

# SPOTLIGHT ON KATHARINE KENDRICK, '09

*The Globalist*  
Alumni  
Series



*by Emma Sargent*

*Katharine is Deputy Director of the Policy Central team at Airbnb, where she focuses on geopolitical and public policy issues across the 220+ countries and regions where the company has listings. Previously, she was part of the inaugural team developing internet freedom policy and programs at the US State Department. She also worked at the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights, where she led research and workshops on how tech companies can protect human rights in their core operations. Katharine holds a bachelor's degree from Yale and a master's degree in international relations from Georgetown. She is a Security Fellow with the Truman National Security Project.*

**Q: Were you involved with the *Globalist* for all four years at Yale?**

A: I wrote and edited throughout my time at Yale. I discovered the *Globalist* my first year, and I got involved spring of freshman year as a writer. I applied to be an editor the following year, and was on the board as a features editor, then managing editor, then editor-in-chief my senior year. I went on two *Globalist* reporting trips—to Venezuela and India—and I just loved it.

**Q: What was the *Globalist* like back then?**

A: Over the course of my time, particularly my freshman to junior year, we pivoted the *Globalist* from being closer

to pure political science analysis to instead focusing more on on-the-ground reporting—highlighting the voices of people directly impacted by international relations around the world. If you look at the bulk of the reporting in 2005 versus 2009, you’ll see it moved more towards the international reporting focus that it still has today. It was definitely an exciting four years to be a part of the *Globalist*.

**Q: Did you write anything for the *Globalist* that you look back on as particularly significant?**

A: Yeah, it’s actually kind of funny. My first feature article for the *Globalist*, and the biggest one I wrote, was my second semester sophomore year. It was about how activists were beginning to use technologies like social media in their movements. I know this sounds comically quaint now, but it was 2007. Right at the beginning of 2007, I interviewed bloggers in Egypt and digital activists in Indonesia, and wrote this piece called “Activism 2.0”. Fast forward two years, I graduated, and I knew I didn’t want to be a journalist, but I was really interested in free expression and media freedom and online censorship issues. I started working on this topic at a think tank and then was hired pretty quickly by the State Department to help start a program on internet freedom. We worked on online human rights and free expression, and thought about speech and activism in the digital world. So, there was a kind of a surprising direct line between the article that was most formative for me at the *Globalist* and then what I ended up doing for quite some time in my career—the connection between digital rights and human rights on the internet.

**Q: How long did you end up working on that in your career?**

A: I continued to follow that thread in my career for some time. I was at the State Department for four years working on tech policy and human rights, and I was increasingly interested in how much of a role the private sector played in either enabling or constricting people’s human rights. The internet is largely privately owned—all of the

platforms people use to express themselves online are privately owned. So while I was a diplomat and engaging with governments, a lot of my work was with activists and with companies, and we noted that the power in the field was far beyond just government policy. And so two of my mentors left the State Department to found the first human rights center at a business school, focused on how companies can build in human rights protections into their core operations. They invited me to come join and focus on the tech sector. So definitely there’s a direct line there back to my work for the *Globalist*. Then, I left to go to grad school—the most *Globalist* grad school ever—I did an international relations degree at Georgetown. Every day, it was like the *Globalist*, and I loved it. Since then, I’ve been at Airbnb for about four to five years, dealing with geopolitical risk and tech policy in the 220+ countries and regions where we have Airbnb listings. I don’t think

it felt quite as linear along the way, but I actually have had this consistent theme throughout my career—my focus is broader now than it was at the State Department, but it’s always about human rights, international relations, and the role of the private sector.

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**Q: How has working for Airbnb fit into your overall focus on human rights in tech?**

A: At Airbnb, we’re facilitating people meeting other people in neighborhoods around the world, so our business is more immediate and more tangible than many tech platforms. Perhaps because of this, Airbnb’s leadership has long taken a proactive approach engaging with communities and governments around the world, and we haven’t been shy about standing up for our values. One example: a few years ago, when we became aware of disturbing reports of discrimination against some guests, we launched a company-wide effort to combat bias and discrimination on our platform. Among other changes, we now require hosts and guests to sign what we call the Community Commitment in order to use our platform, pledging to treat all guests and hosts equally. We’ve removed over a million people from our platform

for refusing to agree to this requirement. Obviously, this has a business impact, but our whole mission is about belonging, so we acknowledged early on that if we're not going to be serious about discrimination, we need a different mission. On a separate note, I think one of the things people forget about Airbnb is that over half of our hosts say that they use Airbnb to help make ends meet. It's a really important source of income for a lot of individuals and it's a way to earn extra money, which is particularly important for a time like now. So, we are dealing with that human element in our policy decisions. We basically have a lot of micro-entrepreneurs on our platform. We're trying to figure out a way for them to be able to have their businesses and welcome people from around the world.

**Q: What do you think is the future of global responsibility in tech?**

A: More tech companies are coming to the table—sometimes reluctantly—and recognizing that they have responsibilities to a diversity of stakeholders, not just to their investors or even to their consumers. I think in the future there will be more pressure from consumers to prioritize human rights and ethical company decision making. We're already seeing this, but in future there will just be an expectation that you as a company act responsibly and engage on social issues. If you don't, that's what will stand out. At least in the US, we're seeing a shift in consumer expectations towards social responsibility, and I think that is what will drive companies to act on these issues proactively and not just reactively, for example, in response to a congressional hearing or terrible news story.

**Q: What advice would you give to a current college student involved in the *Globalist*?**

A: I learned so much from the *Globalist*, and I have thought back to it a lot of times during my career—everything from the actual writing skills to getting comfortable interviewing people to asking questions and writing in a concise and clear way for an outside audience to the experience of managing a team and working with editors and writers. At the time, I think there were probably moments that I wondered whether I was spending too much time on the *Globalist*, but I was always having a great time and I was always learning and I've never regretted it. I made some of my best friends in the *Globalist*. If anything, I'm just more sure than ever that it was a good use of my college time. I'm a good example of someone who's ended up having a career and post grad experience that's very *Globalist*-y without being a journalist. There are a lot of really cool careers that

would be interesting to *Globalist* alums in different sectors. There doesn't have to be a linear route from working for a college publication to working for a publication after college—you can be exercising all of the same skills and interests but be in the private sector or be in government. So that is something I definitely wish I had been aware of earlier—I stumbled into awareness of the private sector. Another thing I wish I knew is that if you're interested in a job in international relations, chances are that you won't be able to line it up before graduating. I remember going into my senior year, and a lot of my classmates were applying to consulting or finance jobs or Teach for America or different opportunities where there was a clear application process and outcome date and you would know on graduation day where you were ending up. For all of the roles I was interested in, and that many of my fellow Globalistas were interested in, you had to move to a place and get coffees with people—in my case, I moved to DC and started doing informational meetings, some other friends of mine moved to Brazil and started doing freelance reporting—essentially, you just had to throw yourself into the world. Acknowledging that sooner rather than later senior year will give you peace of mind. You should be talking to people to figure out what you want to do, but it's okay if you don't know what you're doing on graduation day. The majority of us did not and then we all ended up in awesome places. None of the jobs I've had existed before I had them. They all came into being through one door leading to another, a new need arising at the State Department or at Airbnb. While it can be a little more ambiguous or take a couple more months to figure out, I've had so many interesting experiences and I don't regret the couple months of uncertainty.

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