Fellowships provide financial security in pursuing an advanced degree

Three students share the incredible impact of the school’s Robertson, Sylff and Dean’s Fellowships

The UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) is internationally recognized for its excellence, and a key reason for our growing distinction is our ability to attract the best graduate students from across the globe.

One notable draw for these student scholars are fellowship opportunities and here we highlight three: Robertson Fellows, sponsored by the Robertson Foundation for Government (RFG); Sylff Fellows, sponsored by the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (Sylff) and the internal GPS Dean’s Fellows.

GPS News spoke with three students that have received support to explore their backgrounds, career goals and how the fellowships have made a positive impact in their academic lives at the school.
Elisabeth Earley

Robertson Fellow

RFG aspires to make a difference by offering annual financial support for graduate students pursuing federal government careers in foreign policy, national security and international affairs.

Robertson Fellows at selected universities receive full scholarships and full internship stipends from the foundation. They also commit to work for the federal government for a minimum of three of their first seven years after graduation.

Elisabeth Earley, a Master of International Affairs (MIA) ’23 student with a career track in international development and nonprofit management and a regional focus in Latin America, grew up in Northern California — “far enough north that I didn’t consider the Bay Area to be NorCal until I attended undergrad there,” she joked.

“San Diego seemed like a great place to get to know Southern California life, so I applied to schools in San Diego that have strong political science and economics programs,” Earley said. “GPS was certainly my preference, so when I received the offer to be a Robertson Fellow, wherein tuition is generously covered, my mind was made up immediately and I started the most important research for moving to San Diego: finding the best taco stands near campus.”

The fellowship supports students by covering tuition, a generous stipend and providing an abundance of career support and networking opportunities.

“This fellowship certainly made my choice to attend GPS very easy,” Earley said. “The financial and academic support combined with the culture of UC San Diego and GPS — not to mention access to the beach — was an unbeatable offer.”

Through the fellowship, Earley has had the opportunity to intern with a federal agency, the National Credit Union Administration, as well as attend many informational interviews and panels. In her internship, she learned about Minority Depository Institutions, which serve minority populations across the U.S. and offer important savings and consumer protection products and information.

“Both have given me a glimpse behind the curtain into federal data management
and policy making, which is an advantage in courses that complement this practical experience with a theoretical and historical perspective,” Earley said. “The internship definitely influenced my career goals in that I want to prioritize service to others in whatever job I find myself in.”

The most rewarding aspect of the fellowship, Earley added, has been getting to know the other Robertson Fellows in her cohort as well as alumni who also took part in the Robertson Fellows program.

“They are very dedicated and passionate people, many of whom I am pleased to call close friends,” she said. “My favorite thing about GPS has been my classmates. There is such a diversity of backgrounds and lived experience that the students bring to the table when discussing the world’s most pressing issues.”

And Earley works to engage with her fellow students outside the classroom as well; she currently serves as co-director of QuIPS, GPS’s queer identity student organization.

“We offer a place to engage and network with the LGBTQIA+ community at various levels of policymaking in San Diego and beyond while drawing attention to policy issues and concerns that affect our community at large,” she said.

Earley hopes to work as a data or project manager upon graduation.

“I love being involved at different levels of a project or initiative and creatively problem-solving, eventually having the satisfaction of seeing the project come to fruition,” Earley said.

In the meantime, Earley said she is looking forward to continuing to form strong bonds with other GPS students.

“I look forward to getting to know my cohort better this coming year and meeting the new incoming class, who I’m sure will enrich the school with their knowledge and passion as well,” she added.

Peter “PJ” Wilborn

Dean’s Fellow; Robertson Fellow
Some outstanding students, such as Master of Public Policy (MPP) ’23 student Peter “PJ” Wilborn, have the opportunity to benefit from multiple fellowships. Wilborn is both a Robertson Fellow and a Dean’s Fellow.

