



ANA VICTORIA FORTES is a Civil Rights Analyst at the US Commission on Civil Rights. She graduated from Cal Poly in 2012 with a master's degree in Public Policy.

## **Alumni Spotlight: Ana Victoria Fortes**

*By Camden Belliveau*

Many people aspire to advocate for the causes they consider important in a professional capacity. Ana Victoria Fortes has made that dream a reality. As a graduate from Cal Poly in 2012, with a Master's in Public Policy emphasizing social welfare policies and entitlements, Ana Victoria put herself in a position to represent the interests of those who are often neglected or unrepresented. As a Civil Rights Analyst at the US Commission on Civil Rights, she has acted on that that dream. Hands on experience influenced her decision to choose political science prior to grad school.

“While teaching English for 6 months at a Thai non-profit in Nong Khai a year before applying for graduate school, I observed the importance of public policy and its impact on every day people. Isara, which unfortunately went under a few years ago, was focused on providing English language classes to the community while also engaging in various community initiatives like their public safety helmet campaigns and conservation and recycling efforts. I witnessed collaboration among local officials and Isara to promote the helmet campaign specifically to promote public safety among families in our neighborhood which bordered one of the busiest streets. I was fascinated by the democratic process being used in local communities to enact laws and wanted to learn more about this process through a formal education and hopefully find my way into a profession that has a similar component.”

During her time at Cal Poly, Ana Vi credits “Jean Williams because she oversaw my thesis which focused on examining the effectiveness of federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. I appreciated that she was/is a faculty member because there were so few professors who focused on social welfare policies. The Politics of Poverty class was incredibly substantive, and I will forever remember her for that course.” She also credits Michael Latner for reigniting her enjoyment of statistics, and Elizabeth Lowham for helping navigate through a difficult graduate program.

Ana Vi is passionate about civil rights and wanted to work to better civil rights at an agency that is “not subject to the political changes that other federal agencies experience;” working as Civil Rights Analyst at the US Commission on Civil Rights actualizes that desire. Her work consists of “documenting civil rights issues and developing recommendations for addressing them. The US Commission on Civil Rights conducts research on various civil rights issues across the US and communicates these recommendations to the President, Congress, and various federal enforcement agencies.”

Her advice to Political Science students is to network in the fields you are interested in and pick the brain of professionals who are more experienced than you. Also, take a contract negotiation class so you know your worth! Lastly, she strongly encourages women, and women of color specifically to use their unique experiences as leverage in the workplace. She has found that being honest about unique experiences, especially in homogeneous environments, can truly influence decision-making in the workplace and in school, and be a catalyst for change.

Her hobbies include being politically active and engaging in local campaigns, reading, lifting at the gym, spending quality time with her partner, friends, family, and her 13-year-old half Shiba Inu- half Shih Tzu Biggie Smalls, and lastly making time for international and domestic travel.