a very complicated decision but I am really, really glad that I did.

*You arrive at CCSF. Where did you begin and how did you learn about the many resources available? Did you see a counselor?*

So, my first day I believe on campus is when I did visit to go see a new student counselor before the semester started. That session did absolutely nothing (zero) for me. I came in, met the counselors, sat in the office and waited for 25 minutes. The counselor directed me to the requirements, which I had already read fully and directed me to assist.org – and told me that if I was interested in getting into a four-year school that I should look at this. It was very redundant. The way that I formulated my plan was what I thought would make the most sense and what was available at the time in the class schedule. I looked at past years class sizes and schedules and I had an idea of how many seats were going to be around for each class, and what I could do to get into those. It was truly a self-guided experience because the essentially, most of the resources when I first came in were not terribly helpful which was disappointing. I ended up helping three or four people from my classes figure out their plan because they essentially had the same experience that I did. They did not know how to reach out and find the information on assist.org and stuff like that.

*What was your perception of City College before you arrived?*

Actually, my perception of City before I arrived… it was definitely positive and it was definitely… I looked at the institution as a place where people from all over the map and sorts of different places would come to learn and figure out what they wanted to do.

*What was your experience like building community and finding your place at City College?*

Building community and finding my place was at first a big of a challenge. Definitely limited resources and definitely hard to find the right people at the right time. I joined a bunch of different organizations, and to be fair, Alpha Beta Gamma, ABG was by far the organization that I really got into the most while on campus. That said, I really loved the community feel my first day. It felt like a community and it felt like everyone that was there was working toward the same purpose, but it was the smaller groups that really helped form the community for me.

How did you find the clubs and how did you find your community and how did you even figure out where to go to find like-minded people such as yourself?

That’s a hard one. Where did I go to find like-minded people like me before the clubs. I knew that there would be people at CCSF from all walks of life. I knew there would be people who were working and people who were just in school, there’d be people in school and working at the same time, people who had kids and people who didn’t. The way that I planned it out was in my classes the first semester, I registered for 21 units the first time and I met people in those classes. Even though I wasn’t going to get to keep all of those classes, I pretty much used that to expand my network and to meet people. Because the first day or two in each of those classes was very social. In many cases, the professor would hand us the syllabus, talk about something and say, “now meet everyone else.” So, I used the first day to meet a whole bunch of people. That was definitely a really good experience but in terms of structured events, I would go in the cafeteria and sit down at a table and literally strike up a conversation with someone. I had no idea what I was in for and I had no idea what these people were doing. Trying to find a way to strike up conversations was at the top of my list and to be fair, the classes that I took that were not anything related to my major were the best sources of those conversations – taking a class on electronics and soldering essentially came from all over.

What was your goal while at CCSF in terms of transferring and how did you learn about the transfer process?

My goal when I came into City was definitely to transfer to Cal. It’s funny. I actually… so a number of people said that I should have applied to a number of private schools out of CCSF, and I think I would have been considered a serious candidate and maybe could have gotten in. But I didn’t want to pay that kind of tuition and moving away – so going across the bridge wasn’t so bad and I knew that I also wanted to go to Cal from when I arrived – and I also wanted to prove them wrong because they had rejected me the first time around.

That said, I guess the resources that I looked for transfer – one of the first things that I found was the cross-registration program. That program was invaluable because it put me on campus the first semester, so I got to take essentially a calculus class on campus and that semester I actually had the class at Cal, a writing class at Canada because I couldn’t get a writing class at CCSF because it was full and I had to fulfill the writing requirement, and a class at CCSF – two days a week, I was driving 96 miles roundtrip, but it was worth every second of it because getting into Cal and understanding where I wanted to go – it really made a big difference.

So, I loved the resources that I had in the transfer center. It was so helpful. Great people, great resources and the help writing essays was limited because they didn’t have the resources and getting help with that stuff was hard. But to be fair, I had a lot of resources outside of school that I could rely on for getting help with that sort of thing and I really didn’t have much trouble with it, but once again, but I did end up helping the people that I know who did apply to transfer and I did read a lot of essays and peer review. The requirements are made very clear with assist.org and the websites and the applicable schools that we wanted to apply to, but in terms of the softer side, it was less well-defined.

*What were your extracurricular activities at CCSF and why do you think you were accepted to Berkeley?*

I was a part of ABG and ABG was fantastic. I will admit that having that on my list probably contributed. Being in a business-based club or society, it was something where I’m sure that looked quite good. I also participated in the director’s advisory council for Haas as well while I was at Haas, but before that, because I was in ABG, they sort of looked at me as a candidate because I held a role at ABG. I was part technical because I managed the ABG website as well and did a few other things. Other things I did for fun at CCSF – I spent some time in an electronics lab as a once a week thing paired with a class the first semester and then he said just to come back in whenever we wanted. I did beginning acting and joined an impromptu improv group for a bit. I don’t know what benefit that had, but it was fun, nonetheless. I ended up taking improve again at Cal which was a ton of fun.

*Tell me how the professors at City College compared to the professors at Cal in terms of curriculum and engagement.*

You know, the professors at City from the perspective of coming out of high school, one of my first experiences at City is that the professor clearly states that they are here as a resource, number 1 and I am here to impart knowledge, number 2 and I am going to do my damn best to make sure that everyone who wants to succeed will succeed. Of all the professors I had at CCSF, I would say the quality of the essentially the programs and the quality of the instruction probably an 8 or 9 out of 10 for the majority of my classes. There were a select few classes that left a little something to be desired – mainly because the retention rate was 30% or 25%, and for any professor who has that kind of retention rate (many times due to things out of his/her control), it has to be insanely difficult to keep things going. It was really, really valuable to me that the professors gave me the opportunity to do work at the level I was capable of and to not necessarily hold me down. They let me do projects beyond their limit. The limit was whatever I wanted it to be. I took five or six honors classes. I vaguely remember that the honors projects were really, really good because they were the best part of the semester and something I got to do on my own time and shaped by things beyond the class.

*Was CCSF challenging?*

I took 17 or 18 units every semester – I got out in two years – no summers – you know, I am not going to say that it was easy. There were definitely classes that were quite difficult, on a scale of 1-10, it was probably a 3 or a 4. It wasn’t a 2 and it wasn’t over a 5. I was able to continue running my business during the semester while taking 17-18 units while doing other things – I had a different experience at Cal. During my first semester, I took 14 units my first semester and 17 units every semester thereafter. At Cal, with a 17-unit load, depending on the classes I was taking, I was out of my apartment doing classes I was taking or school-related things from 7 AM to 7 PM. My weekends I reserved for going home and spending time with Ariel (laughs). [Ariel is Rick’s now-wife]

*What was your fondest memory of City College?*

That’s a hard one. There were a lot of moments. Um. You know, the moment that I remember the best is kind of random. But, I believe it was in one of the temporary buildings at the bottom of campus and I believe it was Dennis Mullen’s class. We were essentially waiting for him and we heard there was something going on the Bay Bridge. Someone had called him and he called back. He said he was going to be 35 minutes late and I don’t know whether this should go anywhere, but he said that the blank exams were in the desk and someone can pass them out and you guys can start. And I thought to myself, “you’ve got to be kidding me. We are going to take an exam without the professor in the room.” So, I can’t remember who it was who had called and had heard that and they came in and said it very casually that the exams were in the desk and we can start – so we all sit down and we all start taking the exam. What’s ridiculous is that we took the exam for 20 more minutes before he showed up and everyone was quiet and taking their own test and nobody was doing anything weird – and this is not what I expected but it was really awesome and the people who were in that class really loved the material and really loved the class. Now, mind you that it was more than half of the students had already dropped the class. He called that day saying he was going to be five minutes late and ended up being more than half an hour late. He could never get to class on time.

