

CARLA MARIA GUERRERO'06

Alumni Spotlight, May 2018

Carla Maria Guerrero graduated from Pomona College in 2006 with a degree in Latin American Studies. Currently, Carla serves as an Associate Director of News & Strategic Content in Pomona's Office of Communications. As the first person in her family to attend college, Carla recounts her time during Pomona feeling like an "outsider." However, with the love and support from friends and family, she overcame the feeling and went on to obtain her Masters in Print Journalism from USC. Thank you for your sharing your story, Carla!

"...my silver lining was being able to go home every weekend and help my parents out with their business at a local swap meet."

I was the first person in my family to go to college when I came to Pomona in 2002 – I traveled less than 10 miles from my home in the city of Pomona – and yet I felt like a complete outsider.

I was an introverted, socially awkward, "first-gen" and low-income brown girl with glasses. (I didn't go on Orientation Adventure because I thought it would require camping and I used to think that was only something you saw on TV sitcoms, and because I imagined anything beach-related required a bikini and a bikini body – I am Mexican, so I was used to going to the beach wearing a giant t-shirt and shorts!)

During orientation, while I was walking to Seaver to take the chemistry placement exam, the feelings of doubt and insecurity hit me hard. The minute I took a seat at a desk I immediately got back up and left. I let those feelings take over and I convinced myself that I would have failed that exam anyways. These feelings overwhelmed me at points throughout my first two years at Pomona – my silver lining was being able to go home every weekend and help my parents out with their business at a local swap meet. I felt that the swap meet, although tiring work, helped ground me and rejuvenate me to continue on at Pomona. That, and the fact that my parents were so immensely proud that I was in college!

However, along with my journey, I met some amazing friends – friends who made a huge effort to draw me out of my shell – friends who are still my friends today and whom I love with all my heart. We bonded while on study abroad in Havana, as suitemates in Walker, as classmates in Spanish class, we commiserate over terrible faculty and started fan clubs for our favorite professors!

After you leave Pomona, if you go on to graduate school, please know that you will be some of the most academically prepared people in your programs. You will handle most projects with ease. You'll look back on your four years as rigorous but academically rewarding. I also learned something about myself – that I am resilient, that I am intelligent and smart, that I can do well at a place like Pomona – while I didn't take that chemistry exam I did pass the writing placement exam. I dove wholeheartedly into my Latin American Studies major and fell in love with everything I learned in my classes. I was able to travel to Chiapas, Havana and Peru, because of Pomona. I met amazing faculty mentors because of Pomona. I learned that I could make it here, and that gave me the confidence to get through graduate school and start my career.



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Carla wants students to get in touch. She's available via email and in person in the communications office in Alexander Hall, Room 117.

MARICELA CRUZ '14

Alumni Spotlight, April 2018

Maricela Cruz graduated from Pomona College in 2014 with a degree in Mathematics. Currently, Maricela is a Ph.D. candidate in statistics at the University of California, Irvine. Maricela describes her years at Pomona as bittersweet, motivating, and eye-opening. We asked her a few more questions, and her responses are below. Thank you Maricela!

"Do not feel guilty about your struggles—that is not how that works (or really how it should work)."

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

Work with people who you are mathematically compatible with, not socially compatible (although both are good). Even when you choose an advisor, find someone who you know you will be able to work well with; you can always learn about a new research topic but you cannot force yourself to work well with someone.

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

The first-generation and low-income components of my identity have continuously been at the forefront of my education. At Pomona my status as a first-generation low-income student stressed, pushed, and fortified me constantly. I often felt limited in what I could or could not do and say because of my monetary constraints or because I felt that my truth would make others uncomfortable.

I came from a working-class, single-parent household that never had extra money. At Pomona, I constantly felt embarrassed because I could not afford certain things, angry because I felt embarrassed, and centered because I had purpose. To add fuel to the pre-existing poverty, before starting at Pomona my mother suffered a work-related incident that made it impossible for her to work a labor related job full time. Fortunately, she won a whopping \$35,000 in a lawsuit against the company she worked for. I was able to come up with a plan for her so that the \$35,000 would last her the entire 4 years that I would be at Pomona. My sister (who is seven years older and has worked since the age of 14) vowed to work enough and sacrifice her schooling to pay the remaining familial living expenses. So even though \$35,000 does not sound like a lot of money (especially to most people at Pomona), that money along with my sister's sacrifice served as the backbone to our family's security during my four years at Pomona.

The financial security of my family after those planned four years would rest on my shoulders. Because of that, almost every choice I made about work-study, social excursions, summer plans, and post-Pomona life was formed around my existing and future financial responsibilities. I now, with my graduate school funding, am able to provide for my mom and minimally help my sister. I hope and know that post-graduate school I will be able to do more for my family as a whole. I am in this for the long haul.



Fun questions!

Favorite Spot on campus?

Lincoln classrooms past 8pm (they keep some doors unlocked). Perfect for studying, blasting music, and projecting movies.

Favorite Pomona Professor and Why?

Jo Hardin because she provided (and continues to provide) unrelenting encouragement to my personal and academic development.

Maricela is also willing to talk to current quest scholars about advice and navigating Pomona!

ASHLEY LAND, '16

Alumni Spotlight, March 2018

As the Money Matters photo campaign resounds across the nation, at institutions like Colby College and Amherst College, it is time to recognize the intense energy and love that the founder of the week-long event has invested in our community. **Ashley Land '16** graduated with a degree in Media Studies, led initiatives such as securing a physical space for the first-generation community on campus, and now works as a Communications Assistant for Community Coalition in South LA to empower civic and social justice movements.

"Our QuestBridge Chapter Was Truly My Guiding Light"

"My mantra in college was that I would not allow myself or others to call me poor because although I may have been "poor" financially, I was not poor in intelligence, beauty, power, or love for my community. Those words continuously got me through every single time I thought I wasn't good enough or was undeserving to be in the position I was in--a first-generation college student at one of the most prestigious colleges in the country.

Pomona can be the best four years of your life if you take advantage of every single moment. But you have to be 1. brave enough to ask for help and get support when you need it. I can't count how many times I was in the Career Development Office speaking with Wanda Gibson about my career, my struggles finding an internship, and how I was scared that my major wouldn't get me anywhere in life.

You have to be 2. bold enough to claim every opportunity that comes your way whether that be going to a conference, doing research with a professor, using free camera equipment to create art, volunteering at the Draper Center, mentoring someone younger than you, and the list goes on.

And lastly, 3. you MUST find your community. I don't know what I would've done without my friends, the faculty and staff that supported me and believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. I am so grateful to Montez, Adiza, Ida, Shani, Lizzie, Sergio, Shaina, Donald, Fiker, Michelle Gonzalez, Dean Townes, Wanda Gibson, Rita Shaw, Carmen Brown, Mary Paster, Jahan Boulden, Frank Bedoya, Will Torres, and so many more for really being there for me mentally and emotionally. When they asked me how I was, I knew it wasn't that Claremont-Colleges-in-passing "Hey, how are you!". It was like hey, how are you really?

Because of these three tips I can now say I was the Commencement speaker at my own graduation, I studied abroad in Spain, I produced a huge initiative focused on class consciousness called Money Matters that is still thriving, and I am now living in Los Angeles working at one of the coolest non-profits using digital media to make a huge impact on the lives of Black and Latino residents in South LA. When I first applied to QuestBridge, I didn't know how much it was going to change my life, but now, I am certainly glad I did it."



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