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CCSF Class of 2013

UC Berkeley Class of 2016

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Tell me about your high school years:

I came to HS a year after being in the U.S. and I didn’t speak much English, and wasn’t very comfortable with the American culture. Plus, my high school had some people who were a little racist, so I didn’t really get along with these people.

I always played soccer, so I joined a group of soccer people there. We were mostly Latinos and I would hang out with them, and my life was all about soccer. I wanted to be a professional soccer player. All of my energy went into that, so I didn’t study very much. I did apply myself a little bit, but the crowd that I was with didn’t apply themselves, so I did a little bit – but just didn’t worry about it too much. All of my effort was put into soccer and I got C’s just to pass. Not a very good high school experience because I think I had a little bit of a problem with my identity because I had just come back from Brazil, and I didn’t speak much English.

How did you discover CCSF?

So, in my junior year, my peers were taking the SAT. I didn’t take it because I didn’t feel prepared at all. I thought I would just not take the SATs and get out in my senior year. In my senior year, kids were taking the SATs again, and that’s when I could go to a community college and transfer to another university – and NOT have to take the SATs. So, I thought I would do that instead.

At the time, I researched universities for international business and soccer and San Diego State was a good school. I thought I would go to CCSF and then transfer to San Diego State. I just came into City College in 2009 and walked in – a long time ago – definitely a long time ago -- came in and didn’t know where anything was. Yes, I saw a counselor to take an assessment test to see like my level of English writing and math writing.

I saw a counselor, talked to a counselor and had a negative experience. I told her my plans to transfer to San Diego State and she said, “no, it’s a competitive school. It’s a hard school.” Transfer to SF State. She pushed me like so hard to SF State. She said not to think about San Diego State. “You’re going to SF State.” Even that school is hard to get in, she said. That was pretty sad, and then I saw another counselor, told her my plans to do business and then just went and picked all my classes and then I picked your class to get an introduction to business and I took your general business class.

What do you remember most about your time at CCSF? What comes to mind when you reflect on the 3.5 years spent at CCSF?

What I remember most is was meeting Jesse (Clayburgh). That was the pivoting point, no doubt. I saw him in your class, he walked in, and he had a lot of confidence and he had a conversation with you and he was able to communicate really well, and I admired that so much. I said, “I want to be like that guy.” He was doing so well, and you used to call on him for things, and like Jesse, look this up, Jesse do this and that. And I said, “this guy knows everything and he even gets along with the professor. I couldn’t even look in your eyes. I was so intimidated.” Me: you were shy. I was so shy and we had one conversation on campus and I was so shy. The moment I met him and then I had him in another class and met him, and after that he introduced me to the honors program and we went to Sami Kudsi’s office and met him there. All of a sudden, my eyes opened and I felt like I could reach higher. Higher opportunities. Don’t settle for like just mediocre path which was laid out in front of me. That’s what is most memorable. After that, I became a senator and made a lot of friends that way. I was also part of AGS as the ICC representative and a lot of people in student government body there made a lot of friends and I started Club Brazil and we had four people working with us – four students and a lot of people working together for the Brazilian community. We set up a website of resources and went to speak to the Brazilian Consulate – the club no longer exists, but now I am part of the Brazilian consulate for the public community. The Brazilian Consulate works with business, education and helps immigrants. I worked with the BC to improve the BC and reach out the community that it targets with the services it makes available.

So, the most memorable experience at CCSF would have to be meeting Jesse and joining extracurricular activities and finding myself. Like, I remember that I remember that I made a transition from going out with this little Brazilian group I had where we would go out and party on Friday nights to studying at the Rosenberg library. I remember that the library would close at CCSF, but SF State would stay open 24/7, and I would go and study like Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday. I had to study so much because it didn’t come easy to me – the material – you know. Yeah, it never came easy to me. I had to put a lot of work every time. So then I was studying with groups of friends I met through the extracurricular activities like Sparsh and I would bring Eliza [former GF] to study with me all of the time until she got tired and left, so yeah, City College is amazing.

After a year or two at CCSF, did your confidence level increase, and thus your trajectory and thoughts of going to San Diego change? How did that materialize and when was it that you realized that you could do a lot more?

After the first semester was when I met Jesse. That winter break, we went to Mexico together and spent a lot of time. We hitchhiked through the Baja peninsula and we had great experiences and I learned so much from him. I learned that I could put forth all this work and that there were all of these resources at City College like (inaudible). One that helped me was VITA which helped minorities.

