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Business Leadership Program (BLP)

CCSF Class of 2013

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*When you were at Lowell, what were your thoughts about college?*

When I was at Lowell, I had two plans. I knew I wanted to go to a four year school, but my safety option was always to go to a community college. I had cousins and an older brother who had attended community college as well. When it came to decision time around spring, I realized the CC was probably a better choice for me because I really wanted to go to Berkeley or UCLA, so I made the decision around April of my senior year that I would go to CC. That’s where I left off, and it was great.

*Did you apply to four-year schools?*

I was on the wait list for UC Davis and I got in, and I was fighting to go to UC Davis, but I knew I could do better. And I’m glad I did this. I could have gone to UC Davis and have a lot of fun with my friends from high school and do well, but I don’t know what my job prospects will look like afterwards. OR I could wait two years and work really hard. I was a futurist and waiting and saving money would be a better option for me.

*You arrive at City College – huge school – where did you even start to navigate the system to know what to do first day?*

My first semester at CC – I am not going to lie. It was overwhelming in the beginning. I did not have that many friends from high school that came to community college, so it was a rough transition. I had two objectives, the first of which was to do well in school, so I made sure that I had my schedule of classes planned from the get-go – and then I spent some time by myself honestly just going around and looking at clubs, so I would stop by the student centers and talk to people. It was slow. But halfway through the semester, I started making more friends. Yeah.

*How did you develop community at City College of San Francisco?*

I developed a sense of community at CC through student organizations. So, I joined Alpha Gamma Sigma my first semester as well as Alpha Beta Gamma, and that’s where I started to build community. Friends were very genuine, and they just clicked with you, so that worked out very well for me because I was able to connect with people in those organization and the next semester, I was actually an office for Alpha Gamma Sigma – AGS, and then it kind of took off from there. I found a group of students who were likeminded and had the same ambitions that I did. It just worked out really well.

*What was your favorite part of City College of San Francisco?*

My favorite part was the community that I was very fortunate to be part of, and that just fostered. A lot of it had to do with my experience in AGS, all my friends were there, I became the president the second year, and I had the opportunity to be in an organization with students who were just like me and seeking the same types of goals and I mean, I just felt privileged to help lead that – and I had so many different types of friendships and relationships there that I am still holding now -- I think three or four years later, so it has been amazing.

*Talk to me about your goal early on at City College of San Francisco.*

My goal was to go to Berkeley, and I knew that even before I enrolled, and that drove me all two years. Because I had a former goal in mind, everything just fell into place and came out in many facets. First of all, I had to maintain my grades and I joined many organizations to make sure I was active in networking and speaking out to students who wanted to transfer, and to be the best version of myself – and because I had that ambition and goal in mind all throughout, it is so easy to just be discouraged at times, but that was never the case. I just had this goal and I never wanted to give up.

*What would you change about City College of San Francisco? What would you improve?*

There are a lot of things I would change – that’s the thing. Change needs to occur in different categories. You had to find your community, and a lot of that you can’t control because there’s an age demographic that is different and factors you can’t control. DVC has many students who are straight out of high school. What we can control, which are the classes and clubs and the way it is organized is that it can be more structured. It’s not very centric, so people who want to go towards a transfer route are often confused about what classes they want to take and the approach that CCSF takes when people first arrive is just to make it. The bar is not set so high, and they are not very encouraging in the counseling office. I remember my first counseling session. They were telling me to take one of the lower math sections and build up. They also told me to take an English class that was below my level and to just build up. I told them, “no. I want to transfer in two years.” They’re not really good at educational thing and goal setting and plan accordingly to match that, and there are people who have really strong ambitions and you should try to listen and get a gauge of where they currently are, and whether they are taking the placement exams.

How did you even know where to start?

I did a lot of my own research. If I have to give credit to myself and my success at CCSF is that I did a lot of research of my own, and spent hours and hours researching the summer before. I didn’t find the CCSF website very helpful. That’s the problem at CCSF. I think I was a fortunate one, as compared to other people because I came from Lowell, and I already had this mindset and resources. I knew what I wanted to do: clubs, I wanted to go to Berkeley, I went to the transfer center and planned out my 60 units ahead of time, and other people don’t know how to do that because they will come from a background that’s different from mine – they don’t know about career and college planning.

