

# Valentina Losada on Getting Experience in the Field of Management Consulting

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*McKinsey & Company's practices have been in the news of late, in part because South Bend, Indiana, mayor and U.S. presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg worked for the big-name consulting firm after graduating from Oxford in 2007. The global company, which has more than \$10 billion in revenues, 27,000 employees and 127 offices around the world, is under scrutiny for scandals in various industries, including insurance and manufacturing.*

*Buttigieg's high-profile time at McKinsey, which he calls his "most intellectually informing experience" at "a place to learn...all the things about business I didn't know," also underscores McKinsey's place in the job plans of business-minded college grads. Going into consulting work at any of the top companies in this field is considered by many to be the first step toward a successful, well-paying career – and many students compete regularly for these types of entry-level positions.*

*KWHS interviewer Emmie Stratakis recently sat down with Valentina Losada, a junior at the University of Pennsylvania who is studying philosophy, politics and economics, to talk about the management consulting field. Losada, who first interned with McKinsey & Company at the age of 19, shares insight into the industry and how her experiences are helping to shape her path forward.*

**Knowledge@Wharton High School:** Hello, everyone. Lots of business and finance students aspire to work at companies like McKinsey, a global management consulting firm that competes with other companies like BCG, Bain, PWC. Lots of us even Google search things like, "How do land a job at McKinsey," because we know that it's an incredible employer with lots of opportunities for growth right out of college. Valentina Losada is a junior who did her first internship at McKinsey this summer after her freshman year of college, which is incredible, and already has an offer to work with them full time. She is also the president of Wharton Latino, and has already had opportunities to mentor freshmen and sophomores in their pursuit of early opportunities here in college. Welcome, Valentina.

**Valentina Losada:** Thank you.

**KWHS:** Will you tell us little bit about yourself first?

**Losada:** Of course. So my name is Valentina Losada, as Emmie said. Originally from Bogota, Colombia. I'm a junior at

the college studying philosophy, politics, and economics, and double minor in consumer psychology and Latin American studies.

**KWHS:** Before we learn more about what you did in your internship, could you talk a bit more about what management consulting is? What does this industry even look like?

**Losada:** Yeah, of course. So these are questions that you're going to ask a lot of times, and people are going to answer it in many, many, like fancy ways. As Amy said, like people google all the time, and you're going to get a bunch of, like, dictionary definitions of what management consulting is. The truth is, simply to understand it it's just like McKinsey is the company that offers services to solve whatever problems other companies might have. So you've got the chance to work across all the different industries in all the different roles, different strategies, different times in whatever process, and there's like a business side and then you also work in non-business projects.

And how it works is that — like the work is on a project to project basis. So in one project you get to explore one industry, and solve one problem that's specific to one portion of the whatever process the company is working for. So basically it's solving problems across different industries.

**KWHS:** But how did you get your freshman internship, and how did you decide to even look for opportunities so early on?

**Losada:** So — okay, so I think that the most important thing that you can do as a freshman, and just like honestly throughout your entire college career, is very — be very attentive of everything that's happening. You get to somewhere like Penn, and it's super overwhelming, there's so many things happening, people are throwing a lot of information at you, you're meeting all of these people, listening to all of these stories and people getting these jobs and whatever, it's very overwhelming, and what you need to do is to be like, relax but also at the same time proactively look for information.

And that way if you're informed, if you know what's going on, you're not going to miss out on any opportunities, and the more information you have, the more you're going to be able to narrow it down to what you actually care about. So to me, I always knew that I was very interested in McKinsey. My dad back home in Colombia is actually very — a very close friend to one of the leaders of McKinsey back home in Bogota, so that's a name that I was already running in the back of my mind.

So I was very interested about it. And as soon as I heard that there was an opportunity for freshmen, I was — I jumped at the opportunity. And a lot of people were very skeptical about how it was going to work because it was also the first time that McKinsey ever hired freshmen. So it was a new program, like no one expected freshman to do a whole twelve week internship. But it was a very interesting experience, and I'm very glad I took advantage of it.

“The most important thing that is going to help you throughout college and in different jobs...is to hold on to who you are...If you know who you are, you're going to be able to tell your story.” — Valentina Losada

**KWHS:** Wow, so it's amazing that you already knew the name. I think that's probably really beneficial. But what was your opportunity — what was the experience of being a freshman in a high pressure environment like that, and were you given a lot of responsibility as well?

**Losada:** Okay, so as I said before, this was the first time that McKinsey ever hired freshman. So it was very interesting because we were figuring out what to do, but they were also figuring out what to do with us. So it was a learning curve, a very steep learning curve on both sides. So yes, I was given a lot of responsibility, definitely more than I would have

expected. I mean, I was a freshman, it was very — it's crazy, you're sitting — like I was 19 years old, had just turned 19, and I was sitting in a room — I remember walking in the first day to a room of 30 people, 25 of them were like MBAs, and then the other five were juniors in college, and then I was there like, okay.

But it was very, very special to see how my voice mattered just as much as anyone else's. And the environment really gives you support and empowers you to just like be yourself and speak your mind, and that way the responsibility that you're given later throughout the internship, it's not as bad because you really feel like you can take it. The difference though between a freshman program internship, and then all the like sophomore, junior, and so on, is that because you're a freshman, they try to limit your client exposure. So your project is basically the same thing. Like everything about the project is the same, only you don't have an external client, so you work in an internal project. So that was my experience freshman year, but then when I got to come back sophomore summer, then I had like to deal with clients.

**KWHS:** Could you actually give us an example of a project that you've worked on, or an example of a project — I know that privacy might be an issue.

