



Meet Emily

Emily Smith, Beta Xi–Purdue University, is currently the Chief of Staff of Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) at the United Nations Foundation. FP2020 is a global partnership supporting the UN Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent's Health. With the support of Emily's family, friends and sisters, she successfully supports women and girls around the world in achieving their hopes and dreams, day-in and day-out.

Photo by: Stacy Zarin Goldberg Photography

TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR ROLE AT THE UN FOUNDATION WITH FP2020?

As Chief of Staff, I act as the right-hand to our Executive Director. I am responsible for supporting the effective execution of FP2020's overall strategy and approach, enabling the cross-cutting functions of our team and managing special projects and partner engagement opportunities on behalf of our Executive Director and senior leadership team.

During FP2020's start-up phase back in 2012, my dad shared a quote by Thomas Edison with me to help guide my work, "Vision without execution is hallucination." I see my job as this quote, and think about it every day. FP2020 has an amazing vision, an amazing mission.

HOW DID YOUR PLAN OF BECOMING A KINDERGARTEN TEACHER CHANGE INTO FAMILY PLANNING 2020?

I went to Purdue with the plan to become a kindergarten teacher. One of our required courses was a class on family studies and interpersonal relationships. I was so intrigued by interpersonal dynamics and its ripple effect on others and their communities. The first shift in my course was deciding to study romantic relationships and how those interpersonal dynamics impact health outcomes. After finishing my undergraduate degree, I went on to the University of Georgia to get my graduate degree in Human Development and Family Science.

There I realized that I didn't want to specialize in one specific area. I see systems and structures, how people and concepts are intertwined. I realized that this is a unique skill that, if leveraged in the right way, can help lead organizations and teams. I wanted to work for a mission-driven organization and joined the UN Foundation after graduating, a few short months before FP2020 was formed.

HOW HAS ALPHA GAMMA DELTA AND YOUR SISTERS INSPIRED YOU TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS PROFESSIONALLY AND PERSONALLY?

I am lucky to say that I am not the only Alpha Gam in my family. My mother, two aunts and sister-in-law are Alpha Gams, and I am very proud of that. Alpha Gamma Delta has given me some of the best women in my life that inspire me daily.

My mother, Mary Spiess Smith, Beta Xi–Purdue University, was president of Alpha Gam her senior year while majoring in engineering—no small feat, especially for a woman at that time. As I look to the future, I know I can reach for the stars because she did at a time, and in a field where it was an uphill battle for women. If I can accomplish just 10 percent of what my mother has, then I will have done something right in my life.

Not only has my Alpha Gam legacy left an important mark on my life, but Alpha Gam's current sisterhood has been my lifeline in D.C. Today, my best friend here is an Alpha Gam—one I didn't even know while in school. Without the bond of Alpha Gamma Delta, I wouldn't have her in my life.

WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE TO OTHER YOUNG WOMEN ABOUT BRANCHING OUT AND FINDING THEIR PASSION?

Know that it's okay if you don't have all the answers right away. If you have a general vision, it's okay to be unsure of what the in-between may look like. Enjoy the ride and the fuzziness that is the in-between. Down the line, you'll look back and realize that it wasn't fuzzy at all, but led you to where you are meant to be.