



Alumni Spotlight

This month's Spotlight features Sarah, a former Communication major who, after coordinating film Q&A's with A-List Hollywood actors, has gone global to help build literacy and girls' education programs around the world.



**Sarah Levine:
Associate Manager
Global Business Development
Room to Read**

What are you up to now, post-graduation?

I work for an international nonprofit organization called Room to Read. We work across Asia and Africa to provide literacy and girls' education programs. Through working with local communities, partner organizations, and governments, we develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children and ensure girls have the skills and support needed to complete their secondary education. This year (2015) we are going to be celebrating our 10 millionth child benefitted, which is an incredible time for the organization as well as for me personally. Every child, regardless of where they are born, deserves the opportunity to learn how to read, write, and be able to make their own life choices.

My specific job is to raise money from corporations and foundations. I work with major companies on the West

Coast of North America and also support some of our global fundraising teams with strategy and resources. I have been with the organization for about two and a half years now and my forty-ish person team raises around \$45 million annually.

How did you get to where you are?

The biggest thing I have learned is that you have to figure out what you don't want to do just as much as you have to figure out what you do want to do. Right out of college, I was pretty confused which direction to take my career path. My interests and skills were broad. One of the Global Studies classes I took got me interested in working for a global nonprofit, but most of the jobs I found either required a very specific skillset or a lot of experience. So, I did what my

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parents suggested and I just got a job to start out. I first worked for our local Jewish Community Center in Orange County, assisting with various marketing projects and events. I then had the opportunity to move to Los Angeles and work for the LA Film Festival as a marketing intern. Concurrently, I had been given an offer to intern at a nonprofit called Global Green USA. I worked out my schedule so that I could intern at both – three days at the LA Film Festival and two days at Global Green USA. These six months were instrumental for me, as I learned what I was good at, what I liked, and just as importantly, what I didn't like.

Eventually, through the LA Film Festival, I was offered a job at Daily Variety magazine to help run the Variety Screening Series. While at Variety, in a three-month period of time, my boss and I ran around sixty screenings in LA, New York, and San Francisco of Academy nominated films for voting guild members. I

also coordinated a Q&A after each screening with the talent from the film. I had the opportunity to meet people like Robert De Niro, Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal, Kathryn Bigelow, Anna Kendrick, etc. I learned more in those few months than I thought possible, but I was exhausted. Most of my Monday through Friday (and often Saturday) started at 7AM and ended at around 12AM – not including the traffic I sat in commuting from Santa Monica to Hollywood. While the energy of Hollywood was fun and exciting, I realized that my time at Global Green as an intern was more my speed. Fortuitously, I received a call from Global Green as the Screening Series was wrapping up with an offer to apply for a job. Needless to say, I transitioned out of Hollywood and into the job that I would keep for the next four years.

I worked for Global Green in Los Angeles, New York, and then in San Francisco. I started as an assistant but moved my way up to work in

our Development Department and manage our Special Projects – the highlight of which was a solar installation project for abused women in the Congo, in collaboration with V-Day. From this job, I learned a breadth of skills. I learned how to be an effective Executive Assistant. I worked on marketing campaigns, social media, wrote proposals and managed both individual and corporate donors, and supported large-scale fundraising events across the US. Eventually, it made sense for me to transition to a job where I could focus in on the work I enjoyed the most – fundraising. I was also hoping to focus on international work, as my work on the project in the Congo was what always stood out to me as the type of work I enjoyed the most. I had been following Room to Read's work for years, and when there was an opening on the Global Business Development team, I quickly applied. And as they say, the rest is history.

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

There were two things I did that helped me find my path. The first was taking a variety of classes in different disciplines. While I majored in Communications and loved my classes, I also took a lot away from non-Comm classes. The three that stand out the most to me still were Global Studies, Human Genetics and Diseases, and a class on Autism. While those classes haven't directly affected my career path, they piqued my interests and helped me think beyond myself.

Second, I took advantage of office hours. I got to know my professors, developed relationships with them, and sought their advice. I still do the same thing today. I tend to find and get to know people who are in positions I respect, and learn from them. Whether a family friend, a colleague, a former boss, or even my parents, I find these relationships to be incredibly important as I develop my career path. Relationships with professors early on in college helped me forge this path and get in a habit of going out of my way to seek advice—and often, help.

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

If I could do it over again, I would have taken advantage of any opportunities I had to travel. One of the things that continues to get clearer the older I get is that traveling (and taking time off of work) gets harder! But my experiences traveling throughout Asia and Europe in my early-mid 20's profoundly helped shape who I am today.

When I look back at my study abroad experience in Rome, it stands out as the time in my life where I learned to be independent. I lived with people I had never met, I traveled by myself, and I took (calculated) risks. My decision to study abroad was one of the best decisions I made in college and I would highly recommend it to even those who feel it's outside their comfort zone. My four months in Italy changed me more than I ever could have imagined or hoped.

I do wish I would have looked into opportunities right after college that would have allowed me to travel or live somewhere exciting. I had looked into the Peace Corps, but the idea of committing two years seemed like too

long at the age of 22. First of all, two years at age 22 is not a long time. Second of all, I'm sure there were other opportunities I could have sought out that were a shorter time commitment, but I was too apprehensive. Whether it's an opportunity to travel, to live somewhere new, or to just get outside of your comfort zone, I would say do it while you can.



“...put yourself out there and try new things.”



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

What was the best thing about being a Gaucho?

The opportunity to live and study in one of the most beautiful cities in the world is what I loved most. I mean, think about it. You live walking distance from the beach, you have the BEST weather, you have Nobel Laureates on faculty, you have State Street an inexpensive Uber away—the world is your oyster! I remember my parents telling me that I should enjoy living near the beach, because it was the last time I would be able to afford it. Though said partially in jest, it was true! Going back to visit, I realize just how many opportunities there are for us Gauchos both on campus and throughout Santa Barbara. Take classes that interest you; study on the beach; go on hikes; wine taste on State Street; go to the zoo; play intramural sports. Seize every opportunity Santa Barbara has to offer, because it is one of the best cities out there! And did I mention

UCSB has intramural bowling? Tuesday can become your new Friday. Enjoy.

Any final words of wisdom for the current Gaucho generation?

Don't expect to graduate and have a light bulb moment where you suddenly know what you want to do with the rest of your life. Don't be concerned if you haven't yet figured it out. Personally, I found ages 22-25 to be a time where things in my life were constantly changing—jobs, apartments, cities, and dynamics with friends. If you feel this way, just know you aren't alone and that it is totally normal to be unsure. You don't have to decide on a career now. But you do need to put yourself out there and try new things. As I said before, it's the things you learn you don't want to do that are just as important as the things you learn you do love.



Sarah welcomes UCSB students to contact her via LinkedIn with questions or for advice regarding the fields she's worked in. Requests to review resumes or inquiries about open positions will not be responded to.

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