

JACKIE CHING '14

Alumni Spotlight, November 2018

Jackie Ching graduated from Pomona College in 2014 with a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE)-Economics Concentration, with a minor in Chinese. He is a law student and a former legislative staffer.

Ricardo candidly describes his years at Pomona as overwhelming, stimulating, and fun. We asked him a few more questions, and his responses are below. Thank you, Jackie!

How did your identity as a first-generation and/or low-income student impact your education and/or experience at Pomona?

I felt very grateful to be able to attend Pomona because I knew that as a first-generation and low-income student, it had been a long uphill fight for my family and me to even put me in a position to consider applying to Pomona. Knowing this encouraged me to think about fairness, equal opportunities, and society, some of the foundational pillars of social justice (which is a term I didn't even know existed until I came to Pomona), when considering my academic pathway and extracurricular activities.

For me, because I recognized that there were so many people (parents, educators, coaches, etc.) who helped make me become a better person resonated with me, I wanted to pay it forward and I looked for ways for volunteer to work with youth from disadvantaged communities. Fortunately, I didn't have to look too far because Pomona had its very own community engagement hub: The Draper Center. I began participating in Draper Center programs during my first semester in part to serve a cause greater than myself and in part to do something outside of class. The experience was very fulfilling, and more so, it opened the doors to my learning more about the world, meeting interesting people, and understanding what life-long principles are important to me.

If you could relive your 4 years at Pomona, what would you do differently?

For starters, I definitely felt a pressure to succeed and do well when I got to Pomona. Coming off from a strong academic track record and an understanding of the many sacrifices my parents made, I felt I "needed to" replicate if not exceed my previous academic accomplishments. I expected a lot from myself, and in a sense, I felt that if I didn't do well, I would be letting people down.

Looking back, I realized that I had subscribed to a terrible theory. It took me a few semesters shake it off and to realize that I did not need to impose on myself a standard that completely ignored the differences and circumstances between Pomona College and high school in Hawaii. If I could relive my 4 years at Pomona, I would probably strive to do my best, independent of my previous academic experiences. I would also be more zealous about going to office hours or review sessions when I needed clarification and assistance (I had felt a pressure to be self-sufficient and erroneously felt that getting help was an admittance of failure. In reality, whether in undergraduate or graduate school or in the professional environment, it is perfectly ok to ask for help!).



Most importantly, I learned how to ask for help and that reaching out was not a sign of weakness.

Bonus questions!

Favorite Spot on campus?
Stanley Academic Quad when the fountain is on.

Favorite class you took and why?
Advanced tennis. I really enjoyed being active and playing a sport that I really loved.

Jackie is also willing to communicate with current FLI scholars at Pomona about advice and navigating Pomona!

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Most Valuable lesson - inside or outside the classroom - you learned at Pomona?

Surprisingly, the main takeaways from class were the practices and ideas that I picked up. For example, my ethics classes challenged me to think about standing up for (or adjusting) my value system rather than avoiding tough or personal questions. My constitutional law classes taught me about the role of public policy and the rule of law in society. All in all, writing skills (don't hesitate to visit the Writing Center!), forming good study/work habits, and being able to ask thoughtful questions are some of the many very applicable "lessons" I took away from my classes.

Moreover, Pomona was where I met "my people," people with certain qualities and values that make me want to spend time with them. I met many fantastic individuals at Pomona who became my lifelong friends, and after Pomona, I continue to meet and spend time with people who inspire me. Last but not least, I realized that how I spent my free time at Pomona was very telling about what I was genuinely interested in and could see as an integral aspect of my future career. At Pomona, I spent a lot of time working with Draper Center programs, so I knew that I wanted to do something that helped to address injustices and inadequacies in disadvantaged communities.

What advice would you give current students or recent graduates interested in pursuing a career in your professional field?

I recently started my first year at law school in Hawaii. Prior to that, I worked a few years at the United States Senate for Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI) in Washington, DC.

I never thought I would consider applying to law school when I was at Pomona, but for anyone who is interested, I would recommend talking with lawyers, recent law graduates, or current students to see what law school entails. I also recommend taking a gap year or two to experience the working world as well as having an idea of why you want to attend law school. Knowing that I could use a law degree to do advocacy or help further good public policy is something that gives me purpose when I go to class every day.

For those who are interested in public policy or working at the legislature either at the state or federal level, it is great to begin by interning (either during the summer or after graduation) or taking on entry level positions at a representative's office. On the federal level, both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives websites have job bulletins. It also doesn't hurt to call your representative's office directly. As with many branches and spaces of government work, there are many intricacies concerning what working in U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives is like, so if possible, reach out to friends or mentors who are familiar with your workplace/ area(s) of interest to get a good sense about what working there is like and how to get started. Don't be shy—as long as you are friendly and respectful, you will be in a good place. Don't be phased if you are not a policy guru or if you don't know the ins and outs of the legislative process—you have time to hone that later.