



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

College of Letters & Science

UCSB

Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Sarah, a former Global Studies major who's now at the center of the nation's political landscape, advising Members of Congress and innovating policies to make our country better.



Sarah Trumble: Senior Policy Counsel Third Way

What are you up to now, post-graduation?

I am the Senior Policy Counsel for Social Policy & Politics at Third Way, a center-left think tank in Washington D.C. A think tank is remarkably what it sounds like—I get paid to think and write about policy and politics and to advise Members of Congress and their staff on what to do and how to reach moderate voters. My portfolio includes all the hot-button culture issues that get people riled up: abortion and contraception, immigration, gun safety, religious liberty, LGBT equality, marijuana, criminal justice reform, social mobility and poverty, family policy, and pretty much anything else that Congress is talking about that could vaguely be considered social policy. I think up new policies, counsel Capitol Hill on bills and strategies, advise political campaigns, and do lots of public opinion research to make sure that I really understand where moderates are coming from and what they want out of Washington.

How did you get to where you are?

Fall quarter of my second year at UCSB I took Professor Rich Appelbaum's Global 2 course, and it shaped my whole career. One of the assignments was to write a memo to a policymaker advising them on an issue related to one of the topics we'd covered in class. I wrote to then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi about the Global Gag Rule, which was at that time the U.S.'s international abortion policy, and it was like a lightbulb went off: this was what I wanted to do for a living. I immediately started googling graduate degrees that could get me there. Everyone on "The West Wing" seemed to have a law degree, so that was a good place to start, but I wanted to make sure I had a strong policy background as well, so I

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decided on a joint law degree and master's in public policy. From there on out, I was very careful to make sure I was on track to get where I wanted to go. I planned out when to take the GRE and the LSAT so I didn't have to do them back to back or during classes. I participated in UCDC as a trial run of living in D.C. I interned in local Congresswoman Lois Capps' Santa Barbara office to get experience that I knew would translate. And I applied almost exclusively to graduate schools in D.C.—because where you go to school is where you build your network, so I knew I needed to be in the city ASAP.

In grad school, I interned at every type of policy organization—advocacy non-profits, direct services, think tanks, and professional associations—to really get an understanding of what I wanted to do and where I would be happiest. Luckily for me, one of those internships was at Third Way and lead to my current job.

What was the best thing you did as an undergrad to help you get to where you are?

I asked for help. Like far too many of my peers—and I fear some of yours as well—I had an eating disorder in college. Thanks to the love and encouragement of my family and roommates, I built up the courage to call Student Health to ask for help, and to this day making that call and following through on it is one of my proudest accomplishments. I can't say enough wonderful things about the care and support I received from UCSB—not just from the amazing Student Health Center staff and doctors, but from the Dean's Office, where I was working at the time, and my friends on campus. To date it's still the highest quality and most comprehensive healthcare I've ever received, and I'll always be grateful. I used to wonder what I could accomplish if I didn't spend so much of my time thinking about exercising and what I was eating, but because I asked for help, now I

know: I finished graduate school early, with high honors and my dream job; passed the bar while working full time and serving as Third Way's liaison to the Sandy Hook parents after the school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut; celebrated at the Supreme Court the day it legalized marriage for gay couples; and am the youngest senior policy staffer in my office.

What do you wish you had known while you were in undergrad?

Oh, there is so much I wish I had known, but learning it as you go is half the fun. I wish I had realized that my GPA was not the end-all, be-all that I thought it was. As it turned out, I didn't even go to the highest-ranking law school to which I was accepted; I went to the one that was right for me and I could not be happier with that decision. I was every bit as much of a perfectionist in grad school, but

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since I was hired out of an internship, my boss never saw a transcript after my first year anyway.

Speaking of internships, I wish I’d known how valuable they are and how much they matter, because I would have done so many more as an undergrad. In fact, it was my internship during UCDC that made me realize despite being a Global Studies major, international relations was not the field for me. Internships are how you figure out your path, how you get experience in the field, how you make professional connections, and—at least for me—how you get a job.

Finally, I wish I’d known that in my line of work—breaking down complicated policy concepts in a way that Members of Congress and their constituents can understand—ending sentences in prepositions or starting them with “And” is perfectly acceptable. I’d have spent a lot less time writing and re-writing sentences had I known.

What was the best thing about being a Gaucho?

There is no other environment quite like UCSB, able to provide you with so many opportunities to learn about

yourself, get involved in your community, and make a difference, all while keeping you in the cocoon that is a top-notch research university. Many of the things I did for fun ended up building skills that would be invaluable in my future career. I was a Gaucho tour guide because I loved UCSB and wanted prospective students to see it through my eyes, but I had no idea that the public speaking experience—and practice answering out-of-the-blue questions—would serve me so well; first in law school, where I was named the top appellate defense attorney in the first year class, and now in media interviews for newspapers or TV. I studied abroad in Spain because everyone said it would be a life-changing experience (which it was)—but it also gave me the sense of self and the independence that I needed to move across the country alone, to a city where I knew no one, after graduation. And spending a semester in a country where I wasn’t a native speaker was great practice for coming to D.C., which speaks a language all its own between the jargon and alphabet soup of federal agencies! In college I worked in an EOP orientation program for first-generation Gauchos, who gave me insight into

their lives and the challenges they faced that I still rely on today in my policy work regarding social mobility and college attendance. And through it all, I took classes from brilliant professors, lived in the beautiful IV bubble, and made friends that I’m just as close to today as I was when we first lived next door to one another in Santa Rosa ten years ago. In a way, UCSB is a club that once you’ve been inducted into, you’re always a member of. Every time I wear



“Every time I wear Gaucho gear out in the city I run into people shouting, “olé, olé, olé, olé!”



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www.facebook.com/AskJoeGaucho

If an alum's story is meaningful to you, consider reaching out with questions using the contact information provided.

Gaucha gear out in the city I run into people shouting, "olé, olé, olé, olé!"

Any final words of wisdom for the current Gaucho generation?

I get a lot of questions from college students and interns about grad school, when to go, and whether it's right for you. I've read all the articles that list out the reasons why you shouldn't go to law school. And it's true that if you don't know what you want to do when you grow up, law school is an extremely expensive and inefficient way to put off being an adult for three years. But to provide a counterpoint to the general negativity: I loved law school, and learned so much—even though I was clear going in that I was never going to practice law in the traditional sense. I knew what I wanted to do and I knew that a graduate degree (or two) was necessary to get me

there, and I am so thankful that I did it straight out of college. There's no reason to waste time if you're lucky enough to know what you want. I found law school stimulating and challenging in a way I'd never experienced—it was like learning how to think in a curved line when I'd always taken the straight path. Admittedly, I didn't take lawyerly classes like evidence or criminal procedure; I took legislative drafting (whose textbook I still use when writing legislation for work!) and a class on the stories behind the cases taught by a Supreme Court Justice. Grad school, just like undergrad, is what you make of it, and life is too short to do something that you don't enjoy and find fulfilling. College doesn't have to be the best four (or five!) years of your life. For all the incredible memories I have of my time at UCSB, being an adult is so much better.



Sarah welcomes UCSB students to contact her via LinkedIn with questions about the field and advice on how to prepare for a career in social policy. Requests to review resumes or inquiries about open positions will not be responded to.

[linkedin.com/in/sarahtrumble](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarahtrumble)



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