

CONTRIBUTOR BIO



LINDA BARGER BODENLOS is the Corporate Knowledge and Communications Branch Chief of the Chief Information Office for the USDA Forest Service. She graduated from Cal Poly in 1972 with a degree in Political Science.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Linda Barger Bodenlos

Linda Barger Bodenlos began her Cal Poly career as a Social Science major, but jumped at the opportunity to switch into Political Science the moment she heard Cal Poly was opening up such a major. It was motivating and new! During her time at Cal Poly, Linda worked on a variety of interesting projects including a project that involved studying Arroyo Grande's tax base and how it would change if the city converted its mobile home parks into apartment complexes or single-family homes. She also helped run an election campaign in Arroyo Grande. However, Linda had her sights on becoming a paralegal after graduating, so she decided to take an internship with the District Attorney's Office for her senior project.

After graduation in 1972 as a student of Cal Poly's first Political Science class, Linda searched for a job so she would be able to afford UCLA's paralegal certification program. She found a full time position with the organization she had worked for during her college summers—the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service. While working and after several moves, her focus shifted from becoming a paralegal to becoming a teacher, so Linda earned her Early Childhood teaching credential and began substitute teaching. Despite her enthusiasm for teaching, Linda just couldn't stay away from

the USDA and decided to return to working full-time for the Forest Service.

Thirty-six years later, Linda lives with her husband near Portland, Oregon with whom she raised two sons and has two grandchildren. Linda also remains with the USDA Forest Service, serving the Chief Information Office as its Corporate Knowledge and Communications Branch Chief. However, her rise to the top was no easy feat; at the time of her entry into the full time workforce, the Forest Service was very much a male-dominated culture and as such, it was very difficult to get ahead as a woman. Linda, who began a permanent job as a Personnel Clerk, knew she didn't want to be a support person—she wanted to do her own thing. She attributes her willingness to challenge the status quo in part to her Political Science background, which taught her to question and negotiate everything. Thus, she took it upon herself to always volunteer first. When Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) became a prominent topic in the work place, Linda volunteered to be one of the first EEO counselors in her unit. When the Forest Service began using corporate computers, Linda jumped at the chance to learn as much as possible about how they work and how to use and teach others how to use them. Cal Poly's Learn by Doing motto and her personal love for learning were at the core of Linda's enthusiastic attitude for tackling every new opportunity that arose. Her persistence served her well as she has held numerous leadership positions for the Forest Service. She's worked at all levels of the agency including field units, research labs, regional offices and now in the Washington Office detached in a virtual position. She has served as a Forestry Technician, Systems and Network Administrator, Program/Project Manager, Assistant Director and now is a Branch Chief with Project Management Professional (PMP) and Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) certifications. She has also served on numerous national projects and major initiatives as a team member or leader.

Linda's love for the USDA Forest Service and its values are apparent. "Our motto is Caring for the Land and Serving People. Our mission at the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. We evaluate climate change and resilience, severe wildfire behavior due to drought and effects of invasive species." One of the things she loves most about the Forest Service is her ability to hold different types of positions. "There are so many interesting jobs within the Forest Service because it serves such diverse purposes. There's a job in USDA or the Forest Service for pretty much any

type of work you would want to do.” In her current position, Linda works closely with her team to implement effective communications and training for IT projects impacting customers.

Linda’s advice to Political Science students is to always volunteer first and always be willing to try anything in terms of career opportunities. She also encourages students to get their master’s degrees. “We have many young people working for us and the vast majority of them have a master’s degrees or specialized certifications.” Linda points out that as the world becomes more technical, people tend to lose sight of the importance of interpersonal skills in the workplace and the valuable experiences you can learn by being a supervisor. Excellent writing, public speaking, teambuilding, and emotional intelligence skills are all vital to a successful career. Regardless of whether or not you know what you want to do, Linda insists that all students should find a mentor and take advantage of other people’s experiences. Find out what they know and what they’ve been through and use it to build your own experience. Most importantly, Linda says, “Lead from where you are. It doesn’t matter what your job title is or isn’t. Lead to the best of your abilities and people will start respecting you from where you are. It doesn’t matter where you start—you just have to get started. Don’t try to predict which path you’ll take, just make good choices. If you don’t know where you’re going, it doesn’t matter how you get there – It’s all about the journey.”