



KAYVAN CHINICHIAN is the Associate Director of Individual Membership at the Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. He graduated from Cal Poly in 2009 with a degree in Political Science.

## **ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**

*Kayvan Chinichian*

From his first class at Cal Poly to graduation, Kayvan was always committed to the Political Science discipline. Though Kayvan did consider double majoring in either Economics or Business, ultimately the passion for politics and international relations (IR), coupled with a desire to put his coursework into action, outweighed the decision to have an additional major. Kayvan took up various opportunities offered by the College of Liberal Arts and the University to make the classroom come alive. He was involved in both Model United Nations (UN) and Mock Trial, and was an active member of the Persian Students of Cal Poly, where he and a small group of students raised the necessary funds to bring Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Iranian human rights advocate, Shirin Ebadi to speak at Cal Poly in 2007. In addition to that, Kayvan also was elected to the Board of Directors for ASI as a representative for the College of Liberal Arts.

After graduating from Cal Poly in 2009, Kayvan relocated to Washington, D.C. to pursue his passion for politics. Kayvan began his career, first as a translator, and then as a researcher for a variety of organizations including advocacy groups and think tanks in Washington, D.C. It was in the realm of think tanks that Kayvan felt his calling. Kayvan started with the

Washington Institute for Near East Policy in 2009 and had a variety of positions that were both on the research side and on the non-profit management side. Before his time at that think tank ended, Kayvan was promoted to a Development Operations Officer. Kayvan spent five years at the Institute, and during that time, went to graduate school at the George Washington University Elliot School of International Affairs for a Master of Arts in Middle East Studies with a certificate in Political Management.

One of Kayvan's proudest accomplishments at the Washington Institute included organizing conferences to discuss various policy issues important to Middle East peace and security. The programs initially were expensive and aimless in terms of objectives, but over time and through dedicated management, these programs became lucrative for fundraising purposes and the conversations became more dynamic and fruitful for policy attendees.

Last year, Kayvan moved to another peer institution, the Atlantic Council, which was re-launching its membership program. Kayvan was enticed to take the opportunity because he wanted to take what he had learned from his previous positions and apply it to an entirely new program being built from the ground up. Working at the Atlantic Council provides Kayvan a significant amount of creative space to develop and grow his own program. Kayvan's current emphasis is to build a community of like-minded individuals who are committed to the work and mission of the Atlantic Council, while also raising critical financial resources to support the Council. The tagline for the Members Program that Kayvan manages is a "Global Network with a Global Purpose," and Kayvan continues to put a premium on making sure that this is truly a 'global' community he is helping to build. In addition to the Atlantic Council, Kayvan has also developed a passion for helping non-profits become successful in their efforts, and has been of assistance to organizations like the Nowruz Commission and the Turkish Policy Center.

For Political Science students who aspire to work in the non-profit space, Kayvan's most important recommendation is understanding the mission statement as well as the organization's objectives. Moreover, aspiring students interested in this space should understand that non-profits, like their peers in the for-profit space, provide opportunities for a whole host of skill sets. Understanding that aspect is important and should make

the applicant be creative in how they present themselves to prospective employers. An additional recommendation by Kayvan is that students should not put too much of an emphasis on their research skills. Strong research skills are important, but ultimately employers are looking for other skills from job candidates. Finally, Kayvan stresses the importance of pursuing internships as they provide clarity and are an inexpensive tool to discovering a potential career path. Moreover, internships themselves become a vehicle for networking, which is crucial in today's job market and should not be taken for granted.