

Student Exchange Spotlight: Melisa Uzcategui



In partnership with Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, GPS ushers in a new era of exchanged experiences

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News



From surf lessons to yoga, Chilean exchange student Melisa Uzcategui fully embraced the California lifestyle. After all, academic exchanges offer a rich opportunity for students to expand their horizons and explore new cultures.

“This exchange opportunity was one of the reasons I applied to my master’s program in Chile as I’ve always wanted this experience,” said Uzcategui. “It’s very unique to have an exchange program at the graduate level.”

At the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS), we understand the value of a global perspective by partnering with leading universities to foster collaborative research and student exchanges. This year we hosted the first student from a new program with Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

“We were absolutely delighted to welcome Uzcategui to the school. Creating deep and active links between GPS and leading universities in Latin America enriches our student body, generates new opportunities for research and broadens the scope for public policy impact,” said Professor [Gordon McCord](#). “I hope that GPS’s ever-growing expertise on Latin America attracts many more students like Uzcategui and encourages our students to spend a quarter at one of Latin America’s top universities.”

While at GPS, students like Uzcategui get the opportunity to dive further into their area of study, this time from an American educational lens. As a master’s student in political science, Uzcategui’s emphasis on public policy allowed her to explore a variety of new classes at GPS, all with a hands-on approach to learning unmatched by her own university.

“I found it very easy to make connections at GPS. It is much more difficult in Chile to find this kind of opportunity,” said Uzcategui. “It has been wonderful to work with professors that are renowned in their disciplines and see how their work is applicable to my own studies back home.”

Interested in environmental and energy policy in Latin America, Uzcategui was asked by Professor [Jeremy Martin](#) to help in a research project at the Institute of the Americas sponsored by Sempra Energy.



Uzcategui and other students analyzed whether there should be another expansion of the Panama Canal by considering political factors, water issues, labor issues and financing for liquefied natural gas (LNG) vessels in the global energy market.

“It was an amazing opportunity to be able to work so closely with professors and have those kinds of relationships,” said Uzcategui. “I also wanted to see the other perspective, taking classes on Latin American from an American perspective, and to talk to other classmates about what they think.”

For her quarter at GPS, she enrolled in four classes. Uzcategui shared that she enjoyed the small class size and interactivity while serving as an expert for other students on Latin American affairs. While she thought language acquisition would be the hardest part of the exchange program, her geographic information system (GIS) class proved the most challenging but also the most advantageous.

“While GIS was more difficult than what I know, it will be very useful for my future,” said Uzcategui. “It’s not offered in Chile in my program, so it’s nice to try something new as it offers a comparative advantage for my career when I go back.”



Inspired by education and building an engaged community, Uzcategui started a small NGO called Escuela Ciudadana ONG back in Chile to inspire young citizens to take an interest in politics and to increase education about civic duties, participation and human rights. Uzcategui hopes her career post-graduation will help to

encourage future generations to get interested in politics, be active citizens and serve as environmental heroes.

“The environment has always been a passion of mine. I want to change how we see the environment in Chile,” said Uzcategui. “From national parks to protected areas, I want to fight for better regulations as well as introduce an environmental approach to energy policy in Chile.”

Hoping to return to San Diego in the future, she believes that above all, it was the diversity of people that motivated her each day during her student exchange. Encouraged and inspired by new cultures and the American spirit of collaboration and camaraderie, Uzcategui is taking home fond memories of her time at GPS.

“I’ve met people from all over the world, and everyone was so open and willing to talk. I loved getting to know different cultures and opinions,” said Uzcategui. “GPS is truly a global environment and it really added to the experience.”