



Student Spotlight

Isa Vásquez is a second-year M.A. student majoring in Public Policy and minoring in Political Theory. She is also the Education Programs Associate Coordinator at the [American Social History Project](#).

By Beth Newcomer

Beth: *What led you to choose the Graduate Center to pursue your M.A.?*



Isa: The GC, and CUNY as a whole, is a model of what public education can and should be. We learn under scholars whose academic work is unparalleled and whose expertise is sought out by institutions from the UN to the ACLU to advise on policy. I could not imagine a more influential group of scholars with which to study.

B: *Do you have any recommendations for incoming MA students, things you wish you'd known or were helpful in getting acclimated to the program?*

I: Get to know your fellow students. I've found they're not only wonderfully kind, supportive, generous, and super willing to answer questions – about courses, requirements, faculty, etc. – but they are also impressive intellectuals. Also, CUNY gives students access to *tons* of online journals and research databases, but navigating the library system can be a little daunting at first. Make an appointment with a librarian to walk you through how to access the wealth of material; they're all very nice and helpful.

B: *In addition to taking classes part time, you also work full time at the American Social History*

Project/Center for Media Learning. Tell us about ASHP and the resources it offers for educators.

I: First, folks should know that the interdisciplinary research centers and institutes – including ASHP – are part of what makes the GC so vibrant and special. They are a major link between the academic work that happens in the departments and the practice of this scholarship in the greater community. ASHP provides multimedia materials, primary sources, curated collections, and pedagogical tools that reflect the diverse social and cultural histories of the nation. These materials come directly from teachers' classroom experience through our own professional development programs. The foundation of these materials is the textbook and documentary series "Who Built America?" All of our online resources are considered outstanding in the field of history education professional development and are free and accessible to the public.

B: *Give us an example of one of the techniques provided by ASHP that you could use in a political science course?*

I: One example would be using visual evidence to engage students in critical inquiry. An introductory lesson could be an in-class comparison between the U.S. dollar and the Costa Rican colón. It provides something concrete for students to engage, and can start a conversation about how the design and images on money reflect political choices and what these choices tell us about the priorities of the state. It can help them identify how the political is all around us when they see it in something they interact with every day. We find students interact more critically with content when they see that things that seem fixed are actually the result of contentious politics and people's actions.

