In honor of International Women’s Day on March 8, five GPS alumnae share their career journeys and how they are raising awareness of the diversity of women’s lived experiences.

For the month of March, UC San Diego will be celebrating women by hosting a number of programs in honor of Women’s Herstory Month 2023.

In keeping with this year’s theme of “Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories,” GPS News reached out to a handful of our women graduates who are helping to solve the world’s most pressing policy challenges.

Though these women come from all walks of life, a drive to make a difference in the world through nuanced study of international policy and quantitative analysis brought them to the halls of the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS).

The perfect toolkit for achievement
“It was on my radar when I was researching graduate school options because I was looking for a program with an economics approach,” said Joanna Valle Luna ’18, who was raised in Mexico City. “One of my friends in Mexico knew a second-year student doing the Master of International Affairs (MIA) program, so I had the chance to talk directly to someone already in the program and listen to his experiences.”

Bryn Philibert ’18 said she chose GPS to “get those ‘hard skills’” that she felt would serve her in her career.

“To be honest, of the programs I was looking at, GPS scared me the most,” Philibert said. “It was the program with the most rigorous quantitative focus, and that was something I felt like I was lacking from my background in international studies and gender.”

Tamar Benzaken Koosed ’09, of Manaus, Brazil, was working in sustainability after graduating from the University of Southern California and felt she needed to add data and analytics skills to her toolkit to advance both her career and the field.

“I was really bothered by the lack of metrics and quantification of impact in the sector,” Koosed said. “I searched for master’s degrees that could give me the hard skills to add that value to the field, and this search took me straight to GPS.”
Bryn Philibert, traveling in Pakistan for data collection with Manaus. | Contributed photo

Monique Braudo ’18, meanwhile, was already at UC San Diego pursuing her undergraduate degree in international studies.

“I actually transferred there from UC Irvine because of the BA/MIA concurrent degree program at GPS,” Braudo said. “I got to know the program and was excited about the class size and the heavier focus on econometrics.”

Rummer Bershtein ’21 learned about GPS and the Master of Advanced Studies in International Affairs (MAS-IA) program while serving in the Marine Corps as an intelligence officer.

“I thought it would be a great way for me to further my education in relevant fields while transitioning back into the civilian world, and I was right,” Bershtein said. “The professors at GPS taught me how to deep-dive into research and then curate that research into a coherent package. They also taught me to look critically at everything placed in front of me and gave me the resources to be a problem solver.”

**Advancing in their fields**

**Consulting**

Though Koosed wears many hats, one of her titles is founder of Manaus, a
research and consulting firm that assesses the impact of social policies and initiatives. Philibert, Braudo and Valle Luna also work at Manaus, with Philibert as CEO, Braudo as a consultant and Valle Luna as a research associate.

“We have had over 20 GPSers come through our company, as staff and summer associates,” Koosed said. “We put the GPS playbook to use every day, so we absolutely love working with GPSers. We really are surrounded by GPSers in our social impact and sustainability fields.”

Many GPSers are also Manaus clients, helping them create relationships with organizations like the Levi Strauss Foundation, where alum Kim Almeida ’09 works, and the Africa Development Bank, where alum Helio Bertachini ’09 works.

Valle Luna said her role involves a great deal of data-driven analysis, with the goal of improving people’s lives.

“Last year, I got to go to Ghana, Pakistan and Bangladesh to collect data about factory workers’ well-being in the apparel sector for a project we have with the Levi Strauss Foundation and Levi Strauss and Co.,” Valle Luna said.

Braudo said she has been working on and off for Manaus in various capacities since graduating from GPS, after connecting with Koosed during a site visit in 2017. In her current role as a consultant, she works on projects in areas of strategy development and research for clients in the international development space.
“[Koosed] is also Brazilian, and I ended up supporting research after graduation using my Portuguese,” Braudo said. “We had a great connection, and my good friend from GPS, Bryn Philibert, was working there full time and is now the CEO of the firm.”

Though Philibert holds the CEO title, she said she’s involved in all aspects of the organization — fitting, as she has actually worked at Manaus since a summer internship between her first and second year at GPS.

“I was hired full-time after graduation, and I’ve been here since. In that time, I’ve worked as a research associate, research manager, and now CEO,” Philibert said. “These days, I work on our business development efforts to bring on new clients, I manage and staff projects, and I participate in and lead many of our projects.”

