

Innovation in the TRENCHES

EMI ASHIDA BECOMES THE GSM'S FIRST CORO FELLOW

In just nine months, first-year MBA student Emi Ashida will go behind-the-scenes of a government agency, a media company, a political campaign, a labor union, a corporate business and a nonprofit. She'll find herself in the boardrooms, committee chambers, union halls, newsrooms, conference rooms, and out on the street where public policy is deliberated, designed and put into action. It's a real-world baptism by fire called Coro.

Ashida is the first Graduate School of Management student or alumnus in the rigorous and demanding Coro Fellow Program for Public Affairs. One of the oldest and most prestigious civic leadership-training programs in the country, Coro strives to train creative, ethical and effective community leaders. Each year,

after a national selection process, 64 Coro fellows get the chance to wrap their hearts and souls around the public issues of the day while assigned to one of five Coro centers.

Taking a year off from the GSM to jump in the trenches and make a difference, Ashida has joined 10 colleagues at Coro Northern California in San Francisco.

"I wanted hands-on experience in the public sector and nonprofit management and most of those organizations don't have formal internship programs," says Ashida,

who has an extensive background at Deloitte Consulting developing solutions for state welfare-to-work and child care tracking programs. "The Coro fellowship is a great option for me. It has an established reputation, and, as a bonus, it offers me wide exposure to a variety of experiences in public affairs."

At her first field assignment in early September, Ashida hit the ground running in the Alameda County Public Health Department's Office of AIDS. She helped organize a legislative briefing to lobby state and federal officials for more funding and draw attention to the specific needs of the AIDS and HIV communities in the East Bay.

"I have a much better understanding of how government advocacy works and the power of the peoples' voice," says Ashida. "I'm trying to work within the system — putting pressure to force the government to respond."

After a week-long seminar with other fellows on the topic of energy policy, Ashida moved on to an assignment at Autodesk, Inc., a design software company in San Rafael. The quick rotation of field assignments is designed to improve fellows' ability to react in unfamiliar situations and environments, communicate with members of diverse communities and analyze the resources, needs and goals of different institutions and organizations.

When she finishes the program next May, Ashida will be in good company as a Coro alumna. Now a half-century old, Coro counts more than 5,000 alumni, many at top decision-making positions in major corporations, nonprofits, labor, media and government.

Maureen McNulty, CEO of Coro Northern California and a UC Davis alumna, says that nonprofit management programs at top business schools don't offer this type of practical training in the civic arena. "Coro is enormously enriching for an MBA — to have this wonderful compliment to studying," says McNulty. "During your Coro year, you are living it. You taste, feel and smell it." ■



Photo courtesy Coro Northern California

First-year MBA student Emi Ashida (left) meets with Bay Area business leaders at Coro Northern California's annual Board of Directors retreat in October.