

# Starting the school year on the right foot



**Incoming GPS students attend Prep, a “boot camp” of all things GPS, from quantitative methods and analytic writing to job markets**

Graduate programs at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) require rigorous analytical writing, quantitative methods and economics skills. But what can incoming students do who need refresher courses on the complex concepts they’ll soon be faced with in their classes at GPS?

Enter [Prep](#) - a six-week program hosted by GPS professors and staff, designed to make sure students are beginning their programs on equal footing. Courses offered include math camp, quantitative methods, economics, analytical writing and English as a Second Language.

As part of Prep, which began Aug. 2, students are also given a crash course on all things GPS, UC San Diego and the surrounding area: information about local groups or activities, restaurant recommendations, campus amenities and an introduction to GPS staff departments.

Nancy Gilson, director of GPS Student Affairs, stressed to students that the Student Affairs team is available to them for whatever issues that may arise, be they academic or personal.

“That sense of it being open-door is very important to us,” Gilson said.

## **Prepping for the job market**

As part of Prep, students are also required to take six weeks of [Career Orientation Program \(COP\)](#) courses with the GPS Career Services team. The team brought 14 speakers to the sessions virtually - many that are GPS alumni - to discuss strategies for finding internships and job opportunities.

“COP is designed to help you start the process of thinking about your internship or your job before classes even start,” said Stephanie Boomhower, director of Career Services.

Featured speaker Blake Ellison, a 2011 GPS graduate, shared a number of tips he said he wished he had learned before starting his career. Ellison, a data analytics manager at PlayStation, shared strategies for students to develop plans for their short- and long-term career trajectories.

“I came in with a dream to get into the video game industry, or, failing that, the tech industry,” Ellison said. “Hopefully you have, if not as strong of a dream, at least a rough idea of what you want to do. That’s really important.”

Once students have the “rough beginnings” of what they want their careers to look like, he encouraged them to peruse job listings and find positions that interest them.

“Bear in mind these should be entry level things you can get in a couple of years’ time,” Ellison said.

He recommended that students compare those job listings, finding the skills each

listing has in common and set those as things they should learn while at GPS, either in or outside of class. Ellison also stressed the importance of relying on the alumni network for advice.

Some COP sessions focused on internships, which many students seek between the first and second years of their master's degree programs. But not all internships are created the same.

Jessica Wilson, a GPS career coach, reminded students, "What you'd really like to do and get is substantive, hands-on experience."

Wilson stressed the importance of working on skills-based, technical projects, as opposed to rote administrative work, as well as using the internship as an opportunity to grow your network.

"You want to do good work, but you want to meet people because in developing your network, they're going to look out for you," Wilson said.

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## Q&A with a Prep teaching assistant



Jorge Mata Ochoa, Prep teaching assistant

Second-year student Jorge Mata Ochoa, one of the inaugural [GPS Equity, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) Fellows](#), sat down with GPS News to talk about his journey to becoming a teaching assistant in the analytical writing course for Prep.

### **What duties do you have as a teaching assistant (TA) for Prep?**

As a teaching assistant, I attend lectures given by the instructor as well as hold my own section, keep office hours and grade assignments. An unofficial role of some TAs is to help give incoming students reassurance and advice as well. We were all in the same boat at some point in time.

### **What's your favorite part of being a teaching assistant?**

My favorite part is definitely holding sections and talking to the students. I like learning how to teach and interacting with the first years and hearing their thoughts on the topics we discuss.

### **What's your best advice for students going through Prep?**

My best advice is to remember to stay calm; this is just getting them ready for their first quarter at GPS. It seems tough, but it will be worth it come the first quarter.

### **As a current GPS student, what do you think is the most valuable part of Prep?**

The best part of Prep for me was definitely establishing connections with my cohort. Although our experience was virtual, I still remember interacting with my peers and feeling like I wasn't alone or that I was the only one struggling. We were all reassuring ourselves throughout the process, and that goes a long way in the end.