



MICHELLE CRISTOBAL is a Financial Analyst for the Mozilla Corporation, the for-profit subsidiary of the Mozilla Foundation. She graduated from Cal Poly in 2008 with a degree in Political Science.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Michelle Cristobal

Michelle Cristobal's first feeling toward Cal Poly was typical of most college students, nervousness. There was a large degree of uncertainty because this was the only in-state school she applied to, but those fears were quickly subdued. Now a financial analyst for the Mozilla Corporation, Michelle utilizes the critical-thinking and analysis tools she learned while at Cal Poly and in the Political Science department.

Coming to Cal Poly in 2006 as a Political Science major, Michelle appreciated the way her classes were taught. The Socratic-style teaching she experienced really opened up discussions and kept the professors down to earth. "The professors were at the same level as the students," she said. "Everyone had an equal responsibility for the class experience every day." Michelle also enjoyed the project-based structure to most of her classes, where Cal Poly's learn-by-doing motto shined through. Along with an American Politics concentration, Michelle took on psychology as a minor. This minor would come into play when it came to for her to choose a senior project, as she was able to focus on political psychology. She wanted to better understand the "people", and what governs the choices that are made every day.

After college was when Michelle ran into most of her challenges. At first, her main goal was to attend law school right after graduation, but the 2008 economic crisis and the stories of even Ivy League law graduates having trouble finding work changed her mind. The other problem Michelle ran into was a lack of a professional network to help in her job search. “Other than the internships that I had, I didn’t have influential connections or an influential network right out the gate,” said Michelle. She wasn’t discouraged, however, and started a career pivot by sending out many applications until she got a bite.

While at Cal Poly, Michelle worked for Campus Dining for four years in the procurement department, learning some of the ins-and-outs of logistics and finances. Once Michelle realized that a career change was needed, she used the experiences she had while working for Campus Dining in addition to political science skills to apply for jobs. Eventually she received a job offer from Anderson Audio Visual, and from then on things became less arduous. “It just got better from there, as soon as I got more experience,” she said. After Anderson AV, Michelle moved to Avnet where she worked in procurement and customs regulations, overseeing the imports and exports of the company’s goods and services. These experiences contributed to landing her current job as a Financial Analyst at Mozilla Corporation, where Michelle focuses on budgeting and forecasting for the marketing department and internal operations.

Michelle also had advice prepared for current students. She sees getting out into the “real world” early as incredibly helpful and something she wishes she had done more of. For the recently graduated, being stalwart and persistent is instrumental when trying to land interviews. She said, “There’s nothing that can stop you when you’re in person. As much as you can look good on paper, none of that is as compelling as just showing up.” Finally, Michelle says to truly take advantage of Cal Poly’s learn-by-doing approach. The experiences she had here stayed with her, and continue to help her even now.