Sponsored Student Spotlight: Noritoshi Kurokawa

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Name: Noritoshi Kurokawa
Year in Program: 2nd year, Master of Public Policy, School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS)
Country: Japan
Home institution: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) - Japan
Sponsoring Agency: Japanese government
Field of Study: Public Policy
Majors and Minors: Program Design and Evaluation / Business, Government and Regulation

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

I have worked as an official of the Japanese government for 8 years, and mainly engaged in science and technology policies and energy policies. I started thinking to study in the U.S. because I would like to know deeply about the higher education system and the research environment in the U.S. universities as centers of innovation. Therefore, San Diego’s innovative economy as one of the leading
high-tech hubs in the U.S. attracted me to achieve my study goals. In addition, San Diego’s perfect climate and safety were also important for my family.

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?

School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) at UC San Diego is an ideal place for me because the degree program will help me build the skills and knowledge for policymaking in a global context. Since many students from around the world are in one place, there are great opportunities to share our ideas and experiences with classmates of different backgrounds. Moreover, the Master of Public Policy degree program is a brand-new program at UC San Diego, and it aims to connect the social science policy expertise with the campus strengths in STEM. I look forward to contributing my own experiences with S&T policymaking and add my cultural knowledge of Japan to the program’s diversity.

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 coming to the U.S., I was worried whether my wife and two children would feel comfortable with a new environment; however, there was nothing to worry about that. Many of my friends and university officers helped us set up our lives. Now, my wife and I found language exchange partners through a university program, and we enjoy learning about other cultures. My children also enjoy Mommy / Daddy & Me class every Wednesday afternoon at the university. The class is sponsored by the Friends of the UC San Diego International Center. Thanks to the supportive community, we are having a really good time in San Diego.

4. How do you find the academic climate at UC San Diego and within your program? Describe any highlights and/or challenges.

I was surprised that classes went at a faster pace in a quarter system. In the first year of my study, I completed core courses in economics, management, political science, and quantitative methods. Class activities such as debates, discussion, and oral presentation in English were challenging for me especially in the first fall quarter, but I found that the best way to overcome them would be doing my best.
I got a sense of accomplishment when I received high praise on my presentation from my professor and classmates. They also gave me informative advice and feedback in class. Warm and inclusive classroom environment made me feel more comfortable.

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

In the next winter quarter, I will complete a capstone project. I have not decided my capstone topic yet, but I am interested in an analysis of U.S. university research and San Diego’s innovation ecosystem.

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?

I attended the Japan discussion group meetings held by the Japan Forum for Innovation and Technology (JFIT) to discuss various topics regarding Japan. It was a good opportunity to see Japan from different angles, which helped me broaden my horizons. In addition, I took some non-credit professional development classes offered by GPS career services, and I earned certificates in Entrepreneurship and in Leadership / Management. You can learn whatever you want at UC San Diego.

On weekends, I love spending my free time with my family. In fact, San Diego is one of the most family-friendly destinations in the U.S., and there are a lot of things to do with kids. For example, San Diego has beautiful beaches, world famous zoo, a dozen museums in Balboa park, great attractions such as SeaWorld... I also enjoy a BBQ with friends at my on-campus housing.

7. What was a defining moment in your academic career that shaped who you are now?

Master of Public Policy will be a second master degree for me. I am confident that practical skills of policy analysis I have learned in GPS would form an important background for me as a technocrat. I will work harder to improve Japan’s research and development environment and enhance its international competitiveness.
8. What have you accomplished during your studies at UC San Diego that you are most proud of? How has this impacted you?

Skills learned in the “Applied Data Analysis and Statistical Decision Making” class would be the most valuable for me. This course provided me with the statistical tools and programming skills to estimate causal policy impacts using real-world data. The course workload was so intense, but each data analysis assignment with real-world datasets helped me master the theoretical underpinnings and data management skills necessary to do my own analyses in the future.

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

After earning my master’s, I will return to MEXT to work on improving Japan’s research and development system. In the second year of my study, I will focus on issues specifically related to S&T policymaking. To build a strong foundation in policymaking skills, I will learn how to design and evaluate policies using advanced quantitative analysis. For R&D management, I will also deepen my knowledge about business economics, project management, and the role of government.

In the long term, I want to expand my career beyond domestic R&D policies to international R&D cooperation in order to solve intractable global problems. I believe that skills, knowledge, and network I have developed in San Diego will contribute to my professional career as a government official.

10. What is one thing you would tell aspiring sponsored students?

“Work hard, play hard.” UC San Diego is the best place to achieve academic, personal and professional success. You will have great experiences with world-class faculty members and diverse students in your campus life.