

Putting students first



Learn how Krislert Samphantharak's new title, associate dean of student affairs, couldn't be better suited, plus some of his recent research endeavors in Southeast Asia

By Sarah Pfladderer | GPS News



When Associate Professor [Krislert Samphantharak](#) makes a tour through Southeast Asia, there's a good chance he's going to see one or more of his former

students. And it's not just because the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) has such a strong alumni network there—and across the globe, for that matter.

It's because he *wants* to keep in touch with them, just as he did when they were students.

“After more than 13 years at the School, you build strong friendships and find opportunities to collaborate with students,” Samphantharak said. “Faculty alone are not going to be able to make the School great without collaboration from students and alumni.”

Appropriately so, Samphantharak is serving as the School's associate dean for student affairs.

Amid being Acting Dean [Gordon Hanson](#)'s right-hand man on administrative items related to student affairs, the associate dean for student affairs also is tasked with ramping up interactions between faculty and students. That means possibly introducing new opportunities for intermingling and encouraging an open-door atmosphere for students to seek out faculty with questions or concerns—basically, what Samphantharak already is very good at and sees value in.

“One of the things I as a professor have learned is that we don't only teach students, but we also learn from students,” he said. “Learning is two ways. Interaction between faculty and students give us more perspective on how to look at the world.”

With every passing school year, Samphantharak said, students pressure his stance on topics or ask new questions that make him look at his lecture materials or research differently.

Samphantharak's research focuses on finance and economic development issues, particularly related to roles of households and firms in Southeast Asia.

In the past year, he's been putting into practice this expertise, as well as common GPS strengths in quantitative methods and data, for the Bank of Thailand to help it launch a new research institute, [Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research](#) (PIER).

“Usually, governments sit on tons of data,” Samphantharak explained. “But many

times the data are underused for policymaking. The goal of this research institute is to use the data to guide policy.”

Samphantharak, in addition, is collaborating with PIER on two research projects. One regards how to use credit bureau data to evaluate the impact of fiscal stimulus on household debt. The other uses import-export data to analyze how financial access affect firms’ access to foreign markets.

Never one to stop learning, Samphantharak said he has a few new realizations to bring into the classroom this year, thanks to his work at PIER.

“In the real world, policymaking processes are not as straightforward as many people in the academic world might think,” he said. “Seeing firsthand how policy is being made, that is very valuable. I’m excited to bring that experience back and share it with students.”



As well in the new school year, Samphantharak is on track to wrap up his forthcoming book, “Economic Development of Southeast Asia,” for MIT Press.

A comparative study of economic development across 11 countries in the region, Samphantharak said the project hasn’t been without challenges, given Southeast Asian countries are fast-changing. Consider Myanmar, he said, which was mostly closed to foreign investments when he began writing the text, but now is open.

“Things change so fast, and it keeps you on your toes to follow what’s going on,” he said.

Gratefully, Samphantharak said, he has plenty of help and supporting materials from his colleagues and students motivating him to get the product to print.

“A lot of the concepts and ideas were from discussions and comments with

colleagues and former students,” he said. “I see this book as not only mine, but it’s GPS’s.”

3 questions with Associate Professor Krislert Samphantharak

What are the real-world impacts of your research?

Finance is an important factor in economic development. My research focuses on how financial access could help poor households and small businesses in developing countries generate higher income and reduce vulnerability to adverse events.

What skills or understanding do you hope students leave your class with?

My goal is to teach students how to apply economics and finance principles and analytical skills to the real world. This is not only useful for students planning to work in business-related areas, but for those in development, public policy and politics as well.

What is your academic focus?

My academic interests are on finance and economic development, with a special regional focus on Southeast Asia.