

# 'My classmates are all superheroes'



**Former U.S. Air Force member Jade Reidy shares how she landed at GPS to study in the MAS-IA program, specializing in the Security of the Asia Pacific with a China focus**

After a 20-year career in the U.S. Air Force, including spending five years stationed in China, Jade Reidy was ready to take her academic career to the next level. In a Q&A, Reidy, who will graduate this June, explains how she chose to pursue a degree through the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy's [Master of Advanced Studies in International Affairs \(MAS-IA\)](#) program, her pro tips for admitted students and why everyone should try to audit a class each quarter.

**Where are you from? Where did you earn your undergraduate degree (and in what)?**

I was born in Alexandria, Virginia, and grew up in both California and Maryland. After graduating from high school in Bethesda, Maryland, I graduated in 2000 from UCLA with a B.A. in Chinese with a specialization in Business Administration.

### **What drew you to UC San Diego and to GPS to get your MAS-IA degree?**

While I was in the Air Force, I spent over five years stationed in Beijing, China. After retiring, I wanted to continue my educational journey by studying at a school that specialized in China matters. I didn't actively seek out San Diego, but after looking at all the programs that specialized in China, UC San Diego was at the top of the list. In 2019, I was considering retirement and cold-called GPS. Director of Admissions [Sonja Steinbrech](#) introduced me to the MAS-IA program. A few months later, my family and I visited UC San Diego to see if the transition to civilian life and the MAS-IA program would be a good fit. [Executive Education](#) expert Janaye Barker explained the program and arranged a meeting with Vice Admiral Robert Thomas and professor Tai Ming Cheung. Meeting the team and appreciating their expertise reinforced the decision for me to retire and come to GPS.

### **What is your area of specialization, and why did you choose it?**

My specialization is Security of the Asia Pacific with a China focus. While I had a lot of experience living in China and working alongside my Tsinghua classmates and People's Liberation Army counterparts, I wanted to understand China from a more academically rigorous perspective.

### **What do you like most about the MAS-IA program so far?**

There is a wealth of expertise and experience among the faculty and my fellow graduate students. It's very humbling to be among professors who have vast experience and are on the cutting edge of their field. Most of all, their desire to equip and invest in students is inspiring. It's fantastic to be a part of a diverse and talented cohort. My classmates are all superheroes with interesting backgrounds, and very modest about it.

### **What's been your favorite class so far and why?**

This must be a trick question - I liked them all! [Tai Ming Cheung](#)'s Chinese

Security, Technology and Innovation was one where I learned the most. The most impactful has been [Emilie Hafner-Burton](#)'s Human Rights class. [Liz Lyons](#)' Start-Ups, Founding to Launch was the most influential. I can't unsee [Jesse Driscoll](#) "in a hat" while roleplaying different national security debates - his class was fascinating. I've tried to audit at least one class each quarter, and every one of those courses taught me a lot, too.

**Is there a particular professor or staff member that has made a big impact on you? If so, who and why?**

Each one has made a positive impact, but two professors stand out over my two-year program. [Vice Admiral Robert Thomas](#) exemplifies service before self and always makes time for his students. [Tai Ming Cheung](#) has been a phenomenal mentor on China and defense matters. I spent 25% of my career stationed in China, and I've learned so much above and beyond those experiences by coming to GPS. In my second year, our career services team was influential in sparking my interest in entertainment diplomacy, and MAS-IA Program Coordinator Janaye Barker was the glue that held us all together.

**What advice do you have for admitted GPS students?**

Learn from everyone. Take advantage of the resources and talent that you have access to here. Introduce yourself to the teaching assistants. Go to your professors' office hours. Audit classes. Join a student group. Break bread with your classmates. Enjoy the journey.

**Amid your rigorous academic schedule, what steps do you take to strike a work/life balance?**

My family and I came to San Diego to begin this adventure together. I try to keep my focus on the bigger picture and try to understand my measures of success. These measures will be different for everyone. For me, I try to stay mindful of time as our most precious resource, and the opportunity cost of how I allocate that time. Making memories as a family is more valuable to me than making a big paycheck at the expense of my family.

**Are you involved in any GPS/UC San Diego student groups?**

Yes! I served on the board of the Strategic Studies Group. It was a great way to

get to know some of my classmates and to learn from each other. Our tenure was during a period of COVID protocols, so we were light on the in-person gatherings. I think the next board will take the group to new heights.

**After graduation, what do you hope to do?**

I'd love to launch a startup. I hope to make a contribution to solving complex problem sets. I feel led to help equip and develop future leaders and decision-makers. I'd like to publish and create content, and I want to make international issues more digestible to the public. I hope to reflect the light in the world.