So when they come to community college, they listen to counselors, and that can offset them a couple of years from transferring. That’s why, for me, if there is a student, and I can only speak to this demographic, who wants to transfer to a UC or CSU, they should have a dedicated counselor who specializes in that. The thing I always thought at the transfer center was that the idea of people going to community college is that they didn’t have a good educational background, or something must have happened so that their expectations aren’t high, so every time I went there they told me that I should have a backup school and I don’t know if this will work – and they just catered to people and ended up setting up the bar really low.

We need to figure out how to have this community [of really motivated transfer students] built up and if the transfer center can work with organizations like AGS and professors like you, it’s truly a community effort.

*How did you know about the CCSF Honors Program?*

I did a lot of my own research and I found out about the TAP program myself. I did a lot of that kind of research and I also knew about assist.org. I would say that 90% of the time, I did my own research and it wasn’t easy and a lot of people don’t know about these resources, so I took a lot of my own time to do this research, and I do believe that this information needs to be more accessible. Something as easy as a pamphlet.

How did you feel about the professors at City College of San Francisco overall?

Professors are fine. I think for the most part, I did not find a lot of the classes challenging. If I can be completely honest, I think that the curriculum sometimes was taught well. I had a handful of teachers who I thought taught the curriculum thoroughly and I learned a lot, but for the most part, it felt like this was a transfer institution, and it was temporary so the information was just kind of like… it just wasn’t thorough. I honestly to be frank don’t remember a lot of the stuff, but the classes where I did learn a lot where the professors were very passionate about what they were teaching – has stuck with me. A good example was -- I had this statistics teacher who I had and he was awesome and the funny this, I hated math before I took his class, but I thought he did an amazing job teaching and I actually did really well in his class and briefly considered learning a little bit more about statistics – but it just goes back to passion and how well they reach out to students and help them – and I don’t feel that a lot of teachers at community college have that passion and so because that lacks, and that outreach towards students is not always available, that’s one of the barriers that I see.

Tell me about the adjustment to a four-year school and how it compared?

So, my experience of two years at CCSF and two years at Berkeley – the way I live my life is always planning ahead. Two years, two years. When I first started at Berkeley, the first semester was difficult, but not too hard a transition. It is just that there are now lectures and you have to prepare ahead of time with a lot more material. You’re also competing with students who are just brilliant and really smart and people are head deep into the material and honestly, sometimes I just didn’t care. I don’t know if I am really passionate about this. But I think the difference between a two-year experience and a transfer is that you’re not used to the pace and not used to the load

You’re in a college setting now, everyone is hanging out and the there are fraternities and the social aspect is broader and bigger – I guess the way to explain it is that it is a little overwhelming. There was a lot to do and a lot to choose from, but you have to apply to get into (clubs) – it’s funny, because when you first arrive, you start interviewing right away – for jobs and internships and for clubs, and then you have to settle into classes and meet new friends at the same time. It was a lot to handle at once, but again, my situation was a little unique because I had a lot of friends from high school who were there. I was really connected to Berkeley and my best friends went to Berkeley from Lowell. It was a lot easier for me to transition, and the material wasn’t too hard for me. I think yeah, the material is just a lot of reading. I did take classes I found interesting and I took a lot of healthcare classes at the time, and I took some Haas courses on the side – marketing credits and started out doing marketing my second semester there. I was taking courses with Haas people.