*Lowell, CCSF, Haas – how did CCSF impact you and your life and career?*

City College gave me an understanding of what the real world was. I went to Lowell, and at Lowell, we were in a little bubble. We were very much separated from reality is and how the working world actually works. CCSF was two years of not necessarily like.. I don’t want to say real life experience out in the field, but real life experiences being discussed in the classroom. Cal was very different – Cal was very much theory. Almost every class was theory. At Haas, I got a good taste of experiential learning, so I did get to go out into the field and try things, but to be fair, when I was at City, the experiences that I had and the people that I got to talk to – I got to ask more questions at CCSF to people who were in my classes – they were peers and like-minded individuals – and I got to hear stories of everything. Left and right, you name it – I got to hear about it. There were people in my classes who got to do virtually every profession – people in sales and everything at least – people who had worked retail, customer service jobs, so I got an experience hearing from people who did all sorts of stuff and that was invaluable to me because I ran my own business all the way through from the time I stated at CCSF to the time that I left. And I had experienced, but I had never seen what I classified as the real world. I had never stepped outside my comfort zone and tried to do something outside of that, but CCSF gave me that experience and it gave me a ton of people who had that experience all at once. It was kind of scary at first, but definitely really really valuable. In terms of how that shaped what I was able to do coming out of school. At Cal, I continued running my business, but at a much lower level. I probably halved my revenue of what I did the first two years at CCSF, but when I left Cal, I knew based on what I had seen and based upon all of the experiences that I had had and everyone that I had talked to, I knew that I wanted to start my own business going into Cal and coming out of Cal, I was super interested in doing something entrepreneurial joining up with one or two of my peers with whom I could work. A lot of what I learned at CCSF from all of those other people – that’s what directed me in that direction. I knew I didn’t want to work in banking, I knew I didn’t want to work in consulting, I knew I didn’t want to work in accounting, and to be fair, most of that is from talking to people that I met at CCSF. So going into Haas, I expected to do entrepreneurship. It was a very different experience at Haas than I had originally intended. Haas did not provide nearly the amount of resources for entrepreneurship that I had expected – it is very accounting, banking and consulting focused – but I got to be one of the not 93% of the students at Haas who go into ABC and got to be interested in entrepreneurship as an undergrad. So, I spent a lot of time with MBAs, which was good.

One of the Twindom partners went to Haas and the other is an Industrial Engineering major.

*Tell me about Twindom.*

Twindom is three years old. We started Twindom in September of 2013. I have been working with David since I was in school at Haas. I met David Pastewka in my first week of school – an entrepreneurship seminar where they were talking about things – we went through our first year bouncing ideas off each other and he would come to me with a really long list and I would shoot them all down. He had taken a class called mobile application development and he had taken a class called mobile application development and that was with Ken Singer and he said it was a great class and there was a spot and I thought this could be a great class, so I joined. Even though David had already taken it, he came back and joined our team. In that class, we ended up with a team of 6, and out of that team of 6, we built an app for clearance items where you could scan a barcode for an item, it would pull product data and we would post it to eBay, so you could scan and sell products from a local store by just scanning and tapping a button. We actually sold things on the live marketplace. Well, actually the things we sold were through our own channel. We didn’t sell through eBay directly. We posted tweets with a link to the product and our own bargain carousel on black Friday. We built the app and after that class, we knew that we wanted to continue working together – the four of us did. There were two with other paths. One went to work for Facebook and the other seriously wanted to work for Goldman Sachs – he wanted to be a banker, no questions asked, so he petered off. So, the remaining four thought that we would investigate and see what we could do. So one of the four of us had an uncle who was seriously interested in LED lighting and he talked to us and made it sound extremely appealing – this was my spring semester, so it would have been January of 2012. His uncle pitched us on doing LED lighting sales and distribution and we knew it would be a replacement for incandescent. We kind of got in bed with the wrong guy and we jumped into a business with an advisor who ended up incorporating the firm without telling us, we were kind of written out of cap table and it just didn’t end well. As soon as we realized that, it was an ex-McKenzie and an ex-Harvard guy. He had a great background and was a family friend but he did not manage himself well, nor did he manage the relationship well. After we built a product, he told us that he was just working with us because it was the best thing to do at the time. We walked away after about 7 months. Effectively, we talked to five different legal councils and a bunch of different lawyers because we had built effectively the starting of a project. The company wasn’t worth anything at the time and there was a bank account with $2,000 – all of the assets were things that I had lent to the company (all of the hardware). We knew it was toast, and decided to put this under our belt and do something different. We moved into an office in the Dogpatch on August 1st. We moved in and we were there for four weeks and we moved out. We called up the guy and told him that we noticed you did this that it was bullshit, and we walked away.

After four months, we moved into Skydeck here at Cal. The guy who ran the mobile app development class at Cal got us into Skydeck without an idea and without anything. It is kind of like a Y Combinator, but nowhere near as structured. We did try for Y Combinator. Within three weeks, we decided on a 3D printing vending machine – and that it would be ridiculously valuable to society because everyone wanted to use a 3D printer but they didn’t have access to it. We wanted to do 3D printing and someone said they like vending machines – so we did that. In November of 2012, we applied to Y Combinator and we did a demo and Paul Graham said it was the most engaging demo he had ever seen and that he didn’t believe in the product. It was a good thing we didn’t get in because that product would not have gone anywhere and we ended up not giving away that much of the company. We ended up working with Boost (Tim Draper’s son), who had been trying to contact us for five months. We just kind of ignored him for a while and then responded to him. He reached out to us. We got a ton of press in January and February of that year. Partly because we took our system to the NYSE with our 3D printing prototype – the Economist did a piece on us and we had the best free advertising anyone could ask for.

We had 120 people reach out to us in two weeks to ask how they could buy a Dreambox. IT took us a few months and one was at the Children’s Creativity museum. WE had a second machine at the Asian Art museum printing miniatures of those sculptures and statues. In August, we decided to go back and test 3D scanning again. WE could get usable scans out of a 3D camera, a hand poled turntable and hold the camera and move up and down. With proof of concept, we sold $3,000 of figurines within 72 hours. I had seen MakerBots every year for three years at CES and I was enthralled by it. A machine that is programmable that makes things is even better. We couldn’t find the ideal product/ killer app for what the machine would produce. No one could think of what they wanted from the vending machine, but with these (points to the figurines), the technology at the time wasn’t the best. Over time, it has gotten to be amazing and that is because the scanners that we used were low res and now the prints look fantastic and one of the other things that we had to get over is that every part of this business is difficult from making the scanner and choosing the right scanner to the scanning process to tracking data and tracking order and to using the data for something meaningful to cleaning up the data into something printable to printing to distribution to shipping. Every part was complicated and we took a ridiculous complicated set of things that need to be done and we created a streamlined process for it – we idd most of it with automation and software and the pieces that weren’t automated and software related, we continued to make easier by making the hardware better. So, you know, today it’s an amalgamation of 20 different steps along the way and we’ve made it so that you can read a 30-page document, understand the whole process and give us $20,000 to start your own business.

We are licensing the software the selling the hardware. Our target market at this moment is anybody who is at a point in their lives of business career where they’re ready for a new source of revenue. A lot of people come to us because they think the technology is amazing. It’s a fun product. The people who buy scanners from us come from all walks of life. We have two investment bankers who bought systems and set them up because they wanted to do something fun. We get people who want to use them for virtual reality and scanning of avatars and we get people who want to use them for clothing and fitting and animation in general. There are tons of different application and what we’ve found is that everyone comes to us with a different idea and what they want to do – and everyone wants the printed product. But our goal is to make it easy to do all of those other things – clothing fitting, virtual reality animation and applications – a lot of special events but not so much weddings – people want weddings to be perfect. This is not a perfect product! We get a lot of people who buy scanners and they expect more than what the printers, which have been the same for 16 years, They sold to 3D systems in 2011, so HP’s printer is the first one that is going to rival these guys in terms of quality but it’s another years and a half until we see the full color quality – that will be a speed increase and not necessarily a quality issue.

We are now a team of 11. The largest we were was 17 with 7 outside the office and 10 in the office. Our most recent is that we had 9 people and then we had a slowdown in orders because it just wasn’t that time of year, so we are back to 7. Because the printed product today – we continue to fulfill the product for our customers – the hardware is not a one-time purchase. The hardware is a one-time fee for covering the cost. We make the money back on the software subscription. When you buy a scanner, the data that the scanner produces is a set of 178 photographs and what we provide in the cloud is a service is 178 photographs that creates that 3D model. We do the fulfillment through a network of partners that we’ve had that we have created. We don’t do any of the printing here – 93% is done off site. We only see international orders here. That was probably one of the hardest parts – figuring out fulfillment. Quality sucks in this industry and nobody can get it right. You have upset partners, customers and you have prints that come in and they look like (inaudible) – the printers are inconsistent and for that reason, quality and consistency are key. The first year and nine months, we never shipped a print to a partner to print. Now we have the three largest print houses in the world.

