

ELPIDA VELMAHOS
YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE MONTH
JANUARY 2018



Philo4Thought Hellenic Professional Mentoring Initiative is pleased to present our January 2018 Young Professional of the Month! The goal of our publications is to provide positive, successful role models who will inspire the next generation of young professionals. Preliminary criteria for YPM candidates is that they are actively engaged in an entrepreneurial initiative or have made a successful career for themselves, thereby serving as strong role models to the next generation of young professionals. Candidates are typically of Hellenic origin and part of a humanitarian (educational, sociological, scientific, etc.) or environmentally-conscious field. Given the gradual expansion of our readership, we currently interview candidates who embrace a specific Hellenic philosophy best described in a word... Philotimo (φιλότιμο). The most important qualifications all our candidates share are the spirit and compassion to persevere, and the heart to share their knowledge and experience with others.

This month's YPM, Elpida Velmahos, has been a proactive member of the National Hellenic Students Association for many years. She has also hit the ground running in the Big Apple as she began her graduate studies at Columbia University in the Fall 2017, looking for opportunities to contribute to the community here as well. She will soon have a Masters in Public Health and is already preparing for the next steps of her personal and professional journey. We are honored to share her story with you today.

THE JOURNEY & "AHA" MOMENT:

"I went to Boston University for undergrad where I earned a degree in Human Physiology with minors in Spanish and Public Health. In addition to that, I took several political science and language courses and graduated with a major, two minors, and double the amount of required graduation credits." Outside of class, Elpida was involved in numerous student groups, having served as President of BU's Hellenic Association (BUHA) for three years. With the support of her Executive Board, she dedicated extensive time and efforts towards event planning, networking with neighboring HSA groups, managing the BUHA budget and creating their media platforms. "Through BUHA, I had the opportunity to connect with NHSA and P4T and to remain involved in Greek organizations after graduation, which was very important to me." Beyond the scope of these Hellenic communities, Elpida was also heavily involved in a variety of health-oriented student groups and national philanthropic community service projects. "I was part of several off-campus research projects throughout my undergrad years and most of the findings were published! My favorite research related to the *Affordable Care Act* and the opioid epidemic."

"My plate was undoubtedly full, but I would never take anything back because I had the opportunity to learn a great deal through all my education and other experiences. I liked living a fast-paced, full life and my experiences in undergrad really catered to that need."

When asked what inspired her to follow her current professional interests, Elpida says, “I grew up in a family of physicians so naturally, I was constantly surrounded by healthcare. I always had an innate attraction to the field and it is what inspired all my educational and professional decisions throughout life, although” (smiling) “whether my parents brainwashed this innate desire is also up for debate. Going into college, I was dead-set on attending medical school. Having only been exposed to the field of medicine through my parents, I truly thought the only way to be involved with people’s health was to become a physician. So, going into my freshman year, I took an introductory writing course called *Topics of Public Health*. I remember seeing the word ‘health’ and thought to myself ‘Health in a writing course? Well, this will look great on my med-school applications!’ Much to my surprise, the writing course had *nothing* to do with medicine, but everything to do with public health. I would call this the moment the doors to a completely new world opened. The course ignited my curiosity and, bit-by-bit, I started taking Public Health courses, eventually turning it into a minor (since BU didn’t have a specific major), as I continued with the more science-heavy Human Physiology major. This combination drove me to seek Public Health internships, including an opportunity to volunteer at refugee camps in Greece.” Elpida describes volunteering at the camps as an eye-opening experience. “It gave me a very real glimpse of the world of public health. It was this experience, along with some graduate courses I took at BU, that pushed me to pursue a career in health policy and management. Today, I see policy as the basis of all healthcare and being involved in the action from the beginning is the most meaningful way for me to help enact positive change.”

“My decision to pursue a career in the field of healthcare is unwavering. It has always been my passion and desire. I have definitely explored the different fields healthcare has to offer which is why I ended up where am I today. What excites me especially about public health is that it’s a very diverse field with a lot of opportunity for expansion and creativity. When I was younger, I always feared of having a career than would become monotonous. Now, with public health, I no longer worry about that happening. In the future, I hope to be involved in policy-making process for people’s health. I feel incredibly lucky to be coming into the field at this time in the history of the United States. Our country is at an instrumental crossroad where the face of healthcare is rapidly evolving. Many changes are due to come and I am very excited to be a prospective active participant of this change.

PHILOSOPHY:

In work and in life, Elpida fervently believes that it’s extremely important never give up on one’s goals. “I haven’t lived long enough to boast about an extensive resume of experience, but I have learned from each experience along the way and will continue to do so. My best learning moments have come from my mistakes. Life isn’t error-free, but for every problem there is a solution. Being able to make it through these moments requires being open to change, accepting my mistakes and, most importantly, not falling into the trap of making the same mistakes again. I learned to appreciate moments of discomfort as opportunities for growth and change. I often try to envision myself in 5 or 10 years, speaking to incoming freshmen, lending advice and inspirations that would have helped me along the way. It’s the sort of thing I’d like to be able to pass on to them and, if I’m not at that place yet, I will work towards getting there.”

Elpida credits a part of her ability to think and function in an interdisciplinary professional path to being raised in an intercultural setting. “Growing up between two cultures taught me to appreciate and seek diversity in my relationships with other people. I also grew up in a house where my family constantly encouraged each other to keep moving forward and to never give up. When I listen to my grandparents’ stories of their youth or how my parents migrated to the US, I am always reminded that no matter how far a goal may seem or how hard to achieve, working towards it faithfully will guarantee success.”

“I love what I do so, I treat every experience like a positive one and an opportunity to learn. I always try my best to be receptive to people’s comments and work with my teammates, though coordinating with others on team projects can get complicated. I’ve learned that it is key to assign clear roles from the start, maintain open communication and, most importantly, treat your teammates with the respect and attitude you want from them.”

MENTORS:

Elpida says that her parents are definitely her greatest and favorite mentors. “The guidance, wisdom, and honesty they give me is unmatched by anyone else. Even when I don’t want to hear it, it seems that they possess this magical ability to always be right and to know me better than (I may think) I know myself. They are my confidants, my cheerleaders, and my mentors.... My grandparents are also close mentors of mine, more in the actions of life than anything else. They have lived through many societal and technological changes, offering a unique viewpoint on how to move through life. They add to the life lessons my parents have offered me, lending finer detail to behavioral protocols like how to ask for a favor, how to apologize when you’re wrong, how not to be afraid to approach the unapproachable.”

Elpida is happy to be a mentor to junior members of the HYP community!

WORDS OF WISDOM:

Elpida’s favorite word is “Ambition.” She always encourages people to have a focused goal and to be attentive to opportunities and networks that will help bring you closer to your goals in work and in life. Her advice to today’s young professional is:

- Be human. Treat the people in your environment with kindness, but maintain respect for yourself.
- Be personable and social even if that scares you at first. Don’t be afraid to be the one to bring people together; others will appreciate and remember you for it.
- The biggest DIY project is your actual life, don’t be a bird in the wind, take control of your environment and the opportunities available to you.
- Treat every obstacle like an opportunity for growth and learning.
- Be loyal to those around you.

