



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

College of Letters & Science

UCSB

# Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Nick, a former English major who's now shaping television entertainment, casting MTV's hit series, *Catfish: The TV Show*.



## Nick Dürnhöfer: Casting Producer

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

I work on MTV's *Catfish: The TV Show* as a casting producer for Relativity Television. The hit show focuses on couples that have met online but have yet to meet in person, often for suspicious reasons.

We do the investigative work and get people to finally meet on the show. My job in particular is to interview people about their stories and find the right cases to take on. I love storytelling and with my job I get to do that almost every day. *Catfish: The TV Show* may be a docu-series with real people, but you still have to figure out a way to tell those stories within the confines of an hour

-long program. As a casting producer, when you pitch someone's story, you have to explain why it's compelling and figure out how it could play out in the field. Of course, you can never fully predict what will happen on the show, but if you're a good producer, you'll have a pretty good guess. People apply to our show over at our site: [www.catfishcasting.com](http://www.catfishcasting.com).

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

I started off as a production assistant working for a few different TV talk shows. The produc-

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tion assistant is responsible for tying up all the loose ends of the show. They do research, run errands, take notes, keep track of release forms, book travel and accommodations, and scout for locations and props. The tasks aren't always fun, but most people in the industry start out that way. I learned a lot of patience and humility as a result.

As far as the entertainment industry goes, your major doesn't matter. I have seen producers from both the sciences and humanities. However, studying English did make me a strong writer and that's helpful for when I'm writing show idea pitches to supervisors and executives. The skills you get in a major are often what you're bringing to the table. As for the

thing that stood out most on my resume to help me get that first position out of college, it was actually my college journalism experience as an editor-in-chief at the *Daily Nexus*. The producer who hired me was looking for someone who could organize quickly, work under a deadline, and find good stories.

The early stages of my career required a lot of energy and long hours, including many (okay, most) weekends. Free time was scarce. The best thing I did during this time was to constantly ask questions from those with more experience. It helped me to advance and eventually get to where I am now. I worked closely with my associate producer and learned about his job. Eventually, the associate producer felt comfortable

delegating some of his responsibilities to me. When I was confident in my abilities and the time was right, I told him that I was interested in a promotion and got one. I did the same thing at another job where I was a casting associate and then became a casting producer. Basically, if you want to move up, put in the time to learn the job and impress your bosses. Perseverance pays off.

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

The greatest thing I did as an undergrad, hands down, was work for one of the best college papers there is: the *Daily Nexus*. I started as a reporter my freshman year and within the first month, I knew I want-

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ed to be editor-in-chief. I took every assignment my editor gave me and put my all into it. I got to know the ins and outs of the paper and worked my way up to editor-in-chief my senior year.

Working for the Nexus greatly improved my writing, analytical and organization skills. It also made me a stellar interviewer and introduced me to working with a team. Producing the newspaper, like producing a show, is very much a group effort and I was lucky to work with the most dedicated and intelligent group of editors and writers you could ask for.

All of this greatly prepared me for working in the entertainment industry. Even if you're not interested in a career in journalism or entertainment, I highly recommend working at the Nexus just for the great college experience and individual growth that comes with it.

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

If I had to do it all again, I probably would have met more often with an academic advisor. I changed majors several times. My idea of what I wanted to do kept changing and I wasn't enjoying what I was studying enough to excel in it. I eventually settled into English because I'd always loved reading and writing and it clicked with the work I was doing at the *Daily Nexus*. I think if I had talked to an academic advisor more often, I could have figured out what to do that much sooner.

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

Any time I see or hear about the *Daily Nexus*, I get very nostalgic. All those late nights under Storke Tower are to me unforgettable. I

look back and think about how passionate and dedicated everyone was and I think about all the fun we had doing it, too. There wasn't a place I would have rather been.



“Find something you love to do and get really active with it.”



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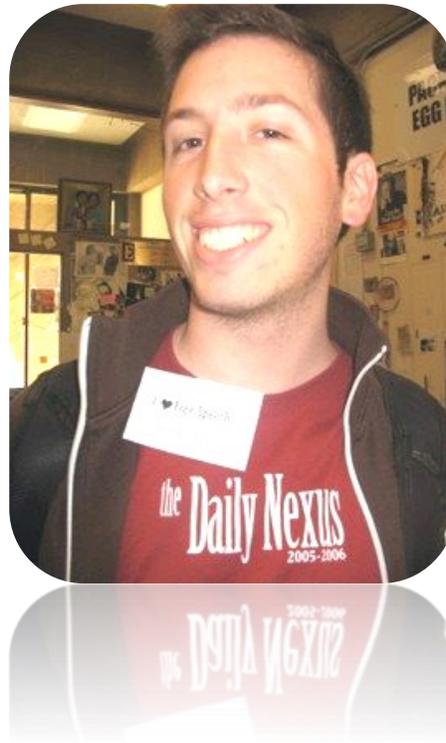


Next month's Spotlight features Hamed, a former triple major who now applies his love of deep thinking to creating risk models for financial firms.

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

For those getting into the entertainment industry, and maybe just for everyone, it's okay to feel stressed. Most people do when they start out. It doesn't mean that you can't do it. Vent to friends, go out when you can, and don't beat yourself up when you make a mistake.

Also, don't let your college years just fly by (even though they will anyway). Find something you love to do and get really active with it. Join a campus club or start your own if you have to. Your memory of that great school on the beach will only be greater for having done so, and most of all, you'll remember it as time well spent.



*Nick welcomes UCSB students to contact him via LinkedIn with questions about the field and advice on how to prepare for a career in television. Requests to review resumes or inquiries about job opportunities will not be responded to.*

<https://www.linkedin.com/pub/nick-durnhofer/22/3b7/4ab>



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*Editor:*

**Brandilyn Gilbert**  
Academic Advisor

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