GLADSTEIN FAMILY HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE

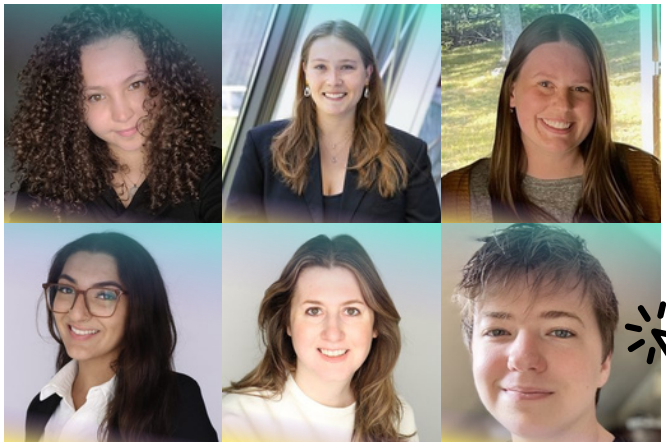
September, 2026

Ask an Alum Advice Column

Do you have a question about navigating life at UConn, finding your place in the human rights field, professional development, or life after graduation?

Good news: HRI is launching a monthly Ask an Alum advice column, where each month, a panel of HRI alumni will answer questions submitted by current HRI students. No question is too big or too small. Ask about making the most of your time at UConn, choosing classes or opportunities, getting involved on campus, figuring out what you want to do after graduation, navigating possible professional opportunities, or anything else you'd like advice on from someone who's been in your shoes.

Meet our Alumni



Submit a Question

Question 1

What advice do you have for students about how to get the most out of their final year at UConn?

Question 2

Why did you decide to pursue additional degrees after graduating from UConn?

Question 3

How did you find your first job after graduation?

Question 4

Has it become more difficult to pursue human rights or related work in this political moment?

What advice do you have for students about how to get the most out of their final year at UConn?

Emily Longmire, Class of ‘21

“I think the best way to get the most out of your final year is to just do as much as you possibly can on campus. Go to as many basketball games, attend as many cultural events, and spend as much time with your friends as possible. Undergrad is such a unique time in your life where you have some of your best friends in such close proximity to you. Once you graduate and you move to different places and start your lives, you will miss that closeness a lot. So, spend as much time with your friends and try and experience as much of the campus as you can before you leave.”

Castella Copeland, Class of ‘19, ‘17

"Take time to do less. I was so involved that I did not have as much time to enjoy the senior year activities. Take time to appreciate campus by doing some of the iconic UConn festivities! Have some last hurrahs with your friends and take pictures for the memories.”

Gamze Ozker, Class of ‘24

"One thing I would highly recommend is using the available resources while they are easier to access. In addition to the more familiar ones, I would suggest looking into what else is offered through the university, such as consultations with subject librarians or language learning and conversation groups.

If I were in my final year again, I would take a course outside of my comfort zone. Being a student gives us more room to explore different approaches and to revise when needed. I do not mean being careless, but there is something valuable about having the freedom to experiment intellectually when the stakes are usually lower than when working on a funded project or preparing work for publication.

Also, I think it is completely understandable to feel uncertain or under some pressure about what comes next after graduation. Our professional and intellectual interests can continue to evolve and become more specific over time. So I think the final year can be a time to narrow the possibilities without feeling that we have to decide exactly what we will do next.”

Taylor Mallon, Class of ‘19

"Don’t be afraid to reach out to professors, mentors, or alumni for their advice. It can feel overwhelming to decide on your post-grad plans, but talking it through with people you trust can be a huge help. And remember to soak up your last few months on campus! You might feel ready to start “real life”, but make sure to take advantage of this time with your friends before graduation."

Ashten Vassar-Cain, Class of ‘25, ‘24

Talk to people in careers that you could see yourself in, find out what they like (or dislike) about that career path. Focus on the practical skills you learned from your assignments, try to see how you can grow those skill areas outside of UConn. Something that helped me was to also start paying attention to deadlines outside of the university (hiring cycles, grant proposals, calls for papers, workshops you want to take). I think this is a great time to draw on the resources and support of the university while remaining open and creative to explore a direction that is fulfilling. "

Why did you decide to pursue additional degrees after graduating from UConn?

Emily Longmire, Class of ‘21

“I graduated from UConn in 2021, when COVID restrictions were still in place and the world was still pretty locked down. I originally decided to pursue a graduate degree because the job market was not great and I was not really sure how I wanted to use my degree. I chose a graduate degree based on a path I thought fit my interests, which was public policy. In the end, I decided public policy was not for me, but I still learned plenty of transferable skills that I use in my work life. It wasn’t until I worked in law that I realized that that was where my passion lay.”