As it stands today, we are…. Poised to continue selling full body scanners and continue building this base of products that people can sell through their platforms and we will continue to release quality improvements on the scanners and we have a lot of things to continue developing those end cases and the level of investment that we would have to make is above and beyond our resources today. We need to define what the next revision of our end product is great. Crystals, plastic prints and animation, but with our next revision of the product, we want to solve a problem and change the way that people make decisions. We like virtual fittings and we have started to prototype that we have the ability to take a scan of you and put clothing on a robotic mannequin – we would likely start and we love low hanging fruit and we need to prove the product in some way. We will start with men’s t-shirts and button ups, but we are definitely going to move towards… every time we can offer a new product, we refuse to have people use our system that is outside of what we intended – people and their pets. We have to turn down a lot of customers and for a purpose that we weren’t interested in, but they don’t want to do the subscription and we want to do our own processing.

*Is this where you envisioned yourself and where do you see yourself in a couple more years?*

I knew that I was going to be doing something that I loved. Because I wasn’t going to give that up. It wasn’t going to be a question on that one. In terms of my day to day, if I look back four years ago and say what did I want to do, I wanted to start a small business consulting firm. I did small business consulting at City and taking a company selling PBX systems to businesses and they wanted to optimize. I always wanted to do small business consulting after doing tech consulting and computer repair – and I saw so many ways people could make their businesses more efficient. What’s hilarious is that at the time I was getting out of school, I chose what I was doing with the team because I wanted to do something on my own. Guess what I get to do every single day? I get to do small business consulting every single day for my own business and for every single one of our partners who buys a scanner – I get to work with them and tell them how to optimize their business because I know how to optimize their business because I’ve been in that business before. We did it ourselves for the first year and now I get to provide them with the tools necessary to make their businesses thrive and as much as I get upset when customers don’t do what they’re supposed to do, and what I love is that I get to optimize for that. It makes more sense for them to read documentation than not to read it. Four years ago I would have said that I will hopefully be running my own business and doing small business consulting, and low and behold that’s what I am doing—I got to continue doing that. I got to do exactly what I wanted to do and I was pretty sure what I wanted to do at the time. With the LED lighting, it would have been helping people optimize their lighting and working with small businesses to make their operations more efficient.

*Tell me about the pride that you feel as a product of the community college system*

I am extraordinarily proud to come from a college that gave me the opportunity to do anything that I could possibly have wanted to do, and it was probably one of the most supportive communities to be in – also one of the most educated communities to be in to make those decisions. It was outstanding to interact with people from all walks of life and also to have the resources and the professors and the programs that we had to be able to identify the areas in which I wanted to grow. That is probably the most valuable thing and what I am most proud of – having gotten out of the community college system.

*What could we do better at City College of San Francisco?*

To be fair, the only part of my CCSF experience that I felt was just terrible and not supported, no help at all, and didn’t point me in the right direction was the new student counseling. It was the first experience I had at CCSF. I walked into an office where there were 12 people working and I did not feel welcome at all in that office. I had conversations with people in that office that made me feel like they were not giving me the right information – they were actually giving me the wrong information, so really I mean apart from those first few experiences dealing with the counseling department, after that, it was phenomenal, and it was great. If CCSF could do one thing better, it would be to have student volunteers who do student counseling and that would be the way to go because really – these people had no idea of what we wanted to do, what our backgrounds were and they didn’t have the ability – I am not going to say it was them individually or the people in the department and the structure of how it works fed them 400-500 students each at the start of semester and there is no way you can possibly know what those students want to do. So, if you even had an idea of what category you wanted your education to land in – math, science, writing, art or technology – find someone in the field at school who knows the system and let them help out. Mentors.

What’s really hard is that everyone that I talk to – I know a number of people who work at CCSF and graduated a few years before me – everyone says if only the school could spend more on classes and less on administration – that might actually make a difference and there’s a massive community of people who would love to help out with counseling and I admit that it would be a ridiculous amount of work. At Cal, they had as a two-year transfer, they had one day where you showed up on campus and before you registered for your classes and before the semester started where they had counselors from the department available for you to talk to – and that was valuable because it let us get answers about specific class-related questions. That’s expensive because you have people who are there during the summer who were answering these questions. I am sure that’s not something they took lightly because it was a very large expensive for them – but more so, they had Haas students there to answer questions. Other than that, honestly, everything else was great. I wish the food was a little better other than the main cafeteria, but that’s okay.

Serena C.,

Lowell High School Class of 2009

CCSF Class of 2011

Pace University, BS Business, Class of 2013

Events Planning Manager One Market Restaurant



***Themes: continuing ed, transfer center, counseling, clubs, hands-on teachers with experience***

*After Lowell High School, what were your thoughts about college, and how did you choose CCSF?*

So, originally my end of junior year in high school, I started to look at four-year universities, and I also started to look at their price tags, and just realized that I wasn’t going to be able to afford it right after high school. I was going to put myself through school, and even if I was able to get certain scholarships, I didn’t think I was able to get a full ride, so I talked to my high school counselor and they suggested City College of San Francisco – because I am a San Francisco resident, and it is the closest community college.

So, I looked into the different programs that were offered and it was a good opportunity to get in – originally, I was just going to go in and take my GEs and transfer, and I realize that they had the hospitality program, and at the time, I wanted to go into hotel operations – and so, I enrolled in the Culinary Arts and Hospitality program and it was great.

*You arrive at CCSF – how did you make sense of this massive place and where did you even begin?*

At the time, I wanted to go into hotel operations, so for me, I actually wanted to start the summer right after high school, so I didn’t wait until fall. I jumped right in. I didn’t take any of the intro classes, the orientation and all of that. So, even though Lowell had a system where you picked your classes every semester, the class selection process was a little more frustrating because of the seniority in terms of taking the classes (laughs) – there was like the bottom of the barrel and I was like the dirt under that (laughs out loud). So, that first experience was extremely frustrating for the first class. Going into fall, it was a little bit better because I was officially enrolled into the CAS program, so that gave me a little bit more seniority but I had a little bit of rearranging to do just because of the budget cuts that were going on at the time. There were some key classes that I wanted to take that semester, and I got the email that I had enrolled and the classes were no longer being offered, so that was a little bit of… I don’t want to say a stressor, but it wasn’t necessarily how I wanted to start off my college career (laughs). I eventually ended up getting a pretty nice college schedule, but I don’t think anybody should take classes six days a week their first official semester of college, which I did. I was enrolled in classes Monday through Friday and my Saturday class was an 8-hour class (front desk operations) at the Southeast campus starting at 8 AM, and I live very close to the main campus, so you can imagine me having to wake up when it was still night time on a Saturday. It was a really great class and a lot of hands on experience, but I just wouldn’t recommend taking that your first semester (laughs out loud).

*What are your favorite things about City College?*

My favorite things about City College were the opportunities that presented itself. There were so many different programs there, and even with the budget cuts, there were so many different classes that you could take – the program that I was in (CAHS) had their own counselors in addition to the regular counselors that were offered, which I thought provided additional support. A lot of the teachers that I had, including you, gave a lot of advice and had a lot of real world experience which I thought was most important – teachers who actually knew what they were talking about instead of teaching from a book. A lot of clubs that – when I was in high school, I wasn’t really as active as I was in college in terms of extracurricular activities and I thought that was a really great transition. City College, especially the main campus, is such a large campus -- it was a great way to meet other students who were not necessarily enrolled in my classes.

