

## CONTRIBUTOR BIO

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KATIE HOSELTON is an intern for the Hagar International in Vietnam and graduated from Cal Poly in 2014 with a degree in Political Science.

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

*Katie Hoselton*

Before Katie Hoselton graduated in 2014, she embarked on her Senior Project, which allowed her to utilize her passion for global politics and advocacy to change Cal Poly for the better. Katie's Senior Project was unique, daunting, and ultimately, successful. After learning about the violence caused by the conflict mineral trade in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Katie was inspired to make sure Cal Poly didn't add to that violence by purchasing electronics from companies who used minerals obtained from corrupt mines in Congo. As one of the largest and most prominent polytechnic universities in the nation, Cal Poly's public acknowledgment and commitment to using products certifiably free from conflict minerals would be huge in terms of implications for companies like Dell and Apple, who cannot always guarantee their products are free from such minerals. With a goal in mind, Katie began the advocacy process.

The advocacy process was difficult to begin as Katie didn't know where to start (although, she realized afterwards that it didn't really matter where she started as long as she started). So she began where any student would by talking to professors and administrators who may have an interest in the topic or may know someone who has leverage in the school's policy-making process. After two long months, Katie finally got into touch with the right people who were

willing and able to help her through the process. One surprising obstacle Katie faced was a lack of student support. ASI even rejected her proposal, deeming it too controversial. Garnering student support was also difficult not because students opposed her cause, but because Katie was just one person. She overcame this obstacle by spending hours visiting classes, giving presentations and raising student awareness. Her efforts gained 500 student signatures in support of Cal Poly going conflict mineral-free.

A second major obstacle was a lack of faculty support; there were some faculty who thought that there wasn't any way Katie could get something like that passed. A few actually suggested that she try something else for her senior project. Luckily, Katie had at least one faculty member on her side: "thank goodness I had Dr. Shelley Hurt by my side the entire time, encouraging me and providing me with a constant stream of support. There was one time that I nearly gave up and wanted to write a paper instead, and Dr. Hurt smacked some sense into me and pushed me to keep going. I attribute a large portion of my success to her." Despite these setbacks, Katie pursued her goal, proposed a resolution to Cal Poly, which was eventually signed by President Armstrong, effectively committing Cal Poly to favor certifiably conflict-free products when considering future electronic purchases.

Katie's advice to students looking to make a change in policy is that the process will almost always be harder than expected and there will be setbacks, but staying positive is crucial and those obstacles make the process challenging and exciting. Katie said, "About half way through my endeavor, I realized that even if my resolution didn't pass, I will have made a significant attempt and will have learned a ton in the process. I also realized that if Cal Poly intentionally voted against a resolution to go conflict-free, that would be huge news in and of itself and I would publicize the heck out of that fact. It is challenging to make yourself vulnerable, but in the end, you really have nothing to lose, only experience and insight to gain." Most importantly, Katie says that students should never be afraid to pursue something they are passionate about.

Today, Katie's passion and experience have brought her to Vietnam where she works for Hagar International—a non-governmental organization (NGO) committed to the rehabilitation and economic empowerment of women and young girls who have been victims of human trafficking, domestic violence, and/or sexual abuse. Katie helps Hagar by writing, conducting research projects, and working on outreach in the community to coordinate efforts between Hagar

and other NGOs in the field. Katie was surprised at how Hagar operates: “it operates at a different pace than previous NGOs I’ve worked for in the United States. I am more used to pressing deadlines and a bit more stressful, time-oriented atmosphere. In Vietnam, things just seem to get done when they are done, and I would say that the quality of work is emphasized over expediency. In the U.S., local governments often greatly support NGOs; however, the opposite is the case in Vietnam where NGOs are completely on their own and rely solely on foreign donors for financial support.”

Although it’s a challenging experience, Katie encourages any student thinking of working or studying abroad to do it. “It always helps to see if and how you can adapt to a different way of life, and see how people on the other side of the world live. Also, don’t be afraid to go alone. I went to Vietnam alone and have been traveling around Asia by myself and it has been a wonderful experience. You meet so many more people traveling alone as you are forced to talk to strangers way more than if you were with a friend. Just be safe and have your wits about you and you will meet people that will shake the way you think and feel about the world.”