

# Reconnecting with the class of 2015



**As GPS's class of 2016 gets closer to commencement, we connect with a few 2015 alumni to see where they wound up one year after earning their degrees**

By Sarah Pfladderer | GPS News

As some students at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) are gearing up for graduation and their job search that follows, we tracked down a few of our 2015 graduates who have the trials and triumphs of entering the “real world” not far in their rearview.

Here, we go beyond the statistics about where are they now—16 percent in the nonprofit sector, 62 percent in the private sector and 22 percent in government. We find out what their lives have been like one year after receiving their diplomas, including the ways in which their degree is incredibly useful today.



## Leila Ahlstrom '15

***She works as a ...*** Presidential Management Fellow (PMF) and portfolio manager at the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Development Credit Authority (DCA) in Washington, D.C.

***If she could relive one day at GPS it would be ...*** the day of her Quantitative Methods I midterm ... to retake it

***Her words of wisdom to current GPS students ...*** "Take advantage of the opportunity to get to know the talented people around you, including your professors!"

**How long did it take you to land your position and, really, how challenging was it to get there?**

I applied for my position in April through the PMF program, interviewed via phone and in-person throughout May and early June and was offered the position the Friday before commencement. The hiring and on-boarding process with the federal government required a good deal of paperwork, perseverance and patience. I didn't officially start at USAID until October, which was over three months from when I accepted my position, but the wait was worth it!

**What skills from GPS do you use most in your career today?**

On a day-to-day basis, I perform financial monitoring of our guarantees, so finance and accounting has been useful to me, as well as the practice I got at GPS in presenting complex material concisely to different audiences. I'm also helping DCA define our impacts and working on the design of a prospective impact evaluation, so the entire QM series has been invaluable.

## **In what ways have you or your lifestyle changed since graduating GPS?**

Now that I've dragged my native San Diegan husband Greg and our dog (named The Chancellor) across the country, I'm enjoying having free time to explore Washington, D.C., with them. On the weekends, we've been checking out local breweries—I miss San Diego-style IPAs—and are looking forward to baseball season.

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## **Akshay Bharadwaj '15**

***He works as a ...*** business development representative at Twilio in San Francisco

***If he could relive one day at GPS it would be ...*** the day he met his closest friend from GPS, Emma Sopadjieva, MPIA '15, during a Career Services trip to San Francisco

***His words of wisdom to current GPS students ...*** “Work is going to be way harder than grad school.”

**How long did it take you to land your position and, really, how challenging was it to get there?**

It took me around two months to get the job at Twilio. I was referred to Twilio by a manager whom I worked under during my summer internship at Vital Wave Consulting. After an initial screening and two phone interviews, I was flown to the headquarters in San Francisco for a three-and-a-half-hour interview. I was lucky enough to hear back the next day from the lead recruiter that they were moving ahead with an offer.

## **What skills from GPS do you use most in your career today?**

Since I interact a lot with Asian startups and enterprises, my Southeast Asia regional focus and entrepreneurship in China classes are very useful. Research skills and presentation skills picked up at GPS are key to my side projects at work. Even though I don't use Stata or the QM series in my current job, those classes help when speaking with the data team on insights into our customer accounts.

## **In what ways have you or your lifestyle changed since graduating GPS?**

Two years spent at GPS makes me think very differently about approaching a problem. Pretty much every issue at work or in life can be analyzed using principal-agent theory, incentives and the concepts learned in the core curriculum at GPS. Also when I look at data or charts I found I have the ability to call out (nonsense) when I see it.

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**Parul Agarwal '15**

***She works as ...*** a consultant for the financial data team in the World Bank's Development Data Group in Washington, D.C.

***If she could relive one day at GPS it would be...*** the day she turned in her Quantitative Methods IV (QM4) final project.

***Her words of wisdom to current GPS students ...*** "Don't throw away your notes!!!!"

**How long did it take you to land your position and, really, how challenging**

### **was it to get there?**

Throughout grad school and especially after graduating I was incredibly worried about getting a job. I applied almost every day. For the position I'm in now, I received an interview request in the middle of July. I had just landed in San Francisco after a five-week international trip. There was a voicemail from the day before asking to schedule an interview. My position is in Washington, D.C, where I was fortunately already planning on moving in the next five days, so I scheduled the interview for two days after my move. I received a job offer the day after my interview.

### **What skills from GPS do you use most in your career today?**

The last question on the Quantitative Methods III (QM3) and QM4 assignments, where we had to illustrate our previous analysis in one graphic, helped me get better at summarizing sometimes complicated data work and presenting it in a visually pleasing and informative way. QM4 was one of the most useful and the most inspiring courses at GPS, and I'm very thankful that I had the opportunity to take it.

### **In what ways have you or your lifestyle changed since graduating GPS?**

GPS helped me become competent in a field I absolutely love. Now I'm more proactive about attending talks or reading up about my field. I now have the capacity to contribute meaningful work. Also, no work on the weekends!

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**Kent Boydston '15**

***He works as a ...*** research analyst at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, D.C. (Read his blog [posts](#) on North Korea: Witness to Transformation.)

***If he could relive one day at GPS it would be ...*** the day when U.S. and South Korean ambassadors spoke on campus.

***His words of wisdom to current GPS students ...*** “Keep up with your professors. They care about your success and want to hear how you’re doing. Send that update email!”

**How long did it take you to land your position and, really, how challenging was it to get there?**

I finished my studies at GPS in June 2014 but spent another nine months studying in Korea on a Boren Fellowship. After that I took the plunge and moved out to D.C., without a job lined up yet. I was fortunate to get an offer a few weeks after that.

**What skills from GPS do you use most in your career today?**

My portfolio includes everything from macro-economy to security issues in Asia, using quantitative and qualitative analysis. I actually think that most classes I took at GPS I use in my work at least to some extent.

**In what ways have you or your lifestyle changed since graduating GPS?**

I have more free time on the weekends! It is a big change to be in the working world instead of a full-time student. At the same time, I miss the atmosphere of engaging with students and faculty at GPS. It was a very unique experience, and I’m grateful for it.