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ALUMNI PROFILE

EMILY SMITH



YOUNG ALUMNI PROFILE

Anand Dalal (T11), MBA candidate at Carnegie Mellon University and MBA intern in corporate financial services at Merck. Read more at purduealumni.org/profiles.

EMILY SMITH (HHS'10) ENROLLED AT PURDUE planning to become a kindergarten teacher. But in a big world, she found an even grander calling.

Smith serves as chief of staff for Family Planning 2020 (FP2020), a global partnership hosted by the United Nations Foundation that supports the rights of women and girls to decide — freely and for themselves — whether, when, and how many children they want to have. FP2020 works with global and country-level partners to grant 120 million women and girls in the 69 poorest countries in the world access to lifesaving contraceptives by 2020.

It was at Purdue that the child development and family studies major considered the potent role that interpersonal relationships can play in changing the planet for the better.

“I learned to see systems and structures, how people and concepts are intertwined,” Smith says. “I wanted to figure out how I could have a career utilizing this unique trait of seeing the world; it’s what brings me into the office every day. Whether it’s the person sitting in the desk across from me or a young woman halfway across the world, I’m helping someone somewhere drive toward being the best person they can be and reach for their hopes and dreams.”

In her role, Smith supports the execution of FP2020’s overall strategy, enabling the crosscutting functions of the

25-person Secretariat. She has traveled to Ethiopia, Senegal, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India, which has allowed her to connect with her work in a very real and personal way and observe firsthand the life-changing impacts of the FP2020 community.

After earning a master’s degree at the University of Georgia, Smith took an internship with the UN Foundation in 2012, joining FP2020 as one of its first Secretariat members at the partnership’s inception less than a year later. She works alongside Kathy Calvin (HHS’71), president and CEO of the UN Foundation.

Smith is one of several members of her family, including her parents and brother, to attend Purdue. “Black and Gold runs through my veins,” she notes. While some people urged her to become an expert in one area, Smith, buoyed by her coursework in West Lafayette, takes a decidedly interdisciplinary view of the world.

She frequently reflects on — and is guided by — an aphorism imparted on her by her father and attributed to inventor Thomas Edison: “Vision without execution is hallucination.”

“If each person feels they are successful in their job, then I’m being successful in mine,” Smith says. “In a million years, I never would have envisioned the job I have, the opportunities it affords me, and the career path that I am now on. The six years since graduating from Purdue have been life-changing.”

—ANDREW FAUGHT

STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG