

## CONTRIBUTOR BIO

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AMANDA ROBINSON is the Owner and Community Outreach Extraordinaire of AR Consulting in Santa Cruz and graduated from Cal Poly in 2010 with a degree in Political Science.

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

*Amanda Robinson*

From the get-go, Amanda Robinson knew she wanted to major in Political Science. Her love for the subject stemmed from an eleventh grade U.S history teacher who challenged the way she perceived the world around her, encouraging her to look at the world through different lenses. From that point on, she knew she wanted to be involved in electoral politics—at least in some capacity. As college graduation approached, Amanda decided she would take some time off to travel. Inspired to experience the places she learned about in a class on Latin American Politics, Amanda headed to Peru where she spent her time volunteering. Before her visit to Pisco, Peru, the area experienced an earthquake, which damaged many of the city's vital buildings and economy. Amanda volunteered with a disaster relief organization by building schools and working on different beautification projects. While Amanda was in Peru, the organization got wind of the city's plans to place a landfill on a beach. She helped successfully lobby the Pisco city council to place the landfill somewhere other than on the beach.

Upon her return to the States in September of 2010, the economy was terrible, nobody was hiring, she had no experience, and grudgingly moved in with her parents. Her now-fiancé, got a job offer in Santa Cruz, so Amanda took the opportunity to move to the Santa Cruz area in January of 2011, where she

began volunteering for a few family resource centers. Many of her volunteer jobs involved event planning, and at one of the annual events she planned, a board member for the organization was thoroughly impressed with the work Amanda did. As a result, the board member asked Amanda if she would be interested in serving as the Campaign Manager for Eric Hammer, who was running for 5th District County Supervisor in 2012. Amanda wasn't quite sure if campaigns were exactly the direction she wanted to go in, but decided it would be silly not to try it out.

Amanda embraced Cal Poly's learn by doing model when she decided to take on the campaign. Having never worked for a campaign in her life, Amanda literally had to learn by doing. Hammer was running against the previous Secretary of State under Arnold Schwarzenegger. Hammer, who was little-known, was running against big money and huge name recognition. In many ways, Amanda considers their loss a success, because Hammer only lost by 123 votes despite running against a well-known opponent. To Amanda's surprise, Hammer's campaign set her career trajectory. Amanda loved the rush of campaigns and now works for herself with the title of Community Outreach Extraordinaire. Her business, AR Consulting, is run entirely by word of mouth, and she works on all sorts of campaigns including public relation, electoral, and fundraising campaigns. She even worked on an El Salvadorian presidential campaign for Salvador Sanchez Ceren after meeting an individual connected to his campaign through her previous work. Amanda was brought on to lobby local cities and community groups as well as to create positive press in the United States in hopes that the El Salvadorian press would pick up something published in California. Ceren's opposition claimed he was a Communist and therefore not welcome in the USA; Amanda was part of a team who negated that by bringing Ceren to the United States to help build and grow relationships between El Salvador and the United States. Amanda's efforts played a huge role in Ceren's eventual victory for El Salvador's presidential office.

Even though Amanda's career has taken off, she still makes the time to volunteer for causes dear to her heart. She's heavily involved in the Democratic Party and serves as the Vice-Chair to the Democratic Central Committee in Santa Cruz County. She also represents the Santa Cruz County Democratic Party at the California Democratic Party, which involves going to conventions every other year to discuss party platform. Despite starting out in 2012 with no political contacts in the area, Amanda was recently named Democrat of

the Year for Santa Cruz County. She's also started a working group within the Silicon Valley Young Democrats whose aim is to increase the voting propensity of individuals between the ages of 18 and 34.

Amanda encourages Political Science students to think about what they want to do and to reach out to their professors and people living in the community they want to move to. "Never be afraid to ask for a meeting or an informational interview. Don't feel bad about working your network, it really is all about who you know and how you present yourself, especially in the campaign industry. If you don't know what you want to do, then volunteer—it helps you start the career you want to have. I didn't want a 9 to 5 job. I wanted to improve the community, be involved in deciding the direction, and have a strong connection to my neighbors. Volunteering helped put me in a position that allowed me to pursue my goal."