

Student Perspectives: Camaraderie in a pandemic



First-year GPS student Emily Collins shares how students found new ways to bond while navigating rigorous coursework amid COVID-19 in fall

By Emily Collins | Contributor

As a first-year graduate student in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, “overwhelming” is a concise and well-rounded description to portray how most first-year students at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) felt. But GPS and its vast array of career counselors, academic advisers, incredible TAs and highly skilled professors made fall quarter feel a lot less overwhelming than it could have.

Starting at GPS as a [Master of International Affairs \(MIA\)](#) student with a focus on environmental policy and Japan, I already knew my course schedule would be

tough. I wanted to take two languages (Japanese and Russian) while taking on the already-heavy load of coursework that constitutes the first-year core courses.



Emily Collins, first-year Master of International Affairs student | Submitted photo

My language classes were a blast and definitely what I looked forward to the most each week. They were creative, with fun and outgoing professors that made it feel like language learning was as difficult as chomping on potato chips and watching Netflix. That is to say, the professors made the classes really enjoyable, despite the challenging coursework and materials.

When it came to the core classes, however, I was nervous: microeconomics, globalization and Quantitative Methods I (QM I). Despite the incredibly hefty and challenging material that filled microeconomics and QM I, there was one factor that made it all easier: camaraderie.

How can there be camaraderie between fellow students when most classes are virtual, and in the in-person ones, we can't even see each other's smiles? Well, there was a lot of it, and I'm beyond grateful for it.

A fellow student from my Japanese course came up to me on my first day in-person with QM I. I barely recognized him with a mask on, but somehow he

recognized me and invited me to join the class group chats on Whatsapp.

I didn't know these groups existed and for a moment felt that maybe it was too late for me to become a part of the group. I didn't do the school's pre-program preparatory courses that most of the rest of my class took and where many got to know each other.

But I was definitely wrong. I quickly got to know my fellow cohort through online chats, and my second-year mentor helped me meet a few other first-year students. I also joined the Japan-focused student organization Asameshikai, which was a wonderful way to practice the language and meet other students studying Japanese topics.

Throughout the quarter we all worked together, helping each other through some of our most challenging homework assignments and supporting each other through tough exam weeks.

I learned more than I can say this first quarter, but most of all, I have been so incredibly impressed by the teamwork and support that I've witnessed and experienced, and I can't wait to continue working with this bright team of students for the next two years to come.

For everyone who might be feeling left out by the virtual classroom style, don't be afraid to reach out to the other students, and know we can get through all of these challenges together.

I am excited to continue moving forward with the content taught in GPS throughout the winter quarter, particularly with professor David Victor's policy making processes (PMP) course. It is always refreshing to learn from new professors, and Prof. Victor's extensive background in climate change policy is something from which I've been waiting to learn.

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