Driving data in family care

While it wasn't always her intent to end up in tech, Joyce Hodel '08 wouldn't have her career any other way

By Sarah Pfledderer | GPS News

With 19.5 million users in 16 countries, Care.com sees scads of clicks on its website every day.

And Joyce Hodel '08 has insights into the activity literally at her fingertips—when they're resting on her keyboard, that is. As a data scientist, who works remotely in Washington, D.C., Hodel acts as somewhat of a decision-making consult at the the online marketplace for finding and managing family care.

In observing, compiling and discerning data from the backend of the website, she

influences Care.com's efforts in fraud detection, financial forecasting, evaluating return on investments and more.

With her technical skillset honed at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) so integral to Hodel's position today, it's hard to believe she once aspired to work in academia and, moreover, that this aspiration is what led her to the School.

"I was always a data person, but it took me a little while to realize it," she said, amusingly. "I went to GPS with the goal of building more background in policy to enter a Ph.D. program."

After earning her MPIA, Hodel received her doctorate in political science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

But being in the Boston Area put the tech industry in her purview, grabbing her attention in more ways than, say, vetting a house-cleaning service on a startup called Care.com.

She joined the company as a data analyst in 2014.

"I had always enjoyed this kind of work, data and analytics, but it took me understanding what kind of companies were getting excited about using data in interesting ways," Hodel said. "Joining Care.com opened my eyes to a new world and a way to apply things I've always enjoyed."

Much like how at GPS she tackled prospective policy questions by gathering data to inform solutions, Hodel uses these same practices to influence Care.com's decision-making today.

"The quantitative training I received when I was at GPS is the best, and it prepared me for this job," she said. "Something as simple as how to run a regression I do on a regular basis."

Hodel hasn't disregarded her policy roots from the School either.

Currently, she's compiling an index that compares costs, quality and availability of child care in the U.S. This of which Care.com is utilizing with its strategic partners in Washington, D.C., to inform policymakers' decisions regarding child care.

Injecting this policy expertise into such a STEM-heavy field, Hodel said, is among the most gratifying parts of her job.

"There's a bit of a challenge in convincing people in the tech sector that social science is just as important to analyze questions," she explained. In this regard, Hodel has helped with Care.com's recruitment, including drawing GPS alums such as Robyn Wentzel Freeman '15 to the company.

"When I started this job, it really felt like the right fit for me," Hodel said. "Not everyone gets to experience that in their career. I'm thankful I do."

Beyond her satisfaction as an employee at the company, Hodel and her husband Michael Hodel '08 also are happy customers. As first-time parents, they're using the child care service for their newborn son, Tucker.