*How did you choose Pace University? Tell me about the selection process and the transfer process.*

I started looking at Pace University during my junior year of high school. It was one of the schools I was really interested in going to at the time – mainly because I was looking primarily at hotel operations. They had my program, but their price tag was just crazy. At the time, I was looking at a bunch of schools that were not in California. UNLV gave me quite a bit of money, but the credits didn’t all transfer over. By the time I had to make my decision, I wanted to get a little further away from California – so for me, in New York, I applied to Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), got in, applied to Pace, got in, and a couple of schools in Florida. I really wanted to live in New York. I thought it would be a great experience, and even if I didn’t end up staying, which I didn’t, I just thought it would be a nice place to live to say I experienced this and I can make it in New York. As the saying goes, “If you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere.” Also, they had a lot of connections and they were really pro internship. I had a cousin who graduated college two years before I started and she had the worst time trying to find a job in her field because she didn’t have a lot of hands-on experience. She only had class experience, and I am a really big believer of learning from other people’s experiences and if you can avoid any negative experiences by learning from others, I am very big on that. So, when I heard that Pace is really pro-internship with a lot of classes scheduled around where you can do an internship and still take the necessary classes to graduate, that was the key factor for me. In addition, they did offer a significant amount of scholarship for me. One of the downsides was that I was the first person from CCSF to ever transfer to Pace – so I had to fight for some of my credits. When they first send you the acceptance of “this will transfer over, this will transfer over,” and then when they give you your final list of transfer classes, there were a couple of classes I’d say I really wish to never take this class again. So, it was like fighting tooth and nail to get a couple of classes transferred.

All in all, I was able to get 57 out of 63 credits transferred at the end of the day. For me, that was fine. Originally, they were saying 48 – and I said I am not doing all of those classes again. The transfer process itself – it was a little interesting just because I was basically going at it – I don’t want to say with little support, but I didn’t necessarily reach out when I should have for help. I started the process on my own. I looked at a bunch of colleges in high school and had the list that I was interested in originally. For me, I think that was part of the problem. I should have asked for help earlier in the process.

I went to the transfer center in the later part of my process to see if there were scholarships or things of that nature, but when it came time for me to start applying, I had my list and cut it down to the schools I really wanted to go to, and for every college you apply to, you have to pay a fee, and I was really trying to save up and factor in the flight costs and you know, (laughs), and so I didn’t want to apply to 10-15 schools and pay all these fess for that.

I didn’t start asking for help until later on in the process – I’d say one or two months before I really needed to get those applications in. I could have asked for help from counselors and teachers a semester or two before by going and telling them that I was interested in these schools and if they knew anything about them. I was aware of the transfer center, but I didn’t know about all of the resources that went with them – like scholarships for transfer students – but I didn’t know about the other resources that they offered.

*Why did you decide to take business coursework?*

After high school, well, my second semester of senior year of high school, I did a program with Salesforce called BizAcademy, and it was basically a week-and-a-half long program and they assign you a role which covers their department, so I was a VP of sales with four other people on my team and basically, you go in and act as consultants to their business and you have to solve a problem (it was a competition and there were four teams), that they presented to us. The group with the best solution for the problem won the competition – and that was my first real exposure to the business world and I loved it, and even though I was initially interested in hotel operations, I thought that maybe I shouldn’t be so specific about taking only hotel classes, because if I want to do something outside of that, I have only learned – and although hotels are still businesses, there are different things you can learn about other businesses, so I didn’t want to limit myself by only taking classes related to hospitality.

*How would you compare your experience with the instructors at CCSF to Pace University?*

I think that at City I got a little bit more hands-on experience, and usually, as least what I’ve heard it vice versa, when you got a university, you can get a little bit more hands on experience. Some of the classes I thought I was supposed to get hands-on experience with when I transferred in, they had taken out of the curriculum that involved the hands-on experience at Pace, which was really a negative for me, but I learned to work around it by getting internships. Especially in the CAHS, I did the hands-on experience, with the front desk Saturday class that I took for 16 weeks and I took a catering and events class downtown campus and it taught you how to plan an event, do your budgets, run a restaurant, work in management, and it was that experience that really propelled me to want to continue getting that hands-on experience when I transferred to Pace. There were a lot of students who didn’t think that hands-on experience as really necessary, which I don’t agree with at all, but City gave me that upper edge when it came to knowing what was necessary. The classes at Pace, just because it was a smaller school, were a little bit smaller, a little more intimate. The classes, I would say, were about 15-17 people at the most – the more general classes that you had to take. There were some lecture classes that easily had 200 kids in them. That was a major difference. The lecture classes that you had to take at City – I don’t think I ever had more than 40 students in the ones that I took.

I think they both were really great experiences. City offered chances to study abroad that I didn’t take advantage of – but I did so at Pace. I studied abroad (on scholarship) in China for a summer. Because I was a transfer student, it was a little tighter for me. I didn’t want to get stuck (doing an extra semester and being set back), so if I went, I had to go during a summer and that turned out to only be six weeks. I also got a chance to do a travel course in Brazil on scholarship for six weeks. It was great. One thing that Pace was also big on was local leadership and global citizenship. This world, especially in the United States, where we are more and more becoming a melting pot, so understanding cultural differences is major. I think before, maybe 20 or 30 years ago, it wasn’t taught, but Pace was a big pusher of that, and I think that was great. Especially for me. When I transferred, I was in their business program with a major in hospitality studies, but I also decided to minor in communications. In fact, one of the internships I did was at Spike TV. It was really interesting because I had such a hospitality background so to jump from hospitality to communications to entertainment was…. It’s a TV station under a parent company, Viacom, VH1, BET, Comedy Central, and I got to do a bunch of different projects with different TV brands.

I decided not to stay in New York mainly because it was a financial decision. The winters are really cold and they last for 7 or 8 months, and the last winter I was there, it got down to 6 degrees and wind chill, and it hurt to breathe. For a lot of the entry level jobs, I didn’t want to have to choose between rent or food – or having 6 or 7 roommates.

I did live on campus for my first two years and then I moved out and moved in with a friend by renting a room in their house. It worked out for me financially at the time, and I didn’t want to overstay my welcome, and they would have continued to let me live there, but I didn’t want to overstay my welcome and finding my own place in New York wasn’t going to work on an entry level salary. I ended up moving back and temping and then getting this job here (at One Market Plaza Restaurant).

David Bouchard has been here since the beginning of time – 1993. We have become one of the staple restaurants in San Francisco. Whenever you want to come by, just let me know. So, essentially, it’s a chef-driven restaurant and Mark Dommen and our GM Larry Bouchard, the GM both run the restaurant. The executive chef has his staff under him – our sous chefs are front line managers for the line cooks in the kitchen and we have a pastry chef with her own kitchen and she reports to our executive chef. She is also a manager with her own separate staff. Our GM, the director of our department (sales and banquets) is who I report to – myself and my colleague report to her. She is new and my previous manager was here for 17 years, and she built up the department. Before her, we only had this one little banquet room. Before we took this room over, it used to be rented out for meetings, and we got this space six years ago. I know they did have it for retail at some point.

So, on a day to day basis, I am involved in sales and event planning. We do the event planning process from start-to-finish. From inquiry, taking the phone call, to email – seeing what the goal of the event is, planning their menus, setup and AD. Often, we are working with a random person who doesn’t know what they’re doing and you have to be patient with them because it’s not their main job. When you send them a list of line items to fill in, they don’t do it and they don’t understand that we are not a hotel with the same audio visual capabilities or stages. WE have started to get some inquiries for graduations like the police academy and working with companies and organizations who want big, huge events. We can do it, but can’t source stages for them. We don’t have it in-house and we have to pop them up. We get confused for a hotel a lot of the time because of the size of the restaurant. We are the largest restaurant in SF not associated with a hotel, and it does not include this atrium space.

We were the NFL house for the NFL for their families. We were closed 9 days for the event. Most of our regulars stayed away from the area for the week. We had about 3,500 to 5,000 people a day, so it was invite only to the NFL house. You had to be a player or a corporate sponsor to affiliate. We re-did the restaurant, took out all of the tables and it was completely insane. It took 18 months to plan. Part of that was the selection process. They have an intermediary called Giamonte Marketing. They come, scout and plan and then the NFL comes in and looks at the menu. For the most part, we don’t do sampling because we are alamanut – we make it to order. Shows me pictures of a built-in bar, bocce courts, funky tables to sit at and completely re-did the space. Lounge furniture so people can hang out. Sponsored by Verizon, the #1 sponsor of the NFL and there were different organizations we had to work with. There we candy and nut sponsors and we had to incorporate all of those sponsors into the event.

