

Alumni Profile Questionnaire
Derek Dolfie – Master of Public Policy Program



Career

Please provide a brief overview of your career path since graduating from UCI.

Since graduating from UCI, I work at the League of California Cities in Sacramento, CA as a Legislative Policy Analyst. I have worked at the League since December 2016. I have cover three different issue areas: environmental quality, public safety, and transportation.

What made you get into the career that you are in?

My undergraduate degree in political science, coupled with my master's in public policy made me very interested in working in California state politics.

What do you see yourself doing in five or ten years?

In five to ten years, I hope to continue to work in Sacramento in both the policy and politics world. Some of the things that I very much enjoy about my job is the wide range of topics I get to learn about and the direct impact my work has on the people of California.

How do you hope to make a difference?

I hope to make a difference by using both my analytical and political skills to better the lives of the people of California. In my current job representing cities, I can see a direct correlation between my work and the city I live in (Sacramento). Be it through local government advocacy or otherwise, I aim to have my work will always be for the betterment of the public.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

2014 – 2016

What program were you in?

Master of Public Policy

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

UCI fit my graduate school needs the best. Also, any school near the beach is always a plus.

Reflections

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

After graduating from San Diego State University with a bachelor's in political science, I realized that while I knew a lot about theory and concepts, I didn't have any marketable skills. Graduate school was a way for me to bridge the gap between having knowledge and skills in my chosen career path.

What is your most memorable moment/experience at UCI?

My most memorable moment at UCI was when I presented my capstone project with my team in front of my colleagues, professors, and the public. After spending the better half of a year working on a project and it finally coming to fruition was a great experience. It felt surreal to be up on a dais presenting and answering questions from some of the smartest people I had ever met. It certainly made me excited to get into the real work and start my career.

Was there one thing or one person at UCI that really helped or made a difference in your graduate/postdoctoral career? If so, tell us about whomever or what it was?

The Public Policy Student Association (PPSA) I think really helped not only myself, but my fellow colleagues during our time at UCI. The PPSA was created by me and a couple other MPP students who felt that the MPP graduate students needed to have a group where they could talk, share ideas, and discuss MPP business with the program staff. Without this group, I'm would not have been able to take advantage of all of the resources UCI had to offer.

Did you do any research while at UCI and what was it?

Yes, I conducted research for Professor Graeme Boushey in the Political Science Department, who is a faculty member for the MPP program. My research with Professor Boushey was focusing on the dissemination of policy ideas between states. It was a really fascinating theory and I thoroughly enjoying playing a part in his research.

What has impressed you most about the subject matter that you chose for your research/degree while at UCI?

Studying public policy is widely applicable to a number of fields. My program focused on both educating students on the policy concepts and on the tools and research methods needed to analyze policy. This combination has come in handy in my current field of California state politics. I am very grateful that what I learned in the MPP program is so easily translatable to my profession.

Alumni Life

What are you currently up to?

Currently I am working full time at the League of California Cities in Sacramento as a Legislative Policy Analyst. In my spare time I am the Lead Advisor for the California YMCA Youth and Government El Dorado delegation, which has around 100 delegates. This program creates a model California state legislature and court program for high school kids. The delegates get to actively participate in a model state government and learn firsthand out government works. I did this program when I was in high school and it influenced me to pursue a career in politics. It's a lot of work but also a lot of fun.

How did your education at UCI benefit you in your current life?

My education helped me get my foot in the door at my current job and gave me the baseline knowledge to do my job effectively. With the labor market tightening, you need every skill to stand out to employers. Without my MPP degree, I'm not sure my job application would have been as appealing.

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who is just getting started with their graduate career at UCI? (Examples – Podcast: *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*; Book: *Who Moved my Cheese*)

I am an avid National Public Radio listener. I listen to the NPR One app on my phone every day. NPR has a number of really interesting podcasts that you can subscribe to that explain everything from what is happening in federal politics to explaining complex economic principles. A couple of my favorites are the NPR Politics Podcast, Up First, Freakonomics, and Planet Money. I would highly recommend listening to these as you begin your MPP program.

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who has just graduated and is transitioning to the working world? (Examples – *The First 90 Days*)

Similar to by other answer about what podcasts to listen to as your start your program, I would say continue to listen to the podcasts I mentioned after you graduate. All of these podcasts are updated weekly, so you will always have fresh information.

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

Here is a list of some of my advice to new graduate students:

1. *Don't stress*
2. *If you are stressed, remember to break things down into smaller tasks and focus on doing one thing at a time*
3. *It's ok if you don't know what you want to research or what career you want to do. Try on different hats and see which one fits*
4. *Utilize all of the resources around you. Your graduate program, the University, and your fellow colleagues all have valuable resources that you can tap into. Don't be afraid to use them!*
5. *Network, network, network*
6. *If you don't advocate for yourself and your interests, no one will. Don't be afraid to ask for things*
7. *Attend all of the lectures, talks, events you can. You will learn a lot and they always have free food*
8. *Don't mix work and play. Dedicate specific time frames for specific tasks. Research when you research and relax when you relax*
9. *Work life balance is a real thing. Find something that relaxes you or makes you happy and dedicate time every day to doing that thing*
10. *You are smart, talented, and driven. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. Don't let yourself think you are not qualified or intelligent enough. Everyone feels like that at some point*

What advice would you give to a current graduate student as they look towards their future careers?

Be relentless in pursuing your career goals. Don't take no for an answer. It took me around 6 months of applying to jobs every day for me to find my first job. If you really want to start a career in a specific field, then get a job in that field. Be creative in how you get your name out there. Cold call or email people who are established in that field and ask them how they got to their position. Make your own business cards and hand them out at job fairs. Don't settle for "a job," find one that you really want to do even if it takes longer to find.

What was your biggest obstacle transitioning from life of a graduate student to your career?

I remember that I thought I was super busy in graduate school, but it's nothing compared to how busy I am now in the workforce. In graduate school you have a lot of work to do, to be sure, but you can, for the most part, customize your schedule. Once you get involved in a company and are salaried, you quickly realize that there just aren't enough hours in the day for everything you want to do.

What is the most unexpected life lesson that you gained from your time at UCI?

You never know the answer until you ask the question. There were times at UCI when I didn't think something was possible and almost didn't even bother to try it. But, by simply asking, certain academic and career doors opened for me. All you have to do is

ask the question. It's like that cliché Wayne Gretzky quote, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

What are your hobbies/passions outside of your work/research?

My hobbies mainly involve being outside, either running, biking, hiking, or just sitting in a park. Being cooped up doing research or working just really makes me want to get outside. I am also very passionate about getting youth engaged in politics and turning them active members of civic society. Making sure that the next generation of voters is educated in both the political process and the prominent issues is something I am passionate about.

How do you balance work/life?

I make sure to make time for myself. Meaning, I deliberately plan things for me to do that are not related to work. That could be as simple as going for a run before work or complex as planning a vacation. You have to make time for yourself or you will get burned out.

What person inspires you?

I derive a lot of inspiration from my coworkers at the League. There are really smart, dedicated, and driven people who work there and seeing them operate makes me want to work harder and become better.