A day in the life of a GSR

In a Q&A complementing our Storify tour of a day in the life of Maya Reynolds, the 2017 MIA candidate paints a picture of what attending GPS looks like for her as a GSR

By Sarah Pfledderer | GPS News

Clinks of bats to balls and other utterances from the UC San Diego softball team’s practice echo up toward the patio of Peet’s Cafe, situated a short walk away from the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS). Maya Reynolds, 2017 MIA candidate, is staring into her laptop, only recognizing the chatter from the field below when she breaks her gaze to raise a pen and write in a notebook.

She’s tumbled down into an online rabbit hole as a result of her research on women managers in Japan. In light of the country’s labor shortage, Japan must make moves to empower more women to enter the workforce. Yet there are many old-school taboos that need broken, she explains, and rattles off some statistics with the confidence of a professor leading a lecture.

If tested on the topic, Reynolds would ace an exam, easy. However, her research isn’t for a class but instead for her position as a graduate student researcher (GSR) at GPS’s Japan Forum for Innovation and Technology (JFIT), led by the School’s renowned professor in Japan business, Ulrike Schaede.

Given she came to GPS specifically to study Japanese management, Reynolds couldn’t be more in her element in the position. Or as she puts it, “What better way than to work directly with the expert?”

In complement to our Storify tour of a day in the life of Reynolds as a GSR, we also asked her a couple of questions for more on what led her to the School and what balancing life as an MIA student and GSR entails.

What led you to GPS?
“Previously, I was working as the assistant to the vice chancellor of student affairs at UC Santa Barbara. In that position, I was invited to be an instructor for an orientation course for international students. I loved doing that, and it reminded me that I really had lost touch with a side of my life, the international aspect. I’m a Japanese-U.S. dual citizen, and I grew up speaking Japanese and travelling back and forth to Japan. There also was this part of me that felt I was missing out because I never pursued private sector jobs in marketing or public relations, which I studied in my undergraduate education at Humboldt State University. I loved that GPS offered management, not only with the focus on Japan, but also with an international relations aspect. It was the perfect fit. And of course, my mom is super pleased I’ve returned to my roots of studying Japanese.”

**How did your GSR position come about and what does it involve?**

“I took Professor Schaede’s Business and Management in Japan course during my first quarter at GPS, and I was extremely lucky to be approached by her about the position. I accepted without hesitation. Some of my day-to-day responsibilities range from social media, writing our weekly e-newsletter, conducting research and analyzing data, designing report covers and layouts, or assisting with events and conferences. I’ve also helped with updating content that goes on our website.

One of our main projects as of late is our newly launched Josei/Women for Upper Management Program, which invites female managers from Japan to come to San Diego and receive hands-on training and mentorship, as well as tools for promotion and self-confidence. Women in Japan, just like women in many other countries, experience a severe gender gap in the workplace, including wage gap and disparity in professional opportunities. There is still a lot of inequality. Naturally, JFIT strives to change that conversation and empower women—led by Professor Schaede’s passion about women’s rights, especially for women in the workplace. It’s one of the things I’m really excited about.”

**How has being a GSR for JFIT complemented your curriculum?**

“I came here to study Japanese management, so what better way than to work directly with the expert here at GPS? Professor Schaede also gives me a lot of autonomy, providing the basic things to work on, but also the flexibility to apply my own creativity. Also, having this practical application of what I’m learning is great in terms of giving me a sense of focus as to why I’m here in this program.
I’ve had moments where I would be struggling through the rigor of Quantitative Methods. But later, I’ll be doing some data research in my JFIT office and realize, ‘This helps.’”

**Is the first year at GPS really that challenging?**

“It is (laughs). But as an undergrad, I avoided math at all costs. I’m in Corporate Finance, Accounting and International Economics spring quarter. My only qualitative course is International Politics and Security. Just the other day, I thought to myself: ‘What am I doing? I feel like I signed up for a math major.’ But it’s forcing me to be good at math. In a sense, it’s really made me appreciate how important quantitative concepts are in the workplace. This program taught me how to be a better skeptic and not take things at surface value anymore. I’ve never regretted coming here. Some days are really hard. But it’s taught me that I’m capable of anything—well, I still can’t design rockets, but I can master things I never thought I could in the past. I’m going to be a more diverse employee now, hopefully at a multinational cooperation in San Diego that does a lot of business in Japan. I’m also excited to test what I’ve been learning all year in my summer internship at Source Intelligence, a supply chain sustainability and transparency company in Carlsbad.”

**In what ways do you de-stress from School?**

“I live in Pacific Beach right by Mission Bay, so when I’m not at School, I’m usually at my house. For fun, I play a lot of tennis, go on jogs around the bay, check out different restaurants around town, and go on long scooter rides. I love being really active. I live with my husband and cat, Master John. We adopted him last February for Valentine’s Day. My friends call me a crazy cat lady because I’m so crazy about him. I want to adopt more pets, but Master John is kind of a queen.
He requires a bit of attention.”

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