An Eye on Tomorrow

Brando Brandolini ’15 CLAS, ’16 CPS draws on experiences in technology and politics to bolster leaders

BY SHAWN PROCTOR

Those who cannot anticipate how policy may affect the future will be unprepared for emerging challenges and changes in the world. That’s why futurists—people like Brando Brandolini ’15 CLAS, ’16 CPS—can provide essential insight for today’s leaders in the public and private sector.

Brandolini’s experience in emerging technologies and political policy—developed at Villanova and honed through research projects and a White House internship—provides insight into how these critical areas intersect and influence one another.

“I don’t necessarily want to go into politics,” says Brandolini, who is currently pursuing opportunities in cybersecurity. “But I want to put myself in a position where I can help bridge that disconnect between politics and the emergence of the digital realm.”

While his undergraduate studies in Political Science and in Fluency and Information Technology at Villanova provided strong academic foundations in those fields, Brandolini knew he needed additional education in technology to round out his knowledge. He enrolled in Villanova’s College of Professional Studies to pursue a certificate in Information Systems, which he completed in 2016.

“There is often a lack of understanding of politics and technology. In this day and age, it is critical to understand their importance to one another. That’s why it is the focus of my research,” he says.

PREPARED FOR SUCCESS

Brandolini noticed how cybersecurity threats and breaches—confidential information made public—could affect geopolitics and foreign policy, as well as how government policies could steer the development of new technologies, such as automated vehicles. He realized that those theoretical ideas had the potential to become very real.

After earning his bachelor’s degree, Brandolini wanted to further his education to prepare himself to face these challenges, and CPS was a natural choice. The Information Systems curriculum, which emphasizes application of technology in the modern workplace, ended up complementing the FIT certificate he had earned previously and opened doors to new learning experiences.

Through his coursework, real-world experience and interaction with his mentor, Sandy Kearney ’00 MS, assistant dean in CPS, Brandolini gained critical insight about computer science in the field. He also worked as a teaching and research assistant on projects, including a National Science Foundation grant and Villanova’s CAVE Automatic Virtual Environment, an enclosure that uses computer graphics to create 3-D environments. And Kearney helped connect Brandolini with an internship opportunity in fall 2016 at the White House as a research assistant for President Barack Obama’s senior adviser for Technology and Economic Policy.

Brandolini’s research at the White House included new and emerging technologies, encryption, cybersecurity, data breaches, and drones and artificial intelligence, often as they related to national security. He also contributed to a developing autonomous vehicle policy, which examines the security risks of driverless cars and offers a framework for how companies could work on implementing an autonomous driving system.

Brandolini drew on what he had learned in Disney Institute leadership excellence courses he took through CPS in June 2016 to navigate the levels of administration and to gain confidence in speaking to White House officials at the highest levels.

“I dealt with a wide spectrum of subject areas, but everything closely related to my education at Villanova,” he says.

INSPIRING OTHERS

His success in the internship program was a direct result of the professional growth Brandolini experienced throughout his career at Villanova. “Brando embodies Villanova as a person,” Kearney says, adding that in his classes Brandolini would take time to mentor fellow students, inspiring robust discussions.

Brando’s desire to elevate the learning of his fellow students had its origins back in his undergraduate days, according to David M. Barrett, PhD, professor of Political Science, with whom Brandolini took courses on the US presidency and government intelligence. “His outgoing personality and contagious enthusiasm for the subject matter sparked lively discussions in the classroom,” Dr. Barrett says.

“Brando is an excellent example of the type of high-caliber student that CPS attracts,” says Deborah J. Tyksinski, PhD, founding dean of CPS. “He is smart, driven and innovative in how he pushes his knowledge in new directions.”