

Student Aline Lino interviewed FTVM alumni Michelle Castillo, who is a digital media distributor for Warner Music Group.

Aline Lino: Can you tell us a little about yourself and when you first found yourself interested in media production?

Michelle Castillo: I'm an alumna of GCC Media Arts department having graduated in 2019 with an A.S. in Film, TV, and Electronic Media. I then transferred to San Francisco State University and finished my bachelor's degree in Electronic Communications within a year and graduated in 2020. As a child I was always interested in storytelling, whether it was through reading books, writing, or watching films/television shows. I knew early on that Media is such a great source of escaping the real world and that inspired me to want to learn how I could create or be a part of the process that takes someone's idea from their mind and transform it into a visual-audio product that will be live on and be experienced for years. I guess as a child I always wanted to be part of media, but it wasn't until I was in college that I learned the process of production well and realized that there were various paths I could take within the industry.

EL: What first attracted you to taking Media Production classes and how did you choose to take classes at GCC and FTVM?

MC: When I first transferred to GCC I didn't know much about the production classes and I enrolled into the Intro to TV Studio Production course because I wanted to learn more about the production process, and I thought the class was a requirement in order to take other media classes, so I started there. I was so excited that first day I stepped into the studio with the lighting grid hanging from the ceiling and the control room full of various production equipment, I felt like I was in the right place. After that one class I just felt energized to do different production work and knew that I wanted to continue on in media.

AL: If Media Arts weren't your major previously, what made you change your mind?

MC: After graduating high school I went to a four year university and was an International Business major but after a year there I realized it was not the right place for me. I wanted to work in films/television so I knew I had to learn all I could about it. Once enrolled at GCC I started taking media classes and I knew I had made the right choice in changing my educational path.

AL: Did you know what career you wanted to have? If your ideas about your career have changed, how?

MC: No, I had no idea what career I wanted to have. Being at GCC was my time to explore and discover what I enjoyed most doing within media production. When I started out in the media department, I jumped around the idea of wanting to be a director, then a producer, then a cinematographer. Ultimately, I felt most attached to scriptwriting. My major goal at the moment for a career is to work in a writer's room and someday become a showrunner.

AL: What is the position you have now and how did you get it?

MC: I currently work for Warner Music Group as a digital products distributor. I applied for the job through a LinkedIn post and had to go through various interviews and provide personal references from past jobs/acquittances for the application process. My references really solidified the company's decision in offering me the position.

AL: What are your job responsibilities?

MC: Essentially, it's post-production work but for the music industry. I make sure music products, whether its a single or album from various labels, are packaged fully with art, audio, and metadata. I'm the last person that the products are handed over to and I make sure it is scheduled and sent out to be released on time to music providers such as Apple Music, Spotify, Amazon, YouTube, and so on.

AL: What do you enjoy about the position?

MC: At this point in my life, I really appreciate the stability that the position provides for me. The team I work with is incredibly kind and helpful. My colleagues really do foster a learning environment and great flexible working hours. Especially since working from home. Overall, it's been an easy transition going into the music industry after studying so much about visual/audio media production and many of the skills I acquired from my media classes have helped me.

AL: What do you wish was different?

MC: I do wish the job was more on the creative side. It's working mostly with internal applications and support so there's not much room for being creative, but it is flexible enough that I have time to work on personal projects too.

AL: What hard skills (applications, Technical) do you think it takes to do your job well?

MC: I think for anyone going into any job that requires keeping track of large data especially in production positions whether its keeping track of equipment, scheduling, or in my case digital products being comfortable working with Excel is a valuable hard skill to have even for individuals who work on their own personal projects. Excel is the required application for most jobs now a days. Another basic hard skill is to be computer literate know how to work with Windows 10 and MacOS systems as well as email applications (Outlook, Gmail,etc).

AL: What personality traits (soft skills) do you think it takes to do your job well?

MC: The most important soft skill for my current job is definitely organization. I often have multiple titles with different deadlines or tasks I have to accomplish for them periodically. Creating a system of organization that works for me to remind me of what needs to get done and when is essential for my work. I often keep post its on my desktop and set up calendar reminders for the different work duties as well as color code my excel sheets to make it a lot more manageable. Another important soft skill for my current job and for any job in general is being able to communicate. I've found that the hardest part of solving a problem is often not knowing what questions to ask. For any work done it's best to ask questions and get clarifications rather than guessing and potentially creating future problems for yourself. In the age of technology people are often tempted to just google or figure things out on their own instead of asking for help which may work out for certain circumstances but if you're part of a team and have people around you who are there to attain the same goal as you then save yourself the inconvenience of figuring out all on your own and just ask the questions. Another critical soft skill that is great to have and is essential for my current job as well is being flexible. I work with various internal applications as well as have different job duties. Being flexible with jumping between diverse duties is a skill that will definitely help you be productive and efficient.

AL: What advice would you give to students hoping to break into LA's media production community?

MC: One word. NETWORK. Growing your list of contacts that have various talents and connections can really accelerate your process in finding your place within LA's media production community. Don't be afraid to make connections with individuals who perhaps don't have the career you hope for in the industry but if they are well connected or know of someone they can refer you, to it's a potential opportunity students should definitely keep in mind. Your professors can also be a great resource when it comes to making connections outside of school. A previous professor of mine at SFSU used to be an attorney for various Hollywood producers and has connections in high places. She would often refer her students for internships or jobs within the industry. Although I now work for the music industry, I'm always meeting people that have connections to people that work in film, television, radio, or other media outlets and am able to then have a starting point in meeting them from a mutual contact. Keeping your peers in mind as future collaborators is also another great way to network. I still keep in touch with various peers of mine from GCC and I have had the pleasure of helping out in their productions even after leaving school. So, networking can come in all different forms and can really make a difference when it comes to breaking into LA's media production community.