A day in the life of a BA/MIA student

In a Q&A complementing our Storify tour of a day in the life of Jeanne Marasigan, the 2018 BA/MIA candidate paints a picture of what attending GPS looks like today

By Sarah Pfledderer | GPS News

On a day toward the tail end of winter quarter, the student body government at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) is gathered in the dean’s conference room. The words “lame duck” are thrown out in the banter preceding the official GO GPS meeting.

Though used jokingly, the term is somewhat appropriate. The group is in transition, with the old administration ushering in—or initiating—the newly elected. As such, this meeting begins with an icebreaker entailing questions and goofy rules to answer them. Eventually, all eyes are on Jeanne Marasigan.

Amid dancing the “Macarena,” she must answer the question, “What do you love most about GPS?” From there, it’s the atmosphere of the room itself—the laughs, acceptance of her dance moves and agreement of response—that speaks to what Marasigan appreciates most about the School, particularly as a 2018 BA/MIA candidate.
“Knowing I would be younger than my colleagues, I worried I wouldn’t fit in,” she explained of the program that incorporates graduate-level coursework into the final year of study for a B.A. in International Studies at UC San Diego. “But the opposite happened. ... I’ve developed lifelong friends.”

In complement to our Storify tour of a day in the life of Marasigan, we also asked her a couple of questions for more on what led her to pursue the program and what it entails today.

How did the BA/MIA at GPS come on your radar?

“UC San Diego is well known for its economics program. That’s what I actually had my eye on when I wanted to transfer from San Diego City College. Investigating that ended up being my gateway to discovering GPS’s BA/MIA program at Transfer Triton Day, where I spoke to another BA/MIA who told me about his experience. It sounded amazing, the fact you can get a master’s while finishing your bachelor’s. This program was such a good deal, especially considering my career goals.

I want to end up in the private sector, specifically the sustainable energy sector. I’m not sure what that is going to look like. But I want to be able utilize my technical skills, and I’m confident this program is positioning me well for it.”

Now, do you feel like a graduate student at GPS or an undergraduate student attending GPS?

“I feel like a graduate student at GPS, and I love it. The funny thing is my classmates can’t tell I’m in the BA/MIA program until I mention it. Up to that point, they assume I’m in the MIA program. Knowing I would be younger than my colleagues, I worried I wouldn’t fit in. But the opposite happened. Everyone meshed really well together. One of my favorite things about the School is it’s small and intimate. My friends and I always joke about being in our little ‘bubble’ here in GPS. But it’s one of my favorite things about it. It’s the perfect environment to get close with faculty, colleagues and friends. I know it’s only the second quarter, but I’ve already developed lifelong friends.”
Is there a particular class or professor that already has made an impact on you?

“In the first quarter, Assistant Professor Gordon McCord taught managerial economics, and there were a lot of important takeaways from that class that are very applicable to current events. It was a challenging yet rewarding class.

Then there’s Assistant Professor Jennifer Burney, who teaches Quantitative Methods II. She’s probably one of the best professors for it. She’s aware of where we are and how overwhelming the material can be, but she keeps our heads above the water.”

A lot of our students note Quantitative Methods (QM) is their hardest course.

“This is going to sound weird: It’s my favorite class. But it’s a challenge. Actually, a challenge would be an understatement. It’s a really humbling experience, to say the least. It pushes you past your limits and, personally, I work best under pressure and when I’m challenged. The silver lining in all the assignments is that my friends and I have gotten a lot closer because we’re working together on every assignment. There’s a lot of comradery when you’re commiserating together in QM. You know when you exercise and you don’t feel growth until you’re sore, sweating and in pain? It feels like that.

Plus, the emphasis on quantitative training was actually one of the things that attracted me most to the BA/MIA program. Because my undergraduate degree is in international political science, I knew the quantitative methods would add teeth to the social science aspect of things. People tend to lend their ears easier to numbers, statistics and data. It’s a practical skill to have.”

In what ways did the BA part of this program prepare you for the MIA part at GPS?

“When I decided I wanted to do the BA/MIA program, I was told I had to do a series of calculus courses. I also had to do summer prep, which served as a good icebreaker among the cohort. By the time fall quarter came, we’d already formed study groups and were familiar with each other.
Also, last year, I began an independent study with Professor Kate Antonovics in UC San Diego’s Department of Economics. Knowing the job market is really competitive now, I just wanted to get more experience while I was an undergrad. It has been a good practice because my professor uses STATA, which is what we use in QM—it’s our best friend. We’re now working on a project together regarding voter turnout among college students. We meet once a week for a couple of hours and do work outside of campus.”

**In what ways do you get your mind off of School?**

“I love yoga and going to the beach, where I body board. And boxing, I really like boxing! Living in North Park is nice, too, because it takes you away from this whole school feel. We have a lot of nice taprooms and cafes there.

Surprisingly, I’m able to find time to do these things. My friends and I always say, ‘Sometimes it’s productive to be unproductive.’ It gives your brain a rest, and physical or social activities are good ways to do that. In fact, I treat it as just another assignment. If I look at it that way, there’s always time for it.”

**Is there anything about this program that has surprised you?**

“During summer prep, there were a lot of alumni who would return to talk to us. They would always tell us, ‘You’re going to make your lifelong friends here.’ You hear it, but you don’t believe it. In some sense, that was surprising. Even though we’re only 150 people—from all over the world with all sorts of experiences—we all meet in this space and connect. I’ve learned a lot from my colleagues. Coming here is the best decision I’ve ever made in my life. I’m not just saying that to sell
it. I love every day I’m at GPS, even if I’m challenged or drowning in workload. You feel growth instantly from it.”

Visit Storify to see a typical day in the life of Marasigan.