*How did you find community at City College?*

I think, for me, I joined the African American Scholastic program, and that is the way I found my sense of community. My counselor was Ms. Clark, and it was great. I had access to a bunch of different resources, along with the chance to meet students outside my classes. Since CCSF is such a large campus, it is easy to make your way to class and then leave. Since you’re not connected, joining that program really solidified my sense of community – in addition to the culinary arts and hospitality program.

Think back to high school, then CCSF, then Pace – and now at One Market Restaurant. What about you has changed, and how did City College contribute to that?

I think that actually just coming to this realization rather recently, that not only education, but continued education is key. Keeping up with kind of trends, actually, I went back last spring, I took an introduction to wine class – I don’t drink personally or socially, but being in this business, you need to know about wine. I just never saw the need to drink, but being in this industry, but I want to know what I am telling my clients about and not have to always defer to my sommelier. As a salesperson, you have to be confident with what you’re selling. I did get to taste, but I always spit it out, and the person who taught the class had taught be before. In most tastings, in the professional sense, they encourage you to spit. Continued education is key and looking forward 4-5 years from now, One Market is great for certain experiences, but I think about how am I going to bridge that gap. I don’t think I am going to retire here. I don’t think people of my generation think about staying somewhere for 25-30 years.

I am always looking at job boards to see what the current market is requiring, just seeing that there are some skills -- I know some things that I am not proficient in. I am constantly looking at classes that City offers, because I don’t think I want to get an MBA right now. I JUST paid off my student loans in April, and one of the reason I moved back is to not have that debt hanging over me. It’s not bad considering that I went to a private school that costs $54,000 a year. Which again, it isn’t bad… It’s crazy. I literally just got out of debt, so I have looked at a couple of MBA programs. I want to own a home.

I think that City College made me realize how important education is. And continued education – even after getting my bachelor’s degree and how much you need to stay up to date in current markets. Required skills are forever changing and it is really important to stay current. I know some people who are in management positions who went to college 20-30 years ago, and their excuse for not knowing what is happening now is that they went to college 20-30 years ago. There are so many classes that are offered at night at City College where you can keep up on skills – and they’re affordable, which I think is great – especially if you work in a company that doesn’t offer any form of tuition reimbursement or assistance, so City College is the perfect solution.

I think that one of the things that I wish I would have taken advantage more of, and I always joke around when I say this, I think I was really excited to get in and out in two years. But if I could have changed something, I would have stayed for another year. I would have taken advantage of opportunities to study abroad. The culinary program has a trip every year to Oaxaca, Mexico and I would have gone for a semester, and while my program was great, it wasn’t a long length of time (only 6.5 weeks). Also, I probably would have gotten more involved at City. When I got to Pace, I was involved with the Black Students Union, Campus activities, the spirit committee, the resident housing program (I became my dorm president). For me, it was a lot harder to find a sense of community at Pace then it was at City. New Yorkers keep to themselves.

*Were they many people of color at Pace? Not many. Our sommelier here is African American. That’s it.*

But also, just being a transfer student, all of the friend groups, and if you come from the same school, there were people who would transfer in from the same school, even if you weren’t friends from the previous school. I was the only one from City College and from Northern California (they mainly promoted from Southern California). Because I was already in the CAHS program, I had already taken a bunch of my major classes, and the first year, I was taking lecture classes in rooms full of 250 people, so you don’t talk to people. You just sit for three hours and wish that you had decided not to come to that class.

*Last question. What can City College do better?*

I think that one of the things is that when I first started my matriculation into City, the counselors – the general counselors gave me a little bit of a rough time because I wanted to start in summer instead of fall. It was still my senior year of high school, and I went to two different counselors who couldn’t understand that I wasn’t signing up for concurrent enrollment. I was signing up to start the summer after high school and some of them gave me a hard time with that and made it sound like I didn’t know what I was taking about -- and I got a hard time for that, which was a major frustration for me. Other than that, I think that for me, just knowing more about what resources the transfer center offered, and what the transfer center offered would have been great. I knew about scholarships, but that was about it. It’s one thing if you’re still trying to figure out what to do, if you’re just taking classes, there should be some structure to that.



**William D., Restauranteur**   
Lowell High School Class of 2008  
University of California, San Diego (one semester)  
City College of San Francisco, Class of 2010  
Brown University, Class of 2012

**Tell me about your high school experience and thoughts after high school with regards to college**

When I first started high school, I had this… I went to Lowell High School and it’s the crème dela crème of high schools, especially among Asian American parents. I had the chance to go to Lowell or School of the Arts and a lot of my friends were at Lowell, and it just seemed like a better choice. My parents were encouraging it. It was very stressful I would say. Lots of studying and it was really competitive. Everyone had to know each other’s grades and SAT scores. I found solace in music – like that was the one thing I always looked forward to – my orchestra classes and that was one reason why I almost went to a conservatory instead of a university for college. I didn’t like high school. I did all right, but I hated the culture of Lowell. Some of the teachers were fantastic, and some of the teachers were only there because …. They called Lowell the retirement school for a lot of the instructors. People were just there to throw out the material and they don’t necessarily have to teach – and because students are pretty bright, they will still learn the material. I didn’t really appreciate that, but after graduating Lowell in 2008, I had actually applied to Ivies and UCs and the conservatory in New York that I got into (Juliard) for orchestral conducting and I chose UC San Diego – it was sort of a compromise. It was close by but not too far and I was studying music and econ there. My initial thoughts were that this place was huge. I wasn’t used to an 800-student economics class, and at the time, at the time I felt that I wanted to do business and UC San Diego has a management science program, and I eventually went towards that route meaning wanting to do business because I suppose I was somewhat wanted to make money and I felt like I could do better than UC San Diego (as strange as this sounds) and I felt that it wasn’t affording me the opportunity to learn about business as I wanted to. So I contemplated leaving. My parents were completely against it. They told me not to try to transfer (after a quarter) and they said stay longer. You might like it. I told them that I didn’t like it, it was too big, and that I wanted a smaller environment. I ultimately made a decision to transfer and at the time, the most humbling thing was to transfer to a community college and to see that as a temporary gateway. My heart kind of sank because truthfully, going to Lowell, you’re brought up in the environment where you should be going to a UC or an Ivy League and it’s almost shameful to go to community college.

My original perception of CCSF was that it was a place for students who don’t know what they’re doing, students who want to save money, which is understandable and students who didn’t do well in high school and I thin k that is still the pervasive mentality at Lowell. The moment I went, I was like, “oh shit. I want to get out as soon as possible and my goal was to transfer out of CCSF in a year and a half and just go there, make the most of it and utilize as many of the resources as possible and to try to be somewhat detached from the CCSF community. At the time, I was very arrogant and had a selfish mentality that I was here to take as much as I can, and to leave and transfer and I am too good for this place.

That how things had changed a little when I had gone to CCSF because I pursued business and met some of the best instructors. I was floored by how small the classes were and the instructors were there because they actually wanted to teach. And that was something I had not quite experienced when I was at UC San Diego. You can talk to them and there was a lot of that bullshit advertisement when you go to a UC or a private college as I later did where they say, “the professors are very approachable and you can talk to them during office hours. At CCSF, you can talk to them during or after class and they actually care what you are pursuing and how you’re doing in class. And so, I actually met some of my closest friends at CCSF and they shared a strong passion of mine in starting a club and I actually started something called the Undergraduate Investment Group (UIG) because at the time my buddies and I were interested in finance and investing and there wasn’t really an outlet for that at CCSF, so we decided we would start the club and we would have Susan Berston as our sponsor our club and her support was great because at the time, we didn’t know what the hell we were doing. The clubs that existed they were there for resume and transcript holders (inaudible) but in all honesty, we did start it does benefit us to have a leadership role and leadership title when applying to college and universities and transferring out. We generally were interested (inaudible) and a lot of the students see the college as a commuter school and so this provided that sense of belonging and it just felt like warm and in an otherwise environment where I don’t see any of my friends and I just see my friends outside of classes. And I was just surprised to see how successful the club was and people came and were genuinely interested. The egos were at the door and no one was trying to brag about the hot shot investor if they traded. They were just interested in and that is something that I miss too. You didn’t have to prove yourself.

