Iann Wu, Product Manager, Macy’s

City College of San Francisco Class of 2011

UC Berkeley Haas School of Business Class of 2013

*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 faire, 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.