Castella Copeland, Class of ‘19, ‘17

"After graduating, I was not quite sure where I wanted to go just yet but knew it was somewhere in the field of education. I pursued a masters and then doctoral degree to help me advance my skills and knowledge. This path ultimately allowed me to expand my network and make meaningful connections both in and outside of UConn.”

Gamze Ozker, Class of ‘24

“I decided to apply to doctoral programs because I want to pursue a career in academia and research. I had been interested in studying conflict and political violence long before beginning my master’s. At UConn, I had the opportunity to develop that broader interest into more specific questions. The interdisciplinary nature of the program and the research methods course helped me realize that I wanted to examine those questions through political science.”

Taylor Mallon, Class of ‘19

"I graduated with a dual degree in History and Human Rights, and wished I had time to take more business-related courses in undergrad. The full-time MBA program at UConn gave me the general experience in business that I was looking for, while also allowing me to explore the ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) field through an internship."

Ashten Vassar-Cain, Class of ‘25, ‘24

“Since I wanted to go into the Library/Archives world, I started looking at degree requirements for different positions and saw that many of them required a Master's of Library Science. I spent my last year comparing programs and trying to find one that was the right fit (and it ultimately came down to funding/flexibility). Now I work in a role where I apply both my human rights background and archival studies, and it's a great fit!"

How did you find your first job after graduation?

Emily Longmire, Class of ‘21

“I found my first job through a friend who worked in the job the year before. She was working as an AmeriCorps Legal Advocate, and she knew I was having trouble figuring out my next steps and my interests. After speaking with her about her work, I applied to be in the 2023-2024 cohort and was accepted.”

Castella Copeland, Class of ‘19, ‘17

“I found my first full time job two years after I graduated from a mutual connection. Those LinkedIn connections and networking events are key! In those two years, I worked multiple part time jobs, networked, went to events, and pursued my masters degree. I wish someone was more transparent about the job market after I graduated since I was expecting to find and or line something up right away. I am grateful for landing a role that I truly enjoyed and human rights centered. However, I wish I had given myself more grace and compassion.”

Taylor Mallon, Class of ‘19

“Immediately following graduation, I worked a few part-time jobs while applying to and starting grad school. One of these part-time jobs was in retail, since I knew I was interested in working in the apparel industry eventually. While it wasn’t my end goal, I gained a ton of helpful experience in management and general business that I still use today.

I found my first full-time job after graduate school through LinkedIn, where I had been following several companies I was interested in. I reached out to the recruiter for a position I knew I was under-qualified for, but we made a connection and kept in touch for a few months, and they eventually reached out with a position they thought I might be interested in. Don’t be afraid to reach out and make connections, even if you aren’t sure you are qualified yet!”

Ashten Vassar-Cain, Class of ‘25, ‘24

“After graduating UConn, I was job searching for a while and doing some independent contracting work for some orgs. While I was in my final year at UConn, I was also putting together grant proposals for the organization I worked with for my Capstone. A project ended up getting funded, and I relocated to be an archivist in Philly and applying for subsequent grants. It was quite jarring to go from applying to entry level positions to being a Principal Investigator on 2 large projects, but I am very lucky it worked out that way!”

Has it become more difficult to pursue human rights or related work in this political moment?

Emily Longmire, Class of ‘21

“I think a silver lining about the current political climate is that there are so many people passionate about human rights who have felt a call to action. Because of this, I think there are so many more opportunities to engage with like-minded people on human rights topics. While there may not be as many government jobs relating to human rights, there are so many non-profits and smaller organizations that are dedicated to human rights work that need supporters, volunteers, and employees to carry out work that the government may not be doing. It is a matter of finding those groups and offering whatever support they may need to carry out their goals.”

Castella Copeland, Class of ‘19, ‘17

“I feel like it has, however, there are pockets within education and healthcare where the ethos of human rights is essential. If you can market the skills you have gained in your human rights roles as interdisciplinary and really showcase concrete examples, you will be able to do anything with your degree!”

Taylor Mallon, Class of ‘19

"Since starting in the workforce during the pandemic, I’m not sure I have ever worked in a “normal” political moment. Human rights and related work have always faced challenges, partly because their nature is challenging to the status quo and traditional business practices. It is helpful to understand and be able to make the case for the business benefits of human rights work, which is a skill I worked on a lot as an undergrad in business & human rights courses at UConn!"

Ashten Vassar-Cain, Class of ‘25, ‘24

"Yes. But it has always been difficult, and it will continue to be difficult. I wish I had something more uplifting to say, but I do not want to be toxically positive. There are people who care, surround yourself with those people, and take care of yourself. There will always be more work to do, and that work may look different from what you initially expect."