After the first year and getting better grades (that I had never gotten before in my life), I thought it was possible to… you know have a chance of going to a UC. And then I found out that I could do IGETC and do this TAG and TAP at Davis and UCLA. So, tried to get into TAP. I couldn’t – but I got into TAP. And I thought, “I could go to UC Santa Barbara and UC Davis.” Some UC – that’s amazing.

My confidence became really high and I became part of AGS and I was standing in front of students and telling them – that was the biggest transition for me – that leadership – all of a sudden I was in front of other students who I knew from the previous year – to speak to them to tell them about things. After that, I started meeting more and applied maybe to UCLA and a semester passed, that spring passed and the fall came and I started that business with Jesse – high hopes and dreams. Growing a business and and I started having thoughts and aspirations – and then I thought it was just a matter of applying myself more. So I think that the confidence level and that switch of sitting down and looking up as opposed to sitting up and being a source for students to look up to and gaining a sense of responsibility and a sense that I am able to do this. It was achievable because you saw other people do it. I thought it was not accessible. I saw Alex Hudzilin and thought, “this guy is hot. He is a god. I could never speak in front of people. These guys are super stars and I remember seeing William Do on campus and he asked me a bunch of questions about what I was thinking, and I didn’t even know how to answer. I couldn’t even speak to him and I didn’t know what to say.

What would you say about the professors at CCSF and access?

It had a big impact and also an eye opener – it was a bigger transition – I was in the dark before I started studying at CCSF. I was living so passively and not understanding how things worked. When I started reading and studying and trying to complete assignments and in my English class, for example, I had a couple of assignments that were hard to complete and that was a big transition – just understanding society and what was going on with me. Kind of like previously living in the shadows.

I had one instructor for English 1A, Maggie was her name, I think. She gave us assignments – writing assignments and I would have conversations with her and I was really xxx and she would ask me questions to make me think and express my thoughts – I don’t know – she was able to make me think – and also the leadership was a big change in my life. And becoming intellectually stimulated – and that’s what Maggie gave to me. Before Maggie, I had an English 96, or whatever comes before English 1A and I had a professor that was a sub, and he was very like – he taught with conviction – and he had an impact on me, but I can’t be too descriptive because it was so long ago but it was one of those moments that I opened my eyes and thought “whoa – what’s going on here?” and became more interested in thoughts I was having --- but he never got back to me (via email), which was sad – but maybe he saw that I got it, and decided not to get back to me.

Why did you decide to go to China?

Yeah, so I decided to go to China because that was right after I sold the business to Jesse and I had money to do something like that – to travel. And I felt like I had been surrounded by people who had the chance to travel – Jesse lived in France for a year and Jenna lived in Puerto Rico or something or somewhere – for one year and we would talk and she was so interested and so intelligent and Wes would talk about his travels, too. And I felt like I was lacking – and I thought that I would just take a break from University and I had been taking Chinese courses for a year and a half and I wanted to immerse myself in culture and language and need to speak it so I could get it in my brain and I just wanted a little break from going to City. And go somewhere where I could find a challenge. I spent six months, including a summer. My life changed in China too and I became so much more intellectually curious – and I came back to CCSF that fall with so much of a desire to learn. I would see Jenna in the library.

That was also a memorable experience – spending all of that time in the LAC (Learning Assistance Center). The LAC was a great resource – one of the best. I saw Jenna and I talked with her and “catched up with her” and said, “Are you so excited for the semester?” She said, “Yeah, kind of, you know…”

I told her that I was so excited and so ready to study. I was so ready the whole time in China to read more about business, politics and economics. And she was taken back and said, “why do you want to do that?” So, yeah. I came back with that desire to learn more. To figure things out. So, yeah. China had a big impact – being on my own, having many challenges and finding a job, because I wanted to find a job to learn more about import/export in China, so I found a job at an exporting company that manufactured garments and shipped them. I would see the factories and go to trade shows and yeah, I would attend business meetings. I ate sea cucumber in a business meeting. I couldn’t say no. I had to eat raw, and it didn’t taste very good. Yeah, China is a place that really opened my mind.

Do you think the experience in China helped you get into Berkeley?

 I think so. By far. My business experience and my China experience as the best thing I had going for me. My business experience of starting a van rental company. Just having that shows a lot of initiative, which I have and so that helped a lot. Leadership and initiative. In China it was great because it really out there and it takes a lot more courage It felt a little bit surreal that I got into a school that I never thought was possible to get into before City College. But after putting in 3.5 of years into work – most days, about 90% of my days, putting work into improving myself and struggling to improve in courses – I felt like I deserved it.

How was your experience at Berkeley?

