



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

College of Letters & Science

UCSB

# Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Paul, a former Sociology and Global Studies double major who is now the voice for student interests on the UC Board of Regents.



**Paul Monge:  
Student Regent  
UC Board of Regents  
JD Candidate, UC Berkeley**

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

The Board of Regents is the governing body for the entire ten campuses of the University of California system, including our three national laboratories and medical centers. Its primary responsibility is to make fiscal and operational decisions on behalf of the 240,000 students in the UC system, as well as personnel decisions across all ten campuses. It oversees admissions policies, financial policies, the hiring of chancellors and system-wide administrators, deciding capital funding for projects like the construction of new buildings, and much more.

The student regent is a steward of the University of California, but has the added responsibility of advocating on behalf of the needs of the undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree students. That can mean any-

thing from being a voice for the most pressing issues affecting the student body across the UC system to creating a platform for student activists and organizers to creating greater awareness around issues like "Fossil Free UC," police accountability, or the culture surrounding sexual assault.

I come from a background of student organizing as an undergrad at UCSB, where I was involved in tuition and access at UC, as well as worker and immigrant rights issues on campus. That's what propelled me to want to pursue public leadership roles within the UC system now that I'm pursuing my JD at the UC Berkeley School of Law. In the Regent position, there's an incredible amount of access to policy levers and the potential for pushing forward initiatives that could concretely impact the lives of students.

**"I want to continue to change realities that aren't tolerable or that shouldn't be."**



### How did you get to where you are?

When I came into undergrad, my initial focus, surprisingly, was Planetary Geology. But while taking GEs, I came across Sociology and Global Studies. Classes like those weren't available in high school. I was already doing social justice work and these classes provided me with a language and a framework for understanding it at a deeper level. I eventually declared the double major and built a critical perspective around power dynamics and racial dynamics that was really influential in my growth as a student organizer.

All four years I remained closely involved with student affairs and student government work. Associated Students, which I was involved in, operated about a \$7 million budget. We were entrusted by the student body to make wise decisions about how to use these public resources to their benefit. I didn't realize I was getting policy training by being in A.S., but later realized it was a mi-

crocosm of what governments look like in cities, states, and on the federal level. My last year, I had the opportunity to serve as A.S. President. It was an incredible honor to be at the table with administrators, representing a student body of 19,000. I started thinking that career-wise, I was interested in the intersection of policy with community organizing and building power for marginalized communities.

After undergrad, I was accepted into a fellowship in New York City analyzing policy for Mayor Michael Bloomberg. I really liked the work, but I have seven younger siblings in the San Francisco Bay Area and it was hard to be a big brother with a country in between us. So I found a position as a political organizer for a public sector labor union called SEIU Local 1021 in the San Francisco Bay Area. It advocates on behalf of public service employees—county workers, city government workers, non-profit employees. I transitioned into the role of Educa-

tion Policy Director for a non-profit organization that helps build the political power of public school families. I remained in that role until I entered graduate school.

I first did a Master's of Public Policy at the Kennedy School at Harvard University and now I'm pursuing my JD at the UC Berkeley School of Law. During the summer of my junior year of undergrad, I did a public policy fellowship program at UC Berkeley called PPIA, Public Policy and International Affairs. The program is designed to demystify the fields of both law and public policy, exposing young people to the jobs they might lead into. They also provide generous financial support for graduates of the program to go into policy and law programs. I learned that, for what I wanted to do, I'd need the legal component of how to do research and write the language of law, but also the policy training of how do you organize stakeholders, how do you use political

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power-mapping and landscaping to identify who the key decision-makers are. I thought the two degrees complemented each other very well and decided to pursue them separately.

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

My senior year, we were getting to a point in the economic recession where it became very financially burdensome for many students to continue attending the university. The successive years of tuition increases seemed relentless. Many of the students and their families were being laid off. There was a tremendous amount of economic hardship. That manifested on campus in several forms and one that was most apparent was lack of access to stable sources of food. We’d heard about students at UCSB skipping meals on a regular basis in order to be able to afford textbooks or rent. So we crafted a survey for the student body, which revealed the gravity of the issue of hunger and food insecurity at UCSB’s campus. We convened folks in Student Affairs, OSL, EOP, the Alumni Association, and a couple of the deans to sit around the table and think through strategies. I traveled down to UCLA

because I’d heard they’d started a food pantry--it was this awesome little closet where they offered free food and toiletries to student. We found there were about ten major food pantries at universities across the country at the time—we contacted them about what their model looked like, how they financed it, how they staffed it, how they made sure they complied with safety and environmental regulations and with all that information we crafted a formal business proposal that we showed to the attorneys at UCSB. It took a little back and forth with negotiations, but they approved what would end up being the A.S. Food Bank. April 2011, we formally opened. I remember on the first day we had something like four or five people and we were so excited. Now, there’s upward of fifty people that visit it a day. It’s both great and alarming that it continues to be needed as a service.

That for me was an example of how you can really use the leverage of government to materially improve the lives of students in a way that is felt by them. That experience solidified for me that I want to continue to change realities that aren’t tolerable or that shouldn’t be.

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

We enjoy this really incredible community of professors and scholars but we don’t really appreciate who they are and what they offer in their respective fields until we leave and we hear about their work once we’re away. For example, I took classes with certain professors who I didn’t get close to, but now, in professional settings, I mention I went to UCSB and people say, “have you worked or have you studied under professors A, B,



“Be okay with taking risks.”



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

or C in the Black Studies or the Chicano Studies or the Asian American Department?" And unfortunately I say no. If I could go back and have a conversation with myself about something I could change, it would be to understand who it is we have on faculty, to really appreciate their contributions to their fields, and to gain some mentorship from them and build longstanding relationships with them.

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

There's this incredible balance of people who are committed to their academics but also equally committed to building friendships and relationships. And that's why I think a lot of Gauchos thrive in fields like the one I'm pursuing—in public interest and government. It was great to be surrounded by similar folks

who wanted to grow professionally and academically, but also were dedicated to growing personally and as part of a greater society.

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

Be okay with taking risks. It's okay to not have lined up everything beyond graduation as long as you're honoring your values and your beliefs as you take each step. People who are at UCSB are there because they're very studious, they're successful in one respect or another, and I think we have this tendency to expect to have to know what the next step is. It's okay to swim in uncertainty and know that because of where we come from, because of our training, because of our leadership experiences on campus, the answers become apparent eventually.



*Paul welcomes UCSB students to contact him via email for mentorship and advice about career paths in public policy. Please do not send requests to review resumes.*

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