

CONTRIBUTOR BIO

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Kelli Seybolt

A maverick in her own way, Kelli Seybolt has forged new paths in the world of international affairs since graduating from Cal Poly in 1990 by becoming one of the youngest women to reach the civilian equivalent of a military general in the United States Air Force.

When Kelli entered college, a time when the cost of tuition was roughly \$235 per quarter, she already knew that she would go straight to graduate school after her time at Cal Poly was finished and then would proceed into public service for the federal government somewhere on the East Coast. During her time at Cal Poly, Kelli was a member of the Zeta Tau Alpha sorority and worked 30 hours a week as a lifeguard at Avila Hot Springs. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, just as planned, Kelli went to CSU Stanislaus to get her Master's in Public Administration.

Though she had known where she was going after graduation, Kelli still took the necessary steps during college to rule out some future options. After a short internship at a law firm in SLO, she decided going to law school was not in her future. She recalls that while she may have had the skills necessary to excel at being a lawyer, it was not her passion. For her, passion is what dictates happiness. Her advice for graduating students who are figuring out their next

steps is as follows: if you are passionate about what you do, you will be more successful and much happier. Your job will feed your spirit and you will love those 40-60 hour workweeks. That is the kind of career you want to pursue. Just because you're good at it, does not mean it is for you.

Kelli's own passion is clearly displayed through her monumental accomplishments thus far in the world of international affairs. She began her career as a Presidential Management Intern in Washington D.C. for the U.S. Department of State where she worked on policy issues relating to diplomatic posts overseas. Since then, Kelli has worked at the Pentagon for the United States Air Force as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Space Plans and Policy, as the Branch Chief of International Space Cooperation, then the Division Chief for Space and Cyberspace Cooperation, and then the Director of Strategy, Operations and Resources. She was promoted to the Senior Executive Service of the Air Force in 2010, which is the civilian equivalent of a military general.

Kelli's tasks in those jobs were primarily to provide expertise in the fields of political and military issues, global engagement strategies, cyberspace capabilities and the assessment of Air Force partnership strategy. She also provided oversight for the execution of operations and maintenance, research and development and foreign military sales budgets to support the security cooperation community and U.S. national security purposes.

One of the highlights of Kelli's career was during her time as the Branch Chief of International Space Cooperation when she was the lead negotiator on a \$6 billion Memorandum of Understanding with Australia's Defense Department for the Wideband Global Satellite communications system. The system provides bandwidth for communication purposes regarding tactical command and control, intelligence and surveillance. For her, the chance she had to be able to have a great concept for collaboration with a partner, be able to pull together a team of all the right players, convince them that particular next steps are the correct ones, move forward and then make something happen- that is what she considers the greatest reward in her career.

After 18 years of doing space-cooperation work with NATO allies, Kelli's next achievement came in the form of a new position as the Director of International Affairs and Foreign Policy Advisor for the United States Coast Guard. At the Coast Guard, the primary focus is the western hemisphere, which is a part of the world that she is less familiar with, making her thrilled to have a new mission and new cultures to work with. Although she has only

been in this new position since December of 2013, Kelli loves the fine line the U.S. Coast Guard plays between military and civilian work. As part of the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard plays an essential role in the world through the development of international agreements and other countries' coast guards.

Kelli has faced her share of challenges during her time in public service. Being a mom of two and balancing her family with her career has been stretching for her, particularly when she works approximately 55-60 hours a week. Her secret? Staying fit and healthy and having a supportive partner. She posits that you cannot do much without those three things.

Kelli Seybolt's accomplishments in public service to the United States are noteworthy. Her story is one of someone so driven and so prepared to make a difference in the world, that it may seem impossible to reach that level of potential when approaching graduation at the age of 20 as I am. However, her advice is this: go for what you're passionate about, (chances are, you already know what that is) stay fit and healthy, choose a supportive partner, be a team player and you'll love every second of whatever you do. As Confucius said, when you love your job, "you'll never work a day in your life."