Really – it was like walking in from the airport to China. There were so many things going on. I walked into Sproul Hall on the first day and there were around 50 stands of fraternities and all of these other types of clubs – business clubs, music clubs and all these things. And I didn’t know what to do for. It was overwhelming and I didn’t have any guidance in Berkeley and I didn’t know what I path should be. There was a problem of too many choices. What do I do? I banking, sales, marketing….

Did you background and time at CCSF help you? I felt intimidated a little bit when I was in the class and the students next to me were asking questions that I thought I would need three other books to understand what they were talking about because they were just geniuses. But after a couple of months, I saw that it wasn’t like that “big monster” that I made in my mind, and that I was able to do just as well as they were. And my writing was solid. I got an A in my English course in the course I took the first semester and I was able to network and get/understand the social hierarchies and ladders within Berkeley – because I had experience with the student council at City College – being senators – and knowing how that worked. Starting a club and being an officer in other clubs – so I had an understanding of how that worked and after the first couple months I wasn’t intimidated at all and I saw that I could just do this -- I could choose something that I wanted to do professionally – choose a path – and I knew I could easily go down that path – by taking a certain type of courses that would lead me to that professional path. Yeah, Berkeley was another experience that changed my life completely.

What did you study at Berkeley?

Interdisciplinary studies – so, I focus and created a focus called international trade and development – so that allowed me to take courses in economics, business sand international area studies and that’s exactly what I wanted to do going into City College. In the first year, I wanted to do international business. I didn’t want to do business. I thought I wanted to do something a little bit more meaningful – and that’s where Berkeley kind of kicked in. That I needed to add money to society in some way – not just i-banking and go for profits my whole life. I mean, “what value are you generating to society?”

Then I thought international trade and development would be perfect. I could do more courses on the liberal side – a course, let’s say a sociology course studying globalization and developments and so I studied many theories like neo-liberal theories and their impact from the 1970s, and what economic theories had in Latin American countries and it was a very holisitic approach that I took to learning about international business and economics. sociology course studying so I studied many theories like neo-liberal theories

How did the community at City College compare to the community that you became a part of at Berkeley?

So, what helped me in Berkeley and made things a little level overwhelming was my City College alums. I talked to Alexander Ioch and he broke it down and told me how Haas worked and what opportunities students were looking for at Haas and I talked to many other City College students who told me what I should be doing, and what I would want to be focusing on. Kiryll helped me a lot and City College gave me this community of friends that were a year, two years and one year below me that I am still in touch with -- and we were able to help each other through many different things – especially the application process and the day-to-day at Berkeley. We always came to each other fast and running with all this help, and we were never busy to help each other. No, I was never busy. I was able to schedule a coffee date with these guys and ask questions when I needed help at Berkeley. We stayed as a tight community and always helped each other.

Do you think those friendships are more meaningful than your Berkeley friendships?

Yeah, so yeah. The difference between CCSF and Berkeley is that CCSF is a more tight community as compared to a community with an individualistic community. So yeah, the friendships I developed at City College were way stronger than the ones I developed at Berkeley.

When you look back now after your recent graduation from Berkeley, and you look ahead, what do you see for yourself in the future? What would you like to do as you look around now?

As I look around now, I’ve become …. Specific career? Yeah, so I would like to begin my career in technology and after doing internships out of college in finance, marketing and sales, and what I liked the most was sales – a lot of people give me feedback and say I am very good at it. I like to talk to and engage people – yeah, I love people. So, I want to do sales for a couple of years and then transition into a more entrepreneuristic lifestyle, so right now I have an ecommerce business going on the side which I started three months ago, and I am looking to grow it in the next few months – and eventually make a transition out of being an employee in sales at a tech company into licensing products and selling in Latin America or licensing products and selling across the world somewhere. So, yeah. My goals are to integrate, take more technology to Latin America and take technologies to Latin America that can help Latin American companies compete with American companies. There’s a big disparity in how advanced Latin American companies are compared to American companies. A lot of that comes down to having the technology that allows you to lower your costs so much. This is a complex topic and there are so many technical aspects – like yeah.

So, its kind of where I’m at now. My first job is to get a job at a technology company and work very hard these next couple of years, develop a lot of contacts and transition into a new role that is more Latin American focused where I could lead a startup or work with a director of a startup that is working in Latin America – and then transition into starting my own company next – in three or four years that is going to be a technical company and I will be doing the distribution channel aspect of it in Latin America where I’ll have some knowledge of how companies enter Latin America, because I will be doing sales in Latin America. It’s just an idea and a plan. I don’t know how it works.