

# On the Front Lines of Clean Energy



In the decade since graduating from UC San Diego's School of International Relations and Pacific Studies (IR/PS), Mark Higgins, MPIA '04, has established himself as a power broker in the clean energy sector — a leader whose work will have a significant impact on our future.

"We are on the front lines of figuring out how to make an energy supply with lower carbon emissions a reality," said Higgins. "This is one of the big issues that we are dealing with as a global society in the 21st century."

Currently, Higgins serves as Senior Director at Strategen Consulting, a California-based strategy consulting firm that helps organizations launch profitable, long-term ventures in clean energy markets. Prior to that, he worked

at Pacific Gas and Electric, heading up regulatory policy work related to new sources of renewable energy, as well as management and planning to ensure that California has a reliable energy transmission grid.

Higgins credits his industry success in large part to the education he received at IR/PS.

“IR/PS is great for going into the energy sector because of its focus on how government and public policy impacts business,” said Higgins. “Energy is one of the most highly regulated industries—it is at the crossroads of business and policy.”

Higgins wasn't always in the energy sector, however. When he first graduated from IR/PS, he helped launch a \$70 million venture capital fund focused on commercializing international technologies in the U.S. market. While much of the investments were in agricultural tech and biotech, the fund he worked with began dabbling in investments in renewable energy, which gave him a taste for the industry sector. When Higgins moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, he made the transition from venture capital and finance to development and policy work related to energy.

Valuing his relationship with his alma mater, Higgins has stayed involved with IR/PS since his graduation.

“When talking with others, I describe an education from IR/PS as an MBA on steroids,” said Higgins. “Students get a lot of the components of a management degree, but in addition, they learn about international government and regulatory processes, which is helpful in many industries.”

Higgins supports the IR/PS Summer Internship Fund, which provides students with the opportunity to participate in intensive summer internships around the globe. An integral part of the IR/PS experience, students gain hands-on experience conducting research, shaping public policy and engaging in public service.

To this day, he reflects fondly on his experience abroad as part of the IR/PS Summer Internship Program. He worked in the United States Foreign

Commercial Service in Auckland, New Zealand, and as a systems analyst at Deloitte Consulting. He recalls participating in various real-world projects and market research, which gave him insight into how governments can help small and medium-sized businesses grow and expand internationally.

“The program gave a lot to me,” said Higgins. “And I know there were benefactors who helped support me in the summer internship program and made that experience possible for me.”

Today, Higgins seeks to pay it forward. “At IR/PS, every alumni donation makes a difference,” said Higgins. “It is easy to see how our support tangibly helps real people. By giving to the Summer Internship Fund, I know that my gift is going to a student who will gain the same valuable experience I had when I was there.”