



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

College of Letters & Science

UCSB

Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Kelsey, a former Film and Media Studies major who is now using film as a tool to develop more peaceful international relations.



Kelsey Brannan: Senior Video Producer & Video Editing Trainer

What are you up to now, post-graduation?

I'm currently the Senior Video Producer & Photographer (Federal Contractor with Async-Nu Microsystems) at the U.S. Department of State at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). I'm a "Jackie" of all trades, aka a #Shreditor (Shooter, Editor, Producer). I'm in charge of writing, shooting, and editing social media promos and documentaries to promote International Exchange Programs, such as the Fulbright and Critical Language Scholarship program, as well as video-related training videos for U.S. embassies to help them translate and share videos abroad. It's extremely rewarding as it is all connected to our mission, to "increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational

and cultural exchange that assist in the development of peaceful relations."

It's been rewarding to see my video content shared and used at embassies around the world. My work is considered a form of public diplomacy creating a global impact, which is something I would never have anticipated while in undergrad. I get to interview people from diverse places, hear their stories, learn about where they come from and what they are doing. I'm so inspired by them all. I never thought I would work in government, but there is a place for artists there. There, our work has value. Our voices and expertise aren't muted as they sometimes can be, and, if anything, are uplifted.

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I also love not having to sit at a desk all day. I go on site for filming, interview people, and collect awesome video shots, all which brings me out of the office. I am reminded every day how lucky I am to have a job that supports my passion. It does require constant creativity, so it can take a lot of energy. You often have to be the negotiator between clients who have varying points of view.

Throughout it all, I've discovered a love for teaching. Last summer, I launched my own YouTube channel called "Premiere Gal," where I provide free video editing and production tutorials, templates, and resources.

How did you get to where you are?

It's probably not a surprise, but I majored in Film and Media Studies at UCSB. The faculty in that program were absolutely fantastic and always available. To name a few, Lisa Parks, Charles Wolfe, Peter

Bloom, and our department advisor and coordinator, Joe Palladino were big sources of support. While studying, I was also getting hands on experience. I interned at the Hollywood Reporter in L.A., worked as video editors on many films, and was a digital lab assistant at the Kerr Hall Digital Editing Lab.

I was so inspired by the research and writing of the faculty and graduate students at UCSB, I decided to take on a master's degree. I landed at Georgetown University's Communication, Culture, and Technology program. It's not a film school, but an interdisciplinary program that let me create my own track. My focus was on documentaries and marketing. There, I crowdfunded my own documentary and archive project on LGBTI spaces in D.C., which gave me a wonderful documentary and promotional video portfolio to present during my future job interviews. In grad school, I learned more about who I was and how to brand myself to stand out in a

crowd. It can be really hard setting yourself apart in such a massively competitive industry. It was also in grad school that I realized what I was capable of when I put enough passion, hard work, and drive behind something.

Afterward, I went on many coffee dates with potential employers and mentors and finally landed my federal contracting job at the U.S. Department of State's Digital Team at the ECA. I've been with them ever since.

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

Ah, there are so many awesome things that happened at UCSB that helped me! The best thing I did was write my own screenplay called "Over & Out" which was green-lit as a Film Production 106 class. I got to executive produce and choose a crew to make the screenplay into a film. Also, all the

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editing gigs I took on helped me realize my passion for post-production (video editing). I participated in Reel Loud (where I edited 16mm film) and many other student projects, such as the Green Screen Documentary course films.

I also studied abroad twice while at UCSB, one summer at the University of Cambridge in the UK and a semester abroad at La Trobe University in Australia. Studying abroad prepared me for the international aspect of my work, but also made me more adaptable and easier to work with. We try to promote this idea that when Americans go abroad or study a new language abroad it better prepares them for the future and, ultimately, they become citizen ambassadors of their country. My own experience is evidence for how true that is.

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

My graduate program and critical thinking skills definitely set me apart from others in my field, but that was because I also had a solid video production portfolio to complement my academic papers. Ultimately, employers in video production are looking for

people with production skills. I have massive student loans to pay off, which is something a lot of graduates have today and is quite frustrating to think about. So, I wish I could have gone back to my undergraduate self and said, “You can do anything you put your mind to, maybe without having to take out graduate student loans with high interest rates.” That said, I don’t regret my decision to go to graduate school — I would just recommend to others to do their research about the pros and cons and to understand that they need to have a solid job after to pay off the loans. Don’t assume grad school alone will get you that job, think about how to prepare yourself to be a competitive applicant.

Also, it’s easy to doubt yourself when you’re in a creative industry. I’m definitely guilty of it! You will have hard times, but they will make you stronger and wiser. During those times, it is so important to surround yourself with creative and positive people. Never isolate yourself! When you work in the creative field you **MUST** collaborate. You get jobs through your connections and relationships.

What was the best thing about being a Gaucho?

In my senior year I took a few graduate Film and Media studies courses to get a taste of what grad school had to offer. I enrolled in a course by Dick Hebdige (famous author on Subcultures), called *Deserting The Map: Mapping The Desert*. We studied the different mediations of the desert through films and writings throughout history. We got to take a three-day overnight class trip down to 29



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If an alum's story is meaningful to you, consider reaching out with questions and for mentorship using the contact information provided.

Palms and Joshua Tree. I pitched the idea of screening a montage of desert films. The montage would connect each film through the desert themes we learned in about class. I didn't think Dick would think it was feasible since we needed power (we were going to be outside) to be able to operate the projector and speakers needed to screen the film. But the night came for the screening and Dick drove up with a generator in the back of his truck and we did it!

It was this extra effort and enthusiasm for making things work from professors at UCSB that really made a difference. They went out of their way to make your dreams and visions come true. I think back on that night with an entire class watching this montage of desert I'd put together while out in the middle of the desert. It was this awesome meta-moment I'll never forget. I'll be forever grateful for that.

Any final words of wisdom for the current Gaucho generation?

Do you! I always struggled with finding one topic or project to focus on throughout long durations of time. I'd always jump around from one small project to the next with lots of energy and excitement. I always viewed it as a flaw. But now, I can see that it's the perfect quality for what I do. I "shred" up to 50 different projects per year at ECA. There are multiple program with all sorts of topics and stories to work with. I can jump between all these ideas and moving parts with ease because that bouncing focus has always come naturally to me. I would have told my undergrad self, "It's okay to have project ADD, it's exactly who you are supposed to be." And that's something for current Gauchos to think about. Those things about yourself you see as flaws just might be what makes you great in the right job.



Kelsey invites current Gauchos to reach out to her on Twitter or through her websites to ask questions about her career or the craft of film-making. Inquiries about open positions or requests to read resumes will not receive replies.

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