



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

College of Letters & Science

UCSB

# Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Stacey, a former English major who has tackled roles from video game researcher to technical writer.



**Stacey Church:  
Technical Writer  
SeeScan Inc**

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

I'm a technical writer. My company designs and builds technology that helps workers find the things we can't see: the secret underground world of buried utilities. Okay, it's not *really* secret, but if you're like me you grew up without much of an understanding of the infrastructure that makes daily life possible. It's critical for excavators and construction workers to know where buried pipes and cables are so as not to damage them, and our equipment helps them find those things.

My role is to create user manuals and white papers (which educate readers on solutions our company offers using case studies and third-party evidence) and to help on marketing-related projects. The strategy of any piece of writing—how technical it should be, whether to discuss the merits of competing solutions, how much to

mention the company's specific solution--can be a moving target. None of what I write would be possible without the help of our scientists and engineers, and a major part of my job involves speaking with them about our products and the technology behind them. There's some high-level physics involved, which is far outside of my realm of knowledge! By far the best thing is that I get to learn something new every day, whether it's about electromagnetism or how utilities work, and communicate that knowledge to the outside world.

## How did you get to where you are?

At UCSB, I bounced between majors several times. I started in English, switched to psychology, then to

**"Don't be afraid to change your mind."**



biopsychology, and finally settled back into English. I wrote my honors thesis on the representation of books in video games, which blended my passions for games studies, book studies, and neo-Medievalism. I also participated in the Arnhold Undergraduate Research Program, which I recommend to any English major considering graduate school! It's an excellent program that equips English undergrads for higher-level research in the humanities.

After graduating, I didn't feel ready for graduate school or settling into a career. I got a job cocktail waitressing at a local casino, working midnight to 8 am. I saved up money, then decided it was time to move on. For a while after leaving the job I had recurring dreams about carrying a tray of cappuccinos at 3 am on a weeknight.

I was accepted to Georgetown University's English MA program in Washington, DC. I didn't enter with a post-MA plan, but I knew that I

wanted to continue to make video games my focus.

Georgetown is unique among English graduate programs in that it offers an alternative to the master's thesis, which is a digital capstone project. I created a website on spatial exploration and identity in video games like *The Elder Scrolls* and *Dragon Age*. While I was at Georgetown, I also worked on a number of initiatives in online and hybrid learning at the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS).

I considered a lot of options with what to do next—writing, creating games, marketing, non-profit work. A little lost, I was applying broadly. Then my stepmother, a technical writer, told me about her work. It sounded interesting—I'm somebody who appreciates learning about how things work. In the posting for my current job, I was struck by the statement that it would entail a variety of written projects in addition to

technical writing. I highlighted my experience in writing for different purposes and with various styles, voices, and strategies. My writing samples included sections from the capstone, CNDLS blog entries, and a bug reporting document. I think having worn many hats during undergraduate and beyond helped my application jump out. A diversity of roles and experiences is something most employers are excited by.

The content and approach to writing for this job was entirely different from the type of writing humanities demands. I went from being encouraged to expand on and complicate ideas to searching for the best way to say something in the fewest words possible. And yet, there were some surprising parallels. Some of what I write uses a narrative arc and thematic continuity. One of my favorite things I'm tasked with is contextualizing technology in the larger world: What is the history of this

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technology? Why do workers rely on it? What goes wrong? What can we fix? Getting the wider story of something like receiver antenna design makes it more interesting and urgent to readers than a straightforward overview of how it works. A background in English plays nicely into this type of work.

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

I took a class called “Literature and Gaming.” I threw myself into it more than I had with any class previously. The title of the class was two of my favorite things in life—how could I not have loved it? The class introduced me to games studies, which would become the focus of my honors thesis. I connected with the PhD student teaching the course, now Dr. Amanda Phillips, and she became a friend and mentor to me. She encouraged me to apply for the English honors program and the Arnhold Program. My research was exciting and purpose-driven, and both programs fueled my desire to go to graduate school.

Also, although I came in considering a career in writing (and now I’m in a career in writing), I sampled other things during undergrad. As I mentioned before, I tried other majors. The exposure to other options ended up making me more certain of my career choice. Maybe for someone else, trying new things will lead them into a new direction. Both outcomes are good!

It’s easy to think that a bachelor’s degree in a subject naturally leads into one highly specific job or graduate program. In reality, the relationship between your major and what you do next is much more complicated. So research what people in your discipline have done post-graduation, whether by networking, scoping it out in advice forums, or talking to your professors, TAs, and people with similar interests.

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

I wish I would have taken more classes completely unrelated to whatever major I was pursuing at the time. You know the ones: maybe your relatives call them “underwater basket weaving classes” and tell you not to

waste your time. I look back on the few of those courses I did take, like playwriting and Roman civilization, and wonder what else I could have experienced. Seriously, now is the time. The longer you wait the more specialized your studies become, and once you enter the workforce or go into another degree program it might be more difficult to get your fix on dinosaurs or world music.



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

I also wish I would have known that writer's block is totally normal and not indicative of personal failure or the inability to write well. I still experience it regularly. Now it's like an old acquaintance who comes into my office uninvited and sits on my keyboard, but I know how to get rid of him. I never took advantage of all of the writing workshops UCSB has to offer, so if you're struggling with writer's block now, go take one!

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

I've yet to find a stronger sense of community along with a laid back attitude than what I had at UCSB. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that most undergrads live on campus or in Isla Vista. There's nothing like leaving your apartment or dorm and being able to walk

down the street and bump into your friends and classmates. It's easy to fall in with people you like when they're just a few minutes from you!

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

Don't be afraid to change your mind. I can't tell you how many times I've had conversations with friends and family members detailing point-by-point why biopsychology was the right major for me or how I was going to start studying for the MCAT over summer. If you're uncertain now or ever find yourself rethinking your choices, embrace it, take a risk, and try something new. You never know where you'll end up or what you'll fall in love with. You may find yourself having to explain why you've changed your mind yet again, but it's worth it.



*Stacey welcomes Gauchos to contact her via email for mentorship and with questions about technical writing or her research. Requests to review resumes will not receive responses.*

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