



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

College of Letters & Science

UCSB

# Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Corinne, a former Linguistics major who, having taught FBI agents and worked for D.C.'s Applied Linguistics Center, is now an advocate for minority language communities in New Zealand.



**Corinne Seals:**  
**Lecturer of Applied Linguistics**  
**and Language Policy Consultant**

## What are you up to now, post-graduation?

Currently I live in Wellington, New Zealand where I work as a Lecturer (NZ's version of an Assistant Professor) of Applied Linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington. I teach both undergrad and MA classes in linguistics, advise students, and work with community groups on developing heritage language teaching programs. I work with research participants around the world, hearing individual and community stories about linguistics journeys and how that connects to who the participants are now. I'm incredibly fortunate that I get to meet so many fascinating people and be with them as they learn things about themselves they weren't consciously aware of before.

Since Wellington is the capital of NZ, I also work with government agencies (such as various ministries and

specialized committees) on language policy and practice. I advocate for heritage and minority language communities, working to protect their access to all of their languages and to help make resources more readily available. I also advise on how to help make multilingualism the national norm.

## How did you get to where you are?

At UCSB, I double-majored in Sociocultural Linguistics and Law & Society. I also double-minored in Russian and LGBTQ Studies (now Feminist Studies, I believe). I originally planned to just do Law & Society and go on to law school, but I really ended up falling in love with Linguistics (which was a class I took just to try it out, funny enough). Through UCSB's supportive LGBTQ environment and groups

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(something I wasn't used to, coming from a small, conservative town), I became active in LGBTQ Studies, and I continue to do some of my work in the area of language, gender, and sexuality. Also, through the Ling Dept, I became involved in both Italian and Russian classes, and then I adopted the Russian minor when I also became an officer of UCSB's Russian Club. At times it was difficult juggling so many courses, but I never wanted to miss out on any of the great offerings at UCSB. I also found great support systems in each of the departments.

During my 3rd year at UCSB, I talked with Prof Mary Bucholtz (Linguistics) about wanting to do an Honors thesis and then an MA in Ling. She advised me in the completion of a thesis on multilingual families, heritage languages, and identity—what is now the backbone of all the work I do. She also offered me the opportunity to train in hands-on linguistics research as an undergrad research assistant for her

National Science Foundation project, which I worked on for a year. These two experiences became the basis for everything I do now in my job, and her excellent advising is what I aim for when I advise students of my own. She is also the reason for the next part of my path, as she encouraged me to “go all the way” in academia and apply for a PhD.

I did, and I accepted an offer to Georgetown University with a full five-year scholarship and stipend support. There, I completed an MS and PhD in Linguistics, focusing on a program bridging Applied Linguistics and Sociolinguistics (focusing on language and identity, especially in heritage language learning). The program was challenging but rewarding. I collaborated on a special workshop for the FBI's Forensic Linguistics unit, who kept in contact and even invited me down to Quantico to see where they work and what they do. I worked with the Center for Applied Linguis-

tics in Washington, DC as the Ukrainian Language Advisor. The difficult part was trying to find work during the summers because most places either wouldn't hire for just the summers or wouldn't pay fair wages. This was a struggle each year and was often really scary.

When I was finishing my PhD, I went on the job market for an academic job. It's very true that the academic job market is ridiculously tough to break into nowadays, and this process is very nerve-racking. What I learned is the importance of being willing to take on a different position while you continue to try to land an academic job (if that's the path you choose). I didn't get an academic position my first year, so I instead took a job as an ESL coordinator at a tech school. This allowed me a relevant means of income while I got ready to apply again to academic jobs the next year. That time I was lucky and was offered my first choice job

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and the first job I applied for that year—the one I have now at Victoria University of Wellington in NZ.

**What was the best thing you did as an undergrad to help you get to where you are?**

Like I previously mentioned, I owe huge amounts of gratitude to Prof. Mary Bucholtz in Linguistics who helped me find opportunities and consider possibilities I hadn't even thought of before. I loved her Sociolinguistics class, so I would talk to her after class about my questions and ideas. When I wanted to know more about doing research, I started signing up for her office hours. Office hours are there for students to use and if you have a question or an idea that will take more than a minute or two, office hours are when professors can give you their full attention and often awesome suggestions. Not many students take advantage of this great opportunity, but it's the best way to establish a meaningful relationship with faculty. Having faculty and staff around you who you trust exposes you to people with a lot more knowledge in the areas you're interested in and can open doors you didn't even know were there.

Faculty and advisors can also help by encouraging you through the tough times. Though it happened after undergrad, when I couldn't get an academic position right away, my advisors helped me remember that it most likely was nothing to do with me personally. Jobs (and internships) are becoming increasingly competitive, so often employers already have a very fixed idea of who they want. You can be absolutely fantastic but still not fit into the idea they already have. That's ok, though, because when you do get an offer, it's more likely to be a really excellent fit, and you're more likely to be happy there. Sometimes waiting an extra year or two to get a better-fitting job (while doing something else in the meantime) will serve you better in the end than getting an ill-fitting position right away.

**What do you wish you had known while you were in undergrad?**

One of the things I wish I had known while at UCSB was how to better balance financial constraints and academic life. It's very challenging to navigate the very difficult financial aid system while still trying to stay

focused on your academic work. I often would become very frustrated with the whole system and just shut it out mentally. However, I would now tell the younger version of myself to schedule appointments with financial aid advisors for at least 30 minutes at a time and to be clear that they are exploratory appointments, as I needed to know the very basics to even understand where to start in making decisions. It's a good idea to do this a few times, as not all of



“Try many different things to get to know yourself better.”



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Next month's spotlight features Carly, a former Psychology major who is now doing double duty in helping people overcome hardships as both a stroke researcher and a volunteer trauma advocate. To learn about her journey and advice for the current Gaucho generation, catch the next Alumni Spotlight in November.

the info will stick or even come up in just one meeting.

I would also recommend looking into certificates that you can complete while working on your BA (for example - the TESOL certificate). Many countries (and even many companies in the US) will accept certificates easily and immediately for jobs such as summer positions because the work required for the certificate is more obvious than what you did for your full major.

#### **What was the best thing about being a Gaucho?**

For me, the best thing about being a Gaucho was all of the exploratory opportunities available. There were so many events and groups that let me have a taste of something new to see if I'd like to become more in-

involved. For example, I highly valued the public arts events at UCSB, the opportunities to volunteer in environmental conservation efforts, being involved with the Women's Ensemble Theatre Troupe, and being a member of the Russian Club. Those are just a few of many that I tried, and each helped me learn more about myself and my goals both while at UCSB and in the future.

#### **Any final words of wisdom for the current Gaucho generation?**

Try many different things to get to know yourself better. There are so many opportunities at UCSB, take advantage of them. They're there for you. Also, use the resources available to you (faculty and staff advisors, TAs, professors, etc) —they can help guide you in new directions and offer new ways of looking at things.



*Corinne welcomes UCSB students to contact her via email with questions about the field and advice on how to prepare for a career in applied linguistics. Requests to review resumes or inquiries about open positions will not be responded to.*

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