Graduation Spotlight: Anya Sastry (BSM '24)

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Name: Anya Sastry

Describe yourself in 15 words or less: “She could be herself, by herself.” – Virginia Woolf

Fun fact: In the first 18 years of my life, I lived in every region of the United States!

Hometown: Barrington, Illinois

Major: B.S.M. in Finance and B.A. in International Relations

Favorite Business Course: FinTech and Blockchain

Extracurricular Activities, Community Work and Leadership Roles During College:

- Altman Scholar in International Studies and Business
- Weatherhead Scholar
- Member of the 2022 Mandel-Palagye Program for Middle East Peace

Internships:

U.S. Government (2022 and 2023)

Post-Graduation Plans: I plan on working for the U.S. Government

Favorite business professor:

When I first declared finance as my major within the business school, I was with Professor Myke Yest for an International Studies and Business summer study abroad experience in Merida, Mexico. I had just completed his month-long Introduction to Finance course, the first finance-specific course that I had ever taken, and it challenged me to use my brain in ways that I was not quite used to. I was initially unsure about my ability to take on this entirely new subject as my major; however, through his passion for the subject and his determination to see every student succeed, I felt energized and excited to spend the next four years dedicating my business school education to finance. Professor Yest recognized my abilities even when I doubted myself and for that I am grateful. I was recently given a piece of advice along the lines of “Have someone in your corner who will never allow the fear of failure to sit in your mind,” and in that moment, as well as in the four years since, Professor Yest has been one such person for me. He has continuously supported me in my endeavors and encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone in order to pursue my best self, and I could not be more appreciative.

What is the biggest lesson you gained from studying business?

Studying business has taught me the importance of developing mental agility and utilizing an innovative mindset in order to provide forward-thinking insight in an increasingly complex world. In my international relations studies, I am constantly studying and working with traditional theories and structures in order to label and analyze the world around us. While this way of learning is partly applicable to my finance studies, I have found that my business school classes have generally encouraged me to apply methods, data, and concepts in ways that consider the future rather than reflect on the past. I believe both are important; however, I am particularly grateful to my business education for fostering the kind of flexible thinking needed to effectively navigate evolving environments.

What advice would you give to a student looking to major in a business-related field?

As a woman of color in the business school, I specifically want to tailor my advice to young women of color who may be considering a major in a business-related field. Something that I encountered when I began my business education was intense imposter syndrome. Everyone in my classes looked entirely different from me and oftentimes, I was convinced that I was not at the same level as my peers, who were seemingly so confident and participative in classes. What I wish I knew in those moments is that everyone there was learning just like me and that being my own number one supporter is the most important thing I could do for myself. To my fellow young women of color: never doubt yourself and what you bring to the table (especially because there will be enough people in life who will do that for you). Seek out environments with people whom you can learn from, but do not forget your own intrinsic value.

What has surprised you most about majoring in business?

I have been so pleasantly surprised throughout the past four years at the expansiveness of the business education. Many of my friends are also pursuing a degree in business; however, each of us on any given day are studying completely different things, whether it be distressed debt, white collar crime, auditing, negotiation techniques, and much, much more. I myself am concentrated in finance, yet even within that major, I am covering a range of concepts, from climate risk in financial markets to cryptocurrency and blockchain to fixed income. The business education truly offers such a wide range of experiences and I highly appreciate how students have the freedom to pursue varied passions.

Looking back over your experience, what is the one thing you'd do differently in business school and why?

If I was able to change one thing about my experience, I would get more involved in the entrepreneurship side of the business school. I have always been interested in innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-ups, and I think I would have learned a lot from participating in events such as pitch competitions.

Which academic, extracurricular or personal achievement are you most proud of?

My time in Jerusalem and the West Bank through Tulane's Mandel-Palagye Program for Middle East Peace was transformative and is something that I consider to be a hallmark of my time at Tulane. The academic outcome of that program was an in-depth research paper centered on any aspect of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and I chose to write mine on the use of cyber tools in the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian Territories. I am extremely proud of this paper, as it is the product of countless hours spent on the ground in Jerusalem and the West Bank, researching and conducting interviews (some more off-the-grid than others) with Palestinian activists who recounted their first-hand experience of intense Israeli surveillance, hacking, and censorship. To be able to bring this information back to my community at Tulane means so much to me, as oftentimes, the reality of what is happening on the ground gets lost in the potential bias and conformity of journalism, academia, and social media.

Which classmate do you most admire?

One classmate that I have admired for some time now is Annalise Rotunda. Beyond being a very kind and generous person, Annalise has a brilliant penchant for entrepreneurship and innovation. She is currently pursuing a B.S.M. in Management on the Entrepreneurship track and I have thoroughly enjoyed watching her embody the spirit of a businessperson and excel in her high-level entrepreneurship incubator classes. Annalise knows how to not only think outside the box, but how to deconstruct the box entirely in pursuit of future-oriented business ideas that positively impact society. As long as I have known Annalise, she has been committed to pursuing her life purpose by bettering the communities she is a part of and the world around her, and I think that that is an ideal quality to have in an up-and-coming entrepreneur and leader.

Who would you most want to thank for your success?

Individual success is built on a strong support system of family, friends, and mentors, thus, quite a few individuals come to mind for this question; however, I would especially like to thank my father for my success. Since the early days of my childhood, my father has raised me to constantly live one step outside of my comfort zone, and to do so with quiet confidence in myself and with respect toward others. Having a parent who helped me push past fears of going outside of my comfort zone was instrumental in shaping me into the person that I am today and will serve me extremely well as I move through life.

What are the top two items on your professional bucket list?

- Lead peace negotiations and pursue conflict resolution between relevant parties on the Israel-Palestine conflict as the United States Secretary of State
- Launch a fully-funded leadership in politics/global affairs program for young girls of color