**Losada:** Yeah, of course. So as I said before, McKinsey works with all sorts of different actors. So you can work with a government, you can work with a company, with a foundation, with anything. So my first summer, because I didn't have a client, it was an internal project, we were doing an assessment of the top industrial companies. We were preparing a summit for industrial leaders. So that was a lot of research and understanding how industrial companies work, what drives value, what alpha growth is. For me, that was a new one, understanding the difference between the market and the performance of a company.

So that was not a specific, specific thing, but just in general learning about that industrial industry. And then my second summer I got to work in woman empowerment. So that was actually something that I never expected to be like placed in, and it was such an amazing experience. We were working in developing plans to empower woman in different parts of the world across different like strategy groups. So we were looking at woman in technology, woman in law, then like barriers for woman.

So just like, for example, a parental family leave, sexual harassment, discrimination. Just like woman empowerment in general. And that was an amazing experience because what happens is that then you go into, for example, something like this that's not something that you usually associate with consulting, per se. But you get to do it with all of the resources of a big firm like McKinsey. So you have basically anyone you want at your disposal — at your disposal. All the resources that you can use to tackle something like woman empowerment. So that was very special to me personally.

**KWHS:** So why do you think you were chosen for this internship? Had you done anything before the internship that would get you into the doors of the interview? Could you talk a little bit about how you prepared your resume so early on?

**Losada:** Yeah, of course. So I think there's like a two — an answer that should be given in two steps. The first one is how to get the interview, and then once you have the interview, how to get the job, right? So it's completely different like skillsets that you need. So for the how to get the interview, honestly the answer like relies on your resume and your GPA. A word of advice just like throughout college would be like be mindful of your grades, like try to have a good GPA.

Having said that, everyone gets like bad grades sometimes. We're at Penn, it's very hard. And that's fine, it's important to balance it out though with your résumé. So what I did was as soon as I got into college, like a lot of people decide that they want to wait to get settled in, to have a slow first semester, and then actually get into doing things second semester freshman year. I decided not to do that. I decided, I'm here, I'm just going to take advantage of every opportunity that I get.

And I got to work with research with a professor in the political science department, with another professor in the Latin American studies department. I joined as many clubs as I could. I tried to get as many leadership position as I could. Because at the end of the day, what really matters in your resume is that you have a coherent story. So even if it's not through research, even if it's not through leadership positions, the important thing is that whoever grabs your resume and reads it, they're like, "Okay this person has a story that makes sense."

And you build that story obviously depending on who you are. To me, the important thing was Latin America, I'm from Colombia, very passionate about the region. So I wanted everything that I did in college to talk about my passion, and to be sort of like a back up for who I am. And that's how you land your interview, being a cohesive, interesting story. And then once you have the interview, it's all about the — I mean, the — killing the interview, right? So a consumer interview has two sides. A case and a behavioral stories side.

Since I was a freshman, I had basically just gone through the college application process, and that college application, as people may know, it's basically all about yourself. Like sitting down, thinking about, okay who am I, how am I going to tell the world who I am, how am I going to sell myself, but not in a way that's like fake. No, like how am I actually going to show who I am and why I'm good. So that's basically what you have to do for your behavioral side. You just have to show yourself through stories that really portray your strengths. And then for the case part, honestly that's just practice. I really think that anyone can do that as long as you sit down and practice a lot.

**KWHS:** You already have an offer to join McKinsey full time after you graduate — that's amazing. Where do you see yourself in five years, and how do you think this will prepare you for the future? Do you think you'll be still at McKinsey 10 years down the line for example?

**Losada:** One of the things that I've learned at college, and that has honestly been great, is that it's great to have plans, and of course you're never going to stop actually making plans, but I have no idea what's actually going to happen to me in five years. The thing that I like the most about McKinsey though is that it's not a set path, but rather it gives me a view of all the different available paths. So it's almost as if McKinsey is just going to continue my education, right? Right now I'm getting all of the foundational, the basis, and everything, and then once I'm going to be able — once I'm there, and I'm going to be able to apply all this to different industries, to different problems, solving different things, meeting different people.

And I think honestly that my career path is going to be determined just by the experience that I have the first couple of years then. And personally though, because I'm from Colombia, I would love to eventually return to Colombia to have some sort of impact in the — in policy, but from the private sector. And I do think that McKinsey is a great tool to be able to influence policy without being — actually working in the public sector. So down, down the line, I do see myself staying in McKinsey but working back home in Colombia.

**KWHS:** If you could pass along one piece of advice that has been particularly eye opening to you from your experience at McKinsey to, for example, high school students that are watching now, what would it be? What is something that you know now that you wish that you had known then?

**Losada:** Yeah, so this is actually something that I was asked in the interview, and what I said was that college is super overwhelming. You get here — you get here being used to being the best wherever you came from, right? Like that's why you get here. And then you're suddenly put in a pool with kids that are the best from wherever they came from. So it's a lot. And it's super exciting. You meet amazing people, but it's also very, very, very overwhelming, and there's so many opportunities, so much information flowing around, you feel like everything is getting thrown at you.

The most important thing that is going to help you throughout college and in different jobs and stuff, is to always remember who you are and to hold on to who you are. Because if not, if you lose — it's very easy to lose yourself in the

middle of this craziness that's college, and then just recruiting and everything. But if you know who you are, you're going to be able to tell your story. It's going to be strong. It's going to be cohesive. You're going to be able to sell yourself in a way that's honest and interesting and appealing to everyone, and you're going to be able to enjoy whatever you do. So, I definitely think that holding on to who you are is what's the most key thing to achieving success.

**KWHS:** I'm actually a student at Penn as well, and I completely agree that that is the one most important thing in college. Thank you so much, Valentina, for joining us.

**Losada:** Thank you for having me.