National security

Rummer Bershtein | Contributed photo

Bershtein is currently an associate at Booz Allen Hamilton working in national security and intelligence, where she does analysis and real-time problem solving to support national security objectives for the U.S.

“I chose my job because I wanted a dynamic and challenging position that encouraged me to deal with constantly evolving landscapes and required innovative solutions,” Bershtein said. “I love doing security work, and I wanted to carry my experience from the Marine Corps into the civilian world and find a place where I could be useful.”
Bershtein said Vice Adm. Robert Thomas had a particular impact on her during her time at GPS because he helped her weave prior experience and professional goals into her coursework.

“He gave me the creative freedom to explore issues that I felt important while still instilling in me the right way to discern information,” Bershtein said. “He also served as a sounding board during office hours for academic and professional guidance — don’t miss the admiral’s office hours!”

Bershtein said though working in national security is challenging because it can be tough maintaining a work-life balance amid such purposeful work, she still finds the work rewarding.

“I am fortunate enough to feel like I am having a positive impact on the security of my country,” Bershtein said.

Nonprofit and other work

Koosed is also the co-founder of Save the Syrian Children, a 100% volunteer-fueled nonprofit that sources and sends medical and humanitarian aid to the hardest-hit areas of the Syrian civil war. The nonprofit has shipped over $135 million in medical supplies to date, Koosed said, along with incredible support from her alumni network.

“We have received over $35,000 in donations from GPS alumni, as well as made connections through alumni that have led to the shipment of entire containers of in-kind donations,” Koosed explained.

But Koosed’s nonprofit work also extends beyond Save the Syrian Children.

“My favorite is my work with Jewish World Watch, an organization that bring people of all faiths and cultures to fight against genocide,” Koosed said.

Koosed said she is also an active participant in multiple companies that she has become invested in over the years.

“One of my favorites is K2 Employment Law, a plaintiff law firm that works on behalf of folks that have experienced harassment and other non-compliances at work,” Koosed said. “I’m proud of the work we do to right the wrong of labor issues experienced by our clients.”
Sharing tips for success

While many sectors are still male-dominated, our society continues to move toward social changes that empower all those who are marginalized by gender oppression. And these alums shared their own advice for women to find success in any field.

Monique Braudo | Contributed photo

“National security can at times be an intense field, but I would encourage other women interested in it to make the leap,” Bershtein said. “There is little room for error in a field where the stakes are so high, so take the time to pay attention to the details, be receptive to criticism, and work harder than most people in the room.”

Valle Luna said she’d encourage people to put in the effort to improve technical skills; ask for help when it’s needed; and reach out to people already working in the field during the job search, which may lead to more opportunities.

“Take advantage of all the resources at GPS, too,” Valle Luna added. “Go to office hours — the professors are amazing! — ask a classmate, or meet with Career Services, and enjoy the process.”

Also keep in mind that getting your “dream job” is a process — not likely a role you’ll secure immediately after graduation but instead something you’ll work toward as you advance your career.
“I was reading the other day that **men apply for jobs when they meet 60% of the requirements**, while women (on average) apply when they meet all of them. Yes, being qualified matters, but it also has the confidence that we are a good fit for the job we are applying for, so don’t be afraid of trying. Go for it!” Valle Luna said. “It’s a numbers game. When you see job positions that fit your professional goals, apply, apply, apply. You might not get the job on the first try, but it’ll serve as practice for how the technical exams are or train you for how to do a better interview.”

Braudo’s advice was simple: do the work you feel underqualified for.

“Learn by doing, and trust your ability to learn, rather than relying on what you already know how to do,” Braudo explained. “That is what GPS taught us most: how to learn. It’s our superpower! Recognize the value of that.”

Philibert said she feels lucky to have worked with a number of other amazing women throughout her career, such as Koosed.

“I often find myself in rooms full of other amazing women and have realized that in the spaces of social impact that I work in, the majority of my colleagues and peers are women, which has made every space empowering and supportive,” Philibert said. “I know that’s not always the case at more traditional consulting firms, so I’d recommend students really engage with the teams, understand how they work and, where possible, talk to women in the companies to understand their experiences.”

“But don’t be afraid to take up space, wherever you are,” Philibert added.