

Jamal Russell Black on Veridian Analytics' entrepreneurial spirit





Longtime friends and GPS classmates innovate data driven solutions for a sustainable future as they launch a global consulting service

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News

Meeting in summer math camp at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) has its perks. Becoming instantaneous friends and soon to be business partners, the love of data ran deep in the founding members, which includes co-founders Arjun Baragi '16, Jamal Russell Black '16 and Ryan Engler '16.

“We really have GPS to thank for bringing us together, not only educationally but helping us get to where we are now,” said Russell Black.

Setting the plan in motion during their second year in the [Master of International Affairs](#) program at the school, [Veridian Analytics](#) officially launched in October 2017. The company specializes in combining the power of data with qualitative research in the fields of economics, social and environmental sustainability.

“When I entered the work world, I expected it to be a scary thing and for people to be so much more advanced than me,” said Russell Black. “The opposite was true. GPS prepared us extremely well from both a quantitative and qualitative dimension.”

Working together, traveling together and even living together has proved a successful model in their entrepreneurial approach. While the founding members all had a data background thanks to classwork, they each came from a unique angle — from Baragi as a U.S. army veteran to Engler’s background in finance —

assisting greatly in client interaction.

“Thanks to our unique backgrounds, we have been able to approach our diverse clients from a multitude of angles,” said Russell Black. “You learn at GPS that you miss the mark if you don’t look at the interrelated issues, the overlap is key.”

Building their network has proven easy. They’ve been in contact with other alumni from around the world, including Austria and Ecuador, all which have played a large role in the early success of Veridian Analytics. In fact, current clients include fellow alumna Courtney Muro ’16 of Mona Monet Fashion.

The company’s name is a mix between the Latin words viridian (green), veritas (truth) and meridian (balanced, unbiased). These three principles comprise their mission and philosophy, which includes looking at the identification, execution and evaluation of sustainable practices and business models. While the company’s areas of practice may change, they stay true to the interdisciplinary nature of GPS when creating targeted marketing for each client.

“My time at GPS really gave me the confidence to start a company and take a risk,” said Russell Black. “We wanted the freedom to take the company in our own direction. We really believe in the product.”

When asked what classes proved the most beneficial in building the company structure, Russell Black cites the quantitative methods series, as well as international law and regulation in building a global business.

“I don’t think we would be able to do the level or quality of work we are doing without those courses,” said Russell Black. “We have a niche market that is very fruitful thanks to the level of technical training.”

Currently a member of the [GPS Alumni Board](#), Russell Black encourages current and past students to view the world from a data-driven approach. Having himself turned down attending other top-tier international studies schools, in both England and the East Coast, Russell Black believes in the GPS model and will be eager to hire interns in the future.

“I have confidence in not only the staff and faculty but also the students they are admitting,” said Russell Black. “All of my fellow classmates went on to do great things. When I talk to alumni around Washington, D.C. and New York, I’ve never

met one alumni that wasn't impressive. I don't doubt that will continue on."