**You decide to leave San Diego – how did you decide to come to CCSF and not try to transfer to another four year college?**

It was in San Francisco and it seemed to have offered a plethora of courses – it had a ton of courses versus the other community colleges I was researching. I was also interested in, at the time, Haas (UC Berkeley) and its business program and it seemed at the time easier to transfer from a community college to a UC seemed to be the most sensible route. I was dead set on Berkeley. That was my goal. I was. I was. I didn’t really dream, to be honest, about transferring to other universities and the only UC that I wanted to apply to was Berkeley. If I didn’t get in, I would be screwed but that was my decision. I took 24 or 25 units per semester and honors courses. I really wanted to hedge my bets, so the majority of my classes were honors, and even if they didn’t offer honors, I would ask the professor to write a year end semester research paper to qualify as honors and luckily the honors program was very forgiving about that and they accepted that. I am grateful for CCSF because I felt – it was an identity that I became very proud of being part of CCSF because of all of the instructors and my peers. I became very proud of CCSF over time I felt the sense of belonging and identify and I am grateful for instructors such as Susan Berston and my peers – I felt that I could dream a little bit, dream a little bit more and that’s why I took that leap and applied to Brown University and a few other private colleges – places I wouldn’t dream of prior to coming to CCSF – and with the support from Susan and Goldsmith (economics), they wrote me recommendations and I worked my ass off and somehow I was lucky and got to Brown and it was that crises too of OK, I had also gotten in UC Berkeley’s Haas and I can sit close by and sit with that trajectory or take that leap, go to Providence and attend Brown.

And thank you for allowing me to be a part of this. I don’t think I have ever crystalized my thoughts about how CCSF has made such an impact on my life. And I thank you for interviewing me with regards to this and taking the time to think about how CCSF has been such an integral part of my life and has been a big part of my journey as to where I am today, so thank you.

**How did you navigate the system at CCSF?**

I first went to a counselor and that didn’t work out quite honestly. They just recommended a bunch of classes and they said I couldn’t transfer and that I had to stay at least two years even though I had some credits from UC San Diego and they told me to aim for a state college. I was a little put off to be quite frank. I just researched it on my own ([www.assist.org](http://www.assist.org)) and did it that way. I forget which courses I had to take and which seemed the most interesting. That’s one of the things I really appreciate about CCSF and the prereqs and requirements when applying to a university is that you have a bunch of courses that are listed under life sciences, math and especially life sciences where you can take environmental science or even the business requirements – you can take a bunch of business classes and it’s funny CCSF and its course offerings were similar to that of Brown (University) where it felt like you could – even though you have to take prerequisites, you can explore and that’s quite beautiful.

In terms of navigating, I am a San Francisco native, so it wasn’t too new to me. I did see a commuter school at the very beginning, but I began to look forward to staying at CCSF, as in not leaving school right after classes ended as I made my friends and as I invested more in the club I started.

**How did you build community at CCSF?**

I am more grateful that the community accepted me and that I just happened to have an interest. I mean, the community was always there at CCSF, I think I just happened to play a part in introducing a small niche of an interest (investments) that happened to attract people to it and so another thing too was food plays a huge part. I remember clubs didn’t really offer food and we would meet around 4 or 5 pm and students were generally hungry and we also get a small little stipend (thankfully) and we would use those funds to buy pizza and drinks, and so, students would come probably for the food, but hopefully they would learn something about investments or have a playful discussion about investments. The community really brightened up and it no longer felt like going to get your resume title, you’re there because you want to be there and you can eat food and those who are like minded and you can have fun. So, yes, the clubs and the teachers are just great.

**How would you rate the instruction and the professors at CCSF – and then compared to your four-year experience at Brown University.**

Very similar in terms of the instructors. I would say the instructors in terms of teaching – Brown because of its huge endowment and reputation can afford to have smaller classes (by small, it can be up to 50 for a large lecture, or as small as 5-6 people) vs. at CCSF, most of the classes I took at most were probably at most, maybe 30. I never felt I needed to take large lecture hall type of class. The number one thing I do remember is that the instructors at CCSF were not there for research. A lot of them don’t have Ph.Ds. – contrary to traditional professors, but they were there because they actually wanted to teach. That is something I came to appreciate in retrospect upon leaving CCSF. They were passionate and they were opinionated, but they wanted to make sure that the students actually cared about learning and they also kept in touch with you – they cared about you outside of classes, especially instructors who sponsored clubs. They cared about your trajectory and what you were going to do outside of CCSF. When I transferred to Brown, interactions were similar. The professors also care, but they were also research professors. They were a little less intimate in that, you know, they don’t necessarily get to understand you on a personal level because they have a lot on their plates because they teach small classes, they can still, somewhat get to know you. I guess a little less intimate at Brown, but I am grateful because I think I had a lot of resources at Brown and the alumni network is very strong and the professors – if you do need a recommendation for grad school or if you need a reference to someone that they know who can help – I started a startup while at Brown and professors would try to connect you whomever they knew. It is also in their best interests to help their students.

**What is your greatest memory of CCSF?**

My greatest memory at CCSF was starting the Undergraduate Investment Group. I think it was the culmination of – how much I enjoyed CCSF and how I so became brave enough to start something while at CCSF and meanwhile, the rejection of what I had originally stereotyped CCSF to be. I think by starting the organization with friends and I started the organization as someone asking CCSF to give me permission to be part of this community and to accept and I think I drew strength from that. That’s probably my greatest memory.

**How did it feel when you got your acceptance letters and how did your paradigm shift while at CCSF transferring to a UC and realizing you could shoot higher?**

I was overwhelmed with joy when I got UC Berkeley’s letter first online. I just remember I was at the computer and I screamed my lungs out in my room. If I didn’t get in anywhere else, that was perfectly fine, because this is what I set out for.

And then when I got my acceptance letter from the other universities and particularly Brown, I felt numb – in the sense that I wasn’t actually prepared for that – I didn’t think I would be able to get it, but a part of me felt that I had a chance to just because I was at CCSF and I felt that I had done a pretty decent job at CCSF and because I was at CCSF, I had a chance – having the resources to start a club, having the instructors support me and being able to do well in classes and negotiate and get the honors courses (total of 15) or create courses that were not originally honors. Creating honors courses and speaking with instructors was a really good learning opportunity and of course it is your prerogative to learn and research deeper into the subject. I was confident after I got accepted into those universities. I thought I was intimidated (I eventually chose Brown) and I realized that the transfer people had a different perspective – they were more humble than the traditional students at Brown and I appreciate that – it made the transition for me much easier. As I gradually took classes, I am confident in my abilities and I realized that this university is very similar to any other university. You will have students who are bright and very intelligent who you will be humbled by and then there will be those who slack off. The notion that an ivy league or a highly ranked university is necessary for success isn’t so.

**What can CCSF do better?**

I think CCSF could improve on a couple of things. I would say providing more direction to students and try to foster what their interests are – I think counseling – but maybe not just counseling but more of a blueprint – certainly most students transfer to state college – but if a student has an interest – understanding what they want to do and understanding their long term goal a vocational one, just to get certain credits to qualify for certain jobs, or is it because they want to transfer to a state college and understand why and understand what subjects they want to pursue and the counselor can help customize and plan the experience of a CCSF student so that they can take certain courses or if they want to dream bigger – understand why UC might be a good fit for them. Or if a student has a lofty goal of going to an Ivy League, understand why and foster that. Don’t shut them down. I think that if I had taken the advice of my first counselor and just not dream big, I wouldn’t be here, I would be where I am today. I also understand that counselors are also trying to be realistic – but CCSF students they’re already fighting a stereotype of going to a commuter school or maybe they struggled in high school or maybe they’re experiencing something in their personal lives that has led them to where they are today to go to another university and maybe they just want a new beginning – and with that, it is imperative that CCSF tries its best to encourage students to dream, encourage students to reach very high so that they actually look forward to their experience – so they can certainly work on that. Guiding students, planning classes, the application process, I had to navigate that on my own. More resources for that. Personal statements – I think that’s one area that is very important. I can’t speak for everyone, with the groups I hung out with, most of them just wanted to transfer so personal statements are important too and providing mentorship on that and understanding that students who are interested in applying to Haas, what kind of essay and study should they focus on writing and not writing a cookie-cutter essay that might not work – and same thing with a private school personal statement, which is also very different. CCSF is very capable and that by promoting these types of themes, it’s a little bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you’re trying to attract more students, CCSF should be a place where you can dream and reach for certain goals academically and vocationally.

