Sponsored Student Spotlight: Duangruetai Surasakjinda

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Name: Duangruetai Surasakjinda

Year in Program: 1st Year, Master of International Affairs, School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS)

Country: Thailand

Home institution: National Economic and Social Development Board, Prime Minister’s Office

Sponsoring Agency: Royal Thai Government

Field of Study: International Affairs (Regional Focus: Southeast Asia)

Majors and Minors: International Environmental Policy

1. Why did you decide to study in the U.S.? What made you choose to come to San Diego?

I believe that this is a tough decision to make for many international students. After learning that I received the scholarship, I spent weeks searching for programs that would best fit my interest and would help me fulfil my future career goals. There were also many interesting programs in Europe and Australia but I decided to pursue my graduate studies in the U.S. because of its internationally-renowned reputation in education. Universities in the U.S. attract
a large number of international students each year, so I was convinced that there would be good opportunities to share both academic and cultural experiences with classmates from different backgrounds. And as people say the west coast is the best coast, San Diego became my final answer chiefly because of its year-round nice weather and the famous beaches.

2. How did you become interested in UC San Diego and your program? What do you hope to gain out of your experience here, academically and personally?

I became interested in the Master of International Affairs program at UC San Diego because I had a chance to meet with a professor and an alum to talk about the curriculum and their experiences at UC San Diego. Both of them only had great things to talk about the program. I was fully convinced after I carefully looked at the curriculum in detail. I really liked how the program integrated diverse subject areas such as international politics, economics, and development into its core curriculum.

Academically, I hope to improve my analytical and practical skills which can be applicable to my future career. I am particularly interested to learn more about the science and policy implications of climate change because Thailand, especially the agricultural sector, is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This program makes it possible to enroll in relevant courses offered at other schools. I am really looking forward to taking a course at the prestigious Scripps Institution of Oceanography in the coming quarter.

3. What challenges/difficulties did you meet while preparing your stay in the U.S. or adapting to your new setting in San Diego? How did you overcome them?

Before moving here, I had never been to San Diego. I did a lot of research online and asked my friends who had been here so I got some ideas about what to expect. The information for international students on UC San Diego’s website is also very clear and useful.

GPS also created a Facebook group for incoming students so I had a chance to communicate with other students before the quarter began. I think it was very helpful with the preparation for my stay in the U.S. that once I arrived I was able to adjust to a life in La Jolla without much difficulty.
4. How do you find the academic climate at UC San Diego and within your program? Describe any highlights and/or challenges.

When I first learned that UC San Diego was operated on a quarter system, it did not quite sink in how tough it was going to be. In the beginning, it was rather stressful trying to catch up with the pace. After a few weeks, I was able to adjust better. Caffeine helped! The academic environment here is very competitive which I find both challenging and motivating. Many of the faculty members here have conducted impressive research which are very relevant to the evolving global context such as policy and technology challenges in getting to carbon neutral future.

5. Do you participate in research? If so, describe your project/lab. Why did you become interested in this topic?

I have not yet participated in any research. However, in the second year, we have to complete a capstone project. I plan to enroll in a course on real world projects in energy and the environment. I have become interested in energy policy and its implications on the environment because in recent years Thailand faces with energy security problems and there needs an improvement in terms of policy to be able to meet with emissions reduction targets.

6. What extracurricular activities do you participate in? Are you a member of any student organizations? What is the best experience you’ve had so far? How do you spend your free time in San Diego?

There are many student organizations at GPS which address diversity and value cultural differences. A number of fun and informative events are organized every quarter. I always participate when time allows. It is an excellent way of meeting and getting to know your classmates and the 2nd year students. I have become more involved in student-run activities at GPS. Currently, I am a President of the South-East Asian Link (SEAL) student group. SEAL aims to raise awareness and promote better understanding about the region through academic, social and cultural events.

In addition, I have just been selected as one of the 2017 – 18 Dean’s Fellows to represent the student body and the school in various activities and programming events to help build a sense of community among students at GPS.
7. What was a defining moment in your academic career that shaped who you are now?

The study of International Relations mainly focuses on two prominent theories: realism and liberalism. Not until I had taken a course in which the professor introduced us to some alternative approaches to international relations did I learn about the green theory that addressed environmental problems, social justice, rights and democracy. I was inspired and wanted to take part in promoting ecological responsibility, social justice and grassroots democracy. It was a defining moment that had driven me to work in the non-profit sector advocating sustainable agricultural practices that mitigated negative effects on the environment. It was a defining moment that had driven me to pursue a government career aiming to create positive change through better environmental policy.

8. How will your experience here in San Diego fit in your educational/professional plan/future career?

GPS is a highly-recognized school for international relations with a great pool of faculty specializing in Asia. It is also a great school for developing analytic tools and practical skills in quantitative methods and policy analyses. I am fully convinced that the tools and skills I have developed here will greatly contribute to my professional career as a policy analyst for an international cooperation unit under the National Economic and Social Development Board in Thailand.

9. What is one thing you would tell aspiring students?

Find a good balance between academic and social life. Do your best in class and do find time to have some fun. There are a variety of activities offered on campus for you to destress and expand your social circle. You will need to have a healthy body and mind as much as a healthy GPA.