

Investing in Relationships: Commitment to Connection Shapes HSB Alum's Career

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Sonya Hakobyan

From growing up in Armenia to navigating the fast-paced world of investment banking in New York City as a VP at Goldman Sachs, Sonya Hakobyan's journey has been extraordinary. When asked what has made the biggest difference in her career and life, she doesn't hesitate: "relationships built along the way."

Sonya's journey was sparked by both tragedy and opportunity. After a devastating earthquake in her hometown in Armenia, Utah businessman and philanthropist Jon M. Huntsman offered Sonya and other prospective Armenian students scholarships to study at Utah State University (USU).

Sonya studied at the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business and graduated with a double-major in international studies and economics in 2015. Her time at USU was shaped by the Jon M. Huntsman Scholarship, which opened doors for her to explore a world of possibilities.

"The scholarship was such an amazing opportunity," Sonya said. "It didn't just help me financially—it also introduced me to a community that would shape my future in ways I couldn't have imagined."

At USU, Sonya felt at home among the mountains of Cache Valley. She connected with other students and professors, and engaged in learning which broadened her worldview. Through study abroad programs she immersed herself in different cultures, traveling to Vietnam, China, and South Korea to learn through real-life experiences.

"Those experiences were transformative," she says. "They reinforced the value of learning beyond the classroom and forming deep connections with people from different backgrounds."

Mentorship played a crucial role in shaping Sonya's future. She credits Huntsman School economics professor Dwight Israelsen for inspiring her to pursue economics as a second major. Another key mentor, Jeannie Johnson from the USU political science department, supported her through a scholarship that enabled her to intern with the United Nations in Armenia.

Sonya's transition to investment banking was not planned, but a product of networking and being open to opportunities. At a Women in Investment Banking Initiative at Goldman Sachs's Salt Lake office, Sonya was introduced to industry professionals. But it was a chance elevator encounter that made the difference.

"I literally bumped into someone from the investment banking program and introduced myself," she recalls. "They mentioned they had a couple of spots left in the program and encouraged me to apply."

This moment, though serendipitous, was backed by hours of preparation. With the help of Huntsman School economics and finance professor Paul Fjeldsted, Sonya rigorously prepared for the interviews. Sonya landed an offer at Goldman Sachs in Salt Lake City, later transferring to the firm's New York office in 2017. Now as a Vice President at Goldman Sachs, Sonya works to be a trusted advisor for her clients.

"In a fast-paced industry people appreciate genuine connections," she said. "It's not just about getting the deal done; it's about being someone clients can count on."

Sonya's commitment to building meaningful relationships extends beyond Wall Street. She remains connected to the Huntsman School of Business, hosting over 30 information sessions at Goldman Sachs for aspiring students and visiting campus when possible. Her dedication to mentorship reflects the support she received at USU.

"People at USU went out of their way to help me without expecting anything in return," she said. "That left a lasting impression on me. Now I want to do the same for others."

Even as her career progresses, Sonya remains committed to fostering meaningful connections and opening doors for the next generation.

"At the end of the day, investing in relationships is what truly makes a difference," she said. "I'm grateful for every person who has been part of my story."