Another way CCSF could improve is providing more opportunities for students interested in internships. I was lucky enough to get an introduction through Susan Berston, whereas, if CCSF could put more energy into connecting students with opportunities that would be great. CCSF should push for that. Not only do students wish to build a network and get some social capital, internship experience is essential for transferring.

**What were your goals after college? And now?**

My life has been sort of very strange – when I was at CCSF, I was juggling the thought of being an entrepreneur, and at the same time, also being interested in finance. When I went to Brown, I had the opportunity of being part of a startup – a women’s startup that sold prenatal supplements – while interning at an investment bank, Barclay’s and the common trajectory of Ivy League students – especially those with a business trajectory – is to go into consulting or investment banking. I interned there at Barclay’s and I realized that I didn’t quite fit that culture and it was like (inaudible) and I was there for a few years and I left in 2013 still holding an advisory role and shares and I was interested in being part of Silicon Valley and starting a tech and it failed because of a co-founder dispute and I thought I would take a break from that – and I realize that looking back, most of my experiences have been an aggregation of an interest in food.

I realized that after my startup experiences starting companies post college that my experience has been an aggregation of an interest in food. When I started Premama, I was drawn to the natural foods industry and when I started Nibbol, I remember my escape was cooking every single day – that was the number one thing that I looked forward two. I remember that after my second company had failed that I thought I would just take a break from starting companies – and the business world. And maybe I will just try to understand food.

So, I took this leap of faith, and again, my parents were shocked – by then, I think they had already given up and they said, “let’s just let William do what he is interested in – and he will figure it out.” I worked at a restaurant called State Bird Provisions for a year and a half and it was incredibly humbling, long hours but being able to understand and source the best ingredients possible and flavor combinations, understanding what it is like to work in a restaurant and appreciating what goes behind the scenes – it’s a very thankless job. It made me fall in love with food even more. I had this goal where I wanted to start a restaurant – which is one of the stupidest things too – lowest margins, brick and mortar, high fixed costs, high operational costs as a result of wages, high physical labor, probably you don’t have weekends and from an investment standpoint, maybe 2% if you’re lucky and as high as 10% in software it’s 90% gross margins. So, it’s again its very antithetical in saying that I am taking the hard route and not necessarily the road less traveled, but the road where people warn you not to go. It just draws me to do. I backpacked for four months in Asia to understand not only food and to learn noodle pulling but to understand my identity and where I came from and why I do this in the first place and I am very grateful for that and my goal is to start my own restaurant and the rational (inaudible) is to scale it -- I would like to change a lot of things. I would like to change how employees are treated. I would like to change the old French culture mentality of being an asshole in the kitchen – I don’t think you have to – not to say that State Bird was ever like that – they were great – but the change how not only food has dignity, but making sure your workplace has that too – and so that is the driving force right now and what really hits home. That’s what I want to do.

**Tell me how it feels to talk about and look back on your life and your beginnings at CCSF as compared to where you are today, Brown alum, two startups later and about to embark on a new endeavor?**

Being able to think about my CCSF experience and sharing it – it grounds me in the sense that I realize that by going to CCSF – CCSF at the time, when I transferred there in early 2009, I thought it was the riskiest thing in terms of my academic and also vocational career. By going to CCSF, I wondered, “where will I end up and what opportunities will be made available to me?” But fast forward 2016, and going through this roller coaster of a journey transferring to Brown, starting two startups and working in a restaurant, it’s kind of incongruent, but these experiences have happened I think because I took that risk at CCSF. Jumping to CCSF has taught me that I can pursue my interests until something feels right. When I transferred to CCSF, it eventually felt right, and every step of the way, it was about feeling, what is right and what can I look forward to – and obviously I am in this place where I am pursuing food – I have something to look forward to and CCSF affords that. I feel very proud every single day. I look back and I am actually more proud of my CCSF experience than my Brown one. I found it to be a more fulfilling one – because it reminds me of how humble the world is – that I can actually pursue something I want to – as nontraditional as it is. I am at times envious looking at my friends who stuck with their jobs whether they’re in finance, whether they’re at startups or large tech companies. And it’s tempting – especially being an outsider – knowing that I was previously part of that community and I could have taken those paths – and it is very tempting honestly – financial stability is a big part – well, my parents taught me to follow and it is sort of the more sensible, rational thing, right? But also, the part of me feels that I should pursue what I’m interested in -- and do it fairly well – and maybe making a living out of it. And I think it started because I took that leap at CCSF that I can afford it right now.



Marie S.,   
Marketing Analyst, Cisco Systems  
City College of San Francisco, Class of 2011  
University of California, Berkeley, Haas School of Business, Class of 2013

Services Marketing Manager, Cisco Systems

**Tell me about your high school years and the educational system from which you came**

The education system in Russia is very very different and everybody is expected to go to college. It’s not a question of whether you’re going or not. College and university are one and the same. Career ambitions are not really promoted (for women). My mom encouraged me to do what I like to do. She never pushed me and the studies that I didn’t grasp right away – she would say to focus on what I am good at. Now as an adult, I see advantages and disadvantages of that approach. I know if I would have studied a little bit more, I would have gotten it right away. Nobody pushed me and I couldn’t care less. I was always ambitious and I liked doing what I found myself successful in. I just never cared for sciences for math, and I so wish I’d have paid more attention to it. I thought I would start my own business and I was very much into travel and I loved languages – I was good with languages. And back then, travel agencies were on the rise and nobody knew much about Expedia or self-service platforms. I was going to open a travel agency and I went to the International Academy for Tourism and my specialty there was Travel and Restaurant Business under the umbrella of hospitality and I did three years of college – after my second year I did a study abroad program – and that was my first time in the U.S. My aunt had been living in the U.S. for 16-18 years now and so my mom said that it was my first time traveling to the U.S. that I should go back to see her so that my mom would not worry as much. She lived in Missouri and it was an interesting experience and for the first time the America that I got to see was the America that most people live in. I didn’t like that because everything that I saw about America was from the movies and they don’t really show a lot about America from Missouri. I worked for three months doing bookkeeping at a store similar to Home Depot in a tiny town called Aurora near Springfield. They live on a huge farm and it was a completely different experience. After my three months of work, I saved money to use for travel. I came to San Francisco for a day in 2007 (September). While I couldn’t understand what it was all about in just one day, I guess I can’t say I really loved it.

I had to go back and finish my education and traveled back in September of 2008. The city I chose was San Francisco. Three months before I came, I was doing my research about where to stay, how to find a job. I went on Skype, which was just coming out in Russia at the beginning of 2008 and I did a search on Skype of people who lived in San Francisco but spoke Russian and Skype gave me a list. There was an account right in the middle and I called that account. The account user hung up on me and I didn’t even know whether it was a male or female (in English). I said that I was just this girl from Russia looking for advice and we talked a bit more (and more) and exchanged pictures and now this person is my husband. (chuckles). I asked him about his story and how he came to the U.S. and we just sort of developed this online friendship.

**How I got to City College:**

The person I met on Skype randomly and when I asked him about school and the summer that I met him in person was the summer that he had just gotten in Haas. I heard about Berkeley back in Russia. We only know Stanford, Berkeley and Harvard and that was huge but I didn’t know about any majors at Berkeley and I had no idea how big a deal that was. He basically told me the entire path that he was poor, he had to work, he had no support from his family, he had to work two jobs sometimes and that City College was the only way he could continue his studies and that there was a way to transfer to a four-year school after that and that is how it began.

**You arrive at CCSF. Where did you begin?**

I knew how and where to take the placement test. I did that and one of the requirements going further was seeing a counselor and then I found it not extremely helpful and going forward, what helped me most was networking. Just talking to students and seeing what people were going through. You meet in classes but you all have different majors in mind and different four year universities that you want to transfer to. Some people are not going to transfer and experiences are very very different and its very eye opening because studying at a place with people from such diverse backgrounds was very valuable experience. You see different perspectives and you see that you’re not in a bubble that people come from different places and that they want different things. You see some students not having a clue about what they’re doing. They’re being told to go to college sometimes by parents and some people join community college at a later time when they have a better understanding or vision about where they’re going and they have a plan. Gathering that information from everybody and making sense about what could work for you and then reaching out and just asking for advice and help. I found out about assist.org and I cannot remember where I found out about it from, but that site was essential for me to determine which classes to take, which prerequisites I needed to complete for which university. I was pretty much only interested in UC Berkeley and my very wise professor suggested that I not put all my eggs in one basket but I did apply to UC Davis.

**What is your greatest memory of CCSF?**

I have many, but the first that came to mind was that I was part of the Undergraduate Investment Group at City College. That group was formed by a couple of great students, one of whom was my good friend and roommate at the time. I saw them putting the group together from scratch and I saw them excel so I became interested in joining the group and really knowing how to run a club, how to attract people, run events and that activity aligned with what I was going to do professionally in the future (marketing) and even though I was not per se into investments or finance, I got engaged and found an angle and went through the interviews and as the staff of the group, we were hosting an event. We invited Ted Janus. Even though we planned so rigorously, so many things went wrong. The only thing he wanted was coffee, so by the time he gets to his speaker event, he gets coffee. We were just learning how to get things on time, where to get them from, and how to get them for cheap. The coffee we got was from the cafeteria at City College. We wanted to source everything from City College and we thought that going forward we could see (building the network at City College) and they were late with their coffee and someone ran and bought the cup of coffee from somewhere else. But just that experience of keeping in mind that things go wrong and that you always need a backup plan and not to panic and that we are all human and that people understand regardless of how big or important they are. Also, from that event, most people who came wearing pretty much pajamas or what City College students wear to class. I don’t believe we had a dress code on the invite and it was interesting how Ted the speaker – he said it – when someone asked about advice you could give in your professional life and one thing he said that was important was to dress the part and well, he pointed it out that this is a professional event and that nobody is dressed professionally.

**What could CCSF do better?**

It has everything to do with resources. Updating the rooms, the equipment, access to computers. I want to say that I went back a few times after I graduated and I see new building, at least one. I don’t know how it is in other buildings, but some of the parts of the campus are really really outdated. Another thing I want to point out is that maybe access potential students get to being students – I feel like a lot of them abuse the system and there are so many ambitious and goal oriented people who would benefit from studying and people who are the first to go to college in their families and people who don’t have money to go to college or people who went on the wrong path or decided to take time off for some reason and then they decide to come back and then they know what they want. But there are a lot of people who are staying random places just to stay on financial aid, people who distract other students in class, people who are consistently late or who bring loud music or dogs to school and people who are just hanging out there and are not there for a reason. I might be wrong, because I think everyone deserves a chance or a second chance – not sure about the third, but the second… and maybe throughout the time a person who was hanging out there for no reason meets somebody and discovers that path, but I feel like the process of letting students in can be revised.

**Navigating the U.S. educational system**

Starting at CCSF was my first educational facility in the states. I had never studied in the states and I had nothing to compare it to and the only other educational system I could compare was the one in Russia and it was very very different and I could go on Rate My Professors and find the easiest or most interesting and that I could try them out, see if the time worked for me and see the syllabus that first day to see if it worked with my schedule, and I have never gone to middle school or high school here, but the syllabus – that piece of paper that clearly states what the expectations are – I thought that was brilliant. It was very clear cut, everybody knew exactly what they need to succeed. No excuses. People get sick or they have to travel, but you can always work with your professor on an individual basis to work on an extra credit and see if you could improve your grade. In my experience, all instructors were open and they offered extra credit and if they saw you excelling, some of them would offer or were open to giving you extra work or extra credit for reaching out – or internships or research opportunities and it was great that it was not just limited to what the class has to offer and you didn’t have to stay with just the same level because people come with different goals and even if the majority is on a different track than yours, you can still squeeze the most out of your experience.

**How did you build community at CCSF?**

I spoke with a lot of Russian people (laughs). Just staying in touch with the Russian community and in any cultural community, you know one person and then you know the rest of them. A lot of the immigrants my age and a lot of the immigrants that came, either my generation or the generation before me – children who grew up here and spoke Russian fluently, we all had a lot in common and we stuck together and exchanged information about teachers and the classes and things like that. That was the first stepping stone in building that community because people know people and you go to events and if a Russian friend invites you to an event and you get to meet that circle that is not entirely Russian, and that goes on.

Jesse C.

CCSF Class of 2011

Stanford University Class of 2014

Protocol Labs, Software Engineer

**What brought you to CCSF?**

I was living in Europe at the time. I took some time off after high school to do some things and I realized that I really wanted to get a college degree. Not so much for the sake of having a college degree, but having a college experience. I ended up in California and CCSF made a lot of sense, so I started taking classes.

**Most memorable CCSF experience?**

Wow! There are so many (chuckles). Spent two years there. There are 100 things in my head, right? I was a student senator there towards the end of my time and we managed to refurnish the student union and that was really fun and it was a big endeavor to make that happen. I got to do it with a bunch of my friend, so not only I get to hang out with my friends, but we were doing something really cool at the time -- and I got to do it with my friends.

**Transfer intentions upon arriving at CCSF:**

Well, when I began CCSF, my intention was to transfer into as good of a school as I could get into. I didn’t have anything specific in mind. Even a specific degree or major. Roughly, set myself up to transfer into Berkeley. I began with this idea that I would start taking all of the general classes because there are many to knock out regardless of what you’re doing to take. I dove in and started taking them. Where did I end up two years later? So, I was taking all of these classes (audio cutoff).

**So, how did I decide where I was going to apply?**

Well, I set myself up to be able to transfer to UC Berkeley and fulfill those requirements got involved in some of the transfer programs that they had between the two schools. In a sense that was kind of like my fallback because I had structured my time at CCSF to be a strong candidate for that. As far as the private universities go, It was important to me to be selective and I applied to a few on the East Coast but what resonated with me was Stanford in the South Bay. I thought that they did and approach things in a way that made a lot of sense if I could get into that. Deciding to apply was easy and finding a university which respected my values, desires and aspirations. The application process wasn’t easy but deciding to apply and to a place I was really excited about.

**How did you build community at CCSF?**

CCSF can be a tough place because it requires a lot of self-reliance. Fortunately for me, I was able to find people that I really loved being around. It happened kind of naturally and I guess you can say in some ways I got lucky. I remember that some of my closest friends that I had the entire two years I met the first week, most of them on the first day. And while I didn’t become close friends with them the first day or the first week, I met them that day and we started hanging out in class, doing assignments and that transferred to hanging out in our spare time, talking about doing other things together. That was the core of my community and it didn’t come from any particular community group, but it came from people who really resonated with me and those I enjoyed spending time with. Once I found these people, I joined all these other groups and I effectively just brought these people into those groups. That was fun, because not only was I doing a cool group which was fun and it looks good on your resume and I was able to pull all my friends in. The people doing these groups and my friends, so everybody won.

**What can CCSF do better?**

I graduated or transferred in 2011 I want to say -- and ever since, I haven’t heard from City College. And I can this say this now – especially after graduating from a four year university -- that fostering an alumni community – not necessarily just for donation which could be a thing. I don’t know if that is useful for City College or not – but I could tell you as a relatively successful alum, so far that I donate to my current university and would also consider doing the same for City College if I knew that money would be put to good use. End of day, City College gave me a ton. Some of my most positive and memorable experiences were at City College. I grew as an individual a tremendous amount at City College and because of that, it has a really special place in my heart. I haven’t heard anything from the college ever since I left. I think that that could be a lot better. Probably not the majority of people who go to City College, but for at least for a small group of people, it is a special place. A lot of my peers are doing really great things now in society – and it would be amazing to have some bigger community around that specifically. That’s one thing I would like to see City College doing. Fostering community.

**How did City College shape you?**

City College was great (laughs). My name is Jesse Clayburgh. It helped me discover myself and I think part of that was just where I was in life at the time and in this moment of exploration and figuring out myself and what I wanted in life. City College provided the opportunity to, it was a great environment to figure that out – it wasn’t the only environment it wasn’t the only thing that helped me do that, there were many things going on at the time. It served as a great platform a great place to go every day in which I could meet awesome people and do fun things – sure, it wasn’t always perfect there are things that were hard, that weren’t optimal or things I would have done slightly different but City College played a large role at that time in my life in helping me set myself up for future success.