*What was the nature of your decision not to enter the Haas vaccum?*

I was not sure what I wanted to do. I think when you’re young you have this expectation of “you should know what you want to do and stick with it. You can do whatever you want, and you don’t have to have a decision, and that is an active conversation here at LinkedIn as well. I am glad I chose political economy, and I am actually really glad I did, because it is super holistic and I learned so much stuff and [inaudible] whatever I wanted to do. My personality, as I have gotten to know it better, is that I crave freedom and I hate it when I have to follow a routine – I don’t like it and it overwhelms me so anytime I have choice and the ability to make my own decisions, I actually thrive a lot better – I value diversity a lot and the circumstance I am in, and in business, I always thought it would be ABC – accounting, banking and consulting and I knew early on that I didn’t like any of them. That did not appeal to me at all. I don’t like numbers and I just don’t like that lifestyle, and for me I just don’t think I can do this, and I don’t think I will be happy in the very end. It was a tough decision to make, but I realize that in the end, political economy was the right move because I had so much time to explore different options and when I went to Berkeley, I ended up doing the Daily Californian, but to be frank, it was to get money at first, and it didn’t make that much money, and it was the basis of my career right now. I didn’t want to cold call people – but I remember my first two or three months doing it, I hated it. I had this unsettled feeling that I can’t leave if I didn’t try and give it my best, and because I have that natural inclination, I thought that I would just try and give it my best.

It doesn’t do justice for me to devote so much time to something and not really try. So, I ended up trying really hard and I actually did really well, and I significantly performed above quota every month and I was the first to hit quota – there were 16 on the team and every single month, I went over every single month and I realized that sales wasn’t only about cold calling but applying the right kinds of solutions to your clients and really be up front to them and consult with them along the way and that was something that I realized I liked, which is helping people and giving them the best sort of guidance and expertise – which is why I did sales. So, that’s how I view sales, and of course, money comes along the way. That’s how I built my skill set. I feel so comfortable on the phone right now.

*Tell me about your confidence before and after City College and your leadership abilities as a result*

My confidence level going into community college if I had to rank it, it would be 5 out of 10. I had just come from high school. I was confident in my ability to do well in school, but in terms of setting a presence for myself, I wasn’t too sure about that because I just wasn’t too comfortable and I didn’t know who to speak with. There was always this idea of observing from afar and admiring people who were in these leadership positions and say how can I get there? And the way to get there is to engage and talk to them, and it is such an easy solution to put yourself out there but it’s also the scariest and hardest part to do, but once you take that leap of faith and your true self, you start fitting into your group, if that makes sense. And because I took that leap of faith, I found community in AGS and the business community as well, and my confidence has increased and has been growing ever since because I know that no one can dictate who you are and I think that community really accepted that and it has carried all throughout Berkeley and all throughout job interviews, and even here at LinkedIn. I feel like I am thriving because I built that confidence early on in my college career, and now I can walk around confidently speaking to whomever and just going up to people randomly and talking to them. It’s not a big deal to me anymore.

Lowell High School, 2011

CCSF, 2013

UC Berkeley, 2015

LinkedIn – one year mark

*Tell me with those accomplishments and achievements, how City College has shaped you looking back from high school to where you are today*

Community college has shaped my achievements and who I am today in many ways. First off, the tenacity to always want more, to keep working hard and reaching for your goals – that mentality – you have to fight for what you want in community college because there aren’t many resources – and the goal is to transfer is not really in your favor and so that goal to stay hungry and to stay humble has carried on with me ever since because I know that in the day, if you just accept things and you’re complacent, then nothing is ever going to work for you because you need to fight for what you want and – and speaking from a community college perspective, I fought for the positions I won, the scholarships I wanted, jobs I wanted and to leave early to be on the team that I’m on and I know that my hunger has carried me really far and has developed from back. I want to be my personal best and know what it means to be successful. They picked five people out of Berkeley to come to LinkedIn. I think the way it worked out for me is that I fought to stick out in many capacities and my nature is that I am not very loud or outgoing right away – I am a little more quiet in the beginning until you get to know me and then I am outspoken. That didn’t work for me – especially in the beginning of a sales career and then I had to fight to show people, hey no, you don’t have to have that aggressive, loud, talkative person leading the pack – you can just say no – I came off as a person who worked really hard and who knew what I was doing. Even at Adobe, I worked with a team full of guys and I was the only girl so it was hard for me, but I build my relationships there and got a return offer (2 out of 5). There will always be things working against you and you will never realize that, and you have to always fight and show people otherwise. Even in the BLP program. It didn’t work in my favor right away – lots of Type A and I feel it, and I am a little different for myself and you want to be authentic and be who you are. Working in an environment like this, I love it to death. It’s so easy to be muffled out and you’re not an All-Star and I found different ways to really stick out and to be authentic while working really hard. At the end of the day, you are who you are and you can only be the best version of yourself.

*Where would you like to be in the next few years?*

I think about this all of the time, and a lot of this has to do with my own self-transformation. I think outside LinkedIn, they think Microsoft is a big impact. We are still LinkedIn and nothing has changed at all. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that I have changed a lot since I graduated and a lot of that was personal change – I definitely have a different type of …. My outlook on life is a lot different. It used to be centered on work and being successful. My mentality was always graduate, get a job, do well in my job, do well in my job, get promoted, do well in this company, get married, have a family and have kids. That’s always been my …. By 30.

The way I look at it right now is that I value so much my personal time. My life has always been around others – I valued so much my relationship with others – I valued so much about relationships and with Tim as well – I changed a lot in discovering yourself and using this time in my life to really explore the world from 23 to 27 because we are so silo’d in this one area of our life which is work and San Francisco. I just have had the time to explore and see what else is out there. I am open to the idea of moving. I am not going to move just for the sake of moving. That is not smart. If there’s an opportunity or the right opportunity comes along and I see a fit, I am totally open to it now – I think that is kind of my point. I can see myself staying in sales for a few years. I will stay in my job and kill it until the end of the year – it is not in our favor to leave in under 9 months, but I am doing really well right now, and I have built relationships with my account executives and my AE managers, so they know who I am and I am having a lot of meetings with them to construct better ways to do lead flow and I am always looking for new opportunities and to put a name for myself and after that, there are two options I am looking at and that may change. I want to go into more of an analytical role and do client support. I definitely like being in a client facing role, it can be monotonous and draining and you’re always on the phone and it is really draining, but I do see myself in a leadership role, and hopefully a management position, maybe in about five years. That’s where I see myself. Do I want to go to grad school? I don’t think I need an MBA. I do think that where I am very fortunate is that I’ve built a lot of relationships already, but they’re primarily based in the West Coast, so if I want to grow and expand and develop, and I want to join a good startup and have those connections, and if I want to branch elsewhere, for me, if there’s an opportunity for me to go to graduate school on the east coast. The way I look at my life right now is how do you really know? You’re looking at each moment and it changes all of the time. I really didn’t think I would be in sales – I had no idea that I was the type for sales --- you can make a lot of money when you go over. I am of the mindset that I am open to other opportunities and I am willing to grow and see other people’s perspectives – and I don’t know …. Embrace uncertainty and be comfortable with it. When I look at people I admire, and even our CEO, his outlook in life has always been to embrace what is happening right now and to always be a team player. To embrace what is going on in the world in which you’re involved – and so I want to do that as well. Yeah. I am just very fortunate in the position I am in right now.

*Tell me three things that you’re grateful about as it relates to CCSF?*

The relationships I built there, the professors, the clubs and the community – everything was awesome and it just carried me along the way – and that’s something I am very grateful for. A lot of people did not have opportunities – again, that is something I will carry on for a very long time. I am grateful for the support I got from my parents and my friends and the community in which I was involved. I remember going to community college and people would ask how I got to where I am and a lot of my answers were you and I not really that different, and you can do what I am doing if you just put your head in the game and work really hard. There’s nothing separating you from this secret sauce, right? The last thing I am appreciative of is just the experience that I had. I felt that I had this common sentiment that you’re almost an underachiever when you first arrive at a community college, and you have this hunger to prove them wrong, and because I have that mentality – it has carried on even to where I am here – that the odds are never in your favor and you can choose to get discouraged or to accept that or say no to work really hard to prove them wrong and become a success story in their eyes –Keep grounded. This is something I see a lot of people from City College do, and it messes them up. Once they transfer to Berkeley, they are so up in the clouds about this one accomplishment they’re not grounded and that is their safe haven – that they got to Berkeley – and so did 30,000 other people. So, you need to realize what made you successful and what made you stick out and continue to do that. So, with 30,000 other people, what can you do to land a job at LinkedIn and there are also other people in BLP (Business Leadership Program) and what can you do to get the next job? Stay humble, stay grounded and just keep working hard.