The special distinction of Dean’s Fellow serves to signal the professional qualities of excellence that the school cultivates and honors, to reward outstanding performance by students and to create a prestigious group of high-quality students and alumni to showcase to the world. Dean’s Fellows are selected between their first and second years at GPS based on academic excellence, leadership, civic engagement and regional involvement.

Wilborn, who was raised in Atlanta, Georgia, is specializing in peace and security as part of his MPP degree. Before entering GPS, Peter served in the Peace Corps in East Africa as a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) teacher and policy advocate, working at a local level with other teachers and advocates to assist students in English learning.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began and the Peace Corps program was suspended, he returned home and worked in the nonprofit sector, specifically in emergency management in relation to COVID testing in vulnerable communities.

“Initially, I wanted to attend GPS due to its quantitative-based curriculum and world class faculty and would have made strides to make sure that I could attend the school,” Wilborn said. “However, in being offered the RFG Fellowship, it fully cemented my desire to attend the school.”

Wilborn said during his time at GPS, he has not only met like-minded individuals but has also learned from them, with all parties benefiting from sharing their experiences and enhancing their global mindset.

“The number of connections both at GPS and external to the school as well have been incredibly helpful in both determining where I would like to work and what I would like to do in terms of my professional passion,” Wilborn said.

Wilborn said he hopes to pursue a career with a federal organization like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which would allow him to focus on working with and empowering marginalized and vulnerable communities.

“Given that a large part of what I want to do is related to serving my own and the
international community, these fellowships have allowed me to properly focus all my attention on excelling in all the subjects necessary to do just that,” he added.

Along with pursuing his studies, Wilborn currently serves as the Vice President of External Affairs for the Graduate Organization of GPS (GO GPS), the Vice President of External Affairs for the Strategic Studies Group (SSG) and is a member of the GPS Ambassador program as part of his Dean’s Fellowship. External to GPS, he also serves as the Vice President of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion for the UC San Diego Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA).

“My favorite thing about being here has been the general environment of San Diego, be it social, academic or professional. The ‘vibe’ both on campus and in the city of San Diego is amazing, and I love that it has provided such a welcoming environment to be a student in,” Wilborn said. “Even in saying that, I definitely enjoy that aspect of being constantly stimulated as a professional student in a way that allows me to continue growing as a young professional, a Black man and as a future public servant.”

**Brandon Callegari**

**Sylff Fellow**

Brandon Callegari, who grew up in Deltona, Florida, described GPS as “the ideal choice” when he was searching for a Pacific-focused graduate school that would aid him in his goal of finding a career in the human rights field.

Callegari’s interest in human rights made him a natural fit for the Sylff program, whose mission is to transcend differences in nationality, language, ethnicity, religion and political systems to bring about social change in the global society and local communities.

“As somebody who wants to dedicate their life to addressing human rights issues for refugees and other displaced groups, I am driven to follow this mission and help to bring opportunities to people beyond social, cultural and physical boundaries,” Callegari said.

Callegari said the fellowship has allowed him to engage in his classes without
adding the worry of financial burdens that could distract him from his coursework — as well as given him the bandwidth to explore international affairs and policy issues close to his heart.

“The Sylff Fellowship has given me the freedom and opportunity to deeply explore human rights topics that I otherwise would not have the time to pursue, including performing quantitative analysis on socioeconomic indicators for refugees in Rwanda over the summer,” Callegari said.

As he enters his second year, Callegari is looking toward a future in doing groundwork on specific human rights crises. He plans to pursue a career at either a multilateral organization, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, or for a local nongovernmental organization (NGO). But many at GPS have already had a huge impact on his career trajectory.

“At GPS, I have been lucky enough to make some great friends and get closer to my professors, specifically Emilie Hafner-Burton and Stephan Haggard, who are some of the most amazing professors that I have ever had the opportunity to learn from,” Callegari said.

Without the Sylff Fellowship, Callegari said these connections and the growth he has experienced over the past year would not have been possible.

“The most rewarding aspect is knowing that I am a part of a larger community of people who want to create a more inclusive and peaceful world for everyone,” he added.