

Student Perspectives: GPS' greatest export is the personal relationships it builds



GPS EDI Fellow Adrian Rodriguez Valdez shares lessons from his long road to graduate school

By Adrian Rodriguez Valdez

It has not been a long time since I was a wide-eyed 20-year-old just starting at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS). Now, I am gearing up for my last quarter here, and, though it may be kind of sappy, I'd like to think that in these two years, I have become a profoundly different person.

To attend a university at all, let alone a graduate program, was not always on the horizon for me. I grew up in a marginalized community in Lake Elsinore, California, and being a first generation college student without the resources to adequately prepare for a university didn't help.

But despite it all, I made it to GPS, where I will graduate with a [Master of International Affairs \(MIA\)](#) degree this summer. I've had the opportunity to serve

as an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Fellow, where I have brought my own ideas to the table for how GPS can enhance its [EDI initiatives](#).

I am constantly thