Three students selected as GPS’s 2017-18 Dean’s Fellows share their experiences that qualify them for this special distinction

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News

From fathers to humanitarians, our fellows are more than just distinguished scholars. They are leaders in the field, inside and outside the classroom. These global citizens at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) have proven their commitment not only to academic excellence but meaningful engagement in the U.S. and around the world.

Displaying leadership, citizenship and regional involvement, we get to know three of this year’s distinguished talent.

Eddy K. Chebelyon, MIA ‘18
High Impact Scholarship in Technological Development

“My career track is International Development and Nonprofit Management and my regional focus is Latin America. My interest in technology for development made choosing the track an easy decision, and San Diego’s location was a key factor in my decision to focus on Latin America. The availability of the track at GPS also contributed to my choice to apply to the program. The Southern Californian weather didn’t hurt either.

During my first year at GPS, I developed a different kind of lens with which to view the challenges of economic development. Courses in quantitative methods, economics of development, and politics and security have broadened my perspective on the many issues experienced not only around the Pacific region but also in other parts the world. Currently, I am also a Robinson Fellow and working on a research project with Professor Kate Ricke, a truly exciting experience, in which we are trying to understand the interaction between temperature, technology and economic production on a global scale.

While I am quite shy, I have made great friends in the program who have similar interests. Whether it is playing soccer in the evenings or weekend study groups, we have managed to build a balance between labor and leisure. I think the sense of community among students at GPS is a major strength of the school and has helped me come out of my shell a bit. Outside of GPS, most of my spare time is spent with my family; my daughter is 22 months old and at a very fun stage.”

Ashley Halabi, MIA ’18

Fighting for Human Rights
“While I was finishing my last year of college in Lebanon, I decided to get a master’s degree to help me pursue my dream of fighting for human rights. This brought me to GPS, a place that has taught me more about myself and my goals in life than I had expected. I say that because the curriculum, specifically the MIA program, has diverse aspects like an internship and language requirement that gave me important skills and life lessons that I will carry with me throughout my career. At GPS, I decided to focus on Latin America to learn more about the wars and conflicts in this region since I wasn’t exposed to these topics in Lebanon.

As soon as I arrived at GPS, I started a student organization called CeaseFire on a topic that is sometimes overshadowed in this part of the world: human rights violations in conflict areas. This human rights organization represents not only my dream to one day establish an NGO for refugees and victims of atrocities, but it also reflects my passion and background in politics, human rights and international criminal law. Luckily for me, GPS welcomed my idea and encouraged me to launch it immediately.

I always attribute my passion for human rights and peace building to the fact that I was born and raised in Lebanon, which is surrounded by countries in the midst of brutal civil wars. GPS gave me an opportunity to learn more about myself and my classmates and a platform to focus my classmates’ attention on topics that they are not usually exposed to. I attended a conference on human trafficking at Harvard University last year that we are currently in the process of bringing to GPS this Winter quarter. I am expecting it to be a very powerful conference for the GPS community.”

Alexander (Alex) Webb, MIA ’19

Expertise in Asia-Pacific Foreign Relations
As I researched various international affairs graduate programs, the single most important factor that led me to choose GPS was the faculty’s deep level of expertise in the Asia-Pacific region. I was searching for a program that would allow me to further my interest in China while honing my analytical skills, and GPS seemed to be the perfect fit. My experience in the MIA program has only reinforced this, including interning with the U.S. Department of Commerce at the American Institute in Taiwan – an opportunity that allowed me to apply some of the knowledge I’ve gained at GPS while moving one step closer to achieving my career goals.

I’ve always enjoyed studying foreign languages. Studying the Chinese language sparked an interest in China’s culture, society and politics, which ultimately prompted me to serve as a teaching fellow with the organization Teach for China following my undergraduate graduation. After two years teaching at a rural school in China’s Yunnan province, my time at GPS has given me the chance to build on that on-the-ground experience and pursue topics such as China’s domestic politics, Chinese foreign policy in Southeast Asia and cross-strait relations with Taiwan.

Between my classmates, professors and the wonderful staff at career services, I have found the GPS community to be endlessly supportive. Over the past year, I found my own niche in the community as a staff writer for the China Focus blog, a student-run publication that aims to share unique perspectives on China-related issues in international affairs. As a 2017 Boren Fellow, I’m currently working to sharpen my Mandarin Chinese skills through a yearlong intensive language program in Taipei, Taiwan.

2017-18 Dean’s Fellows include:

- Eddy K. Chebelyon, MIA ‘18
- Ashley Halabi, MIA ‘18
- Victoria Holden, MIA ‘18
- Samuel (Sammy) Huang, MIA ‘19
- Meghna Jain, MIA ‘18
- Andrew J. Kincare, MIA ‘18
- Dana Kozhakhmetova, MIA ‘18
The students' responses included here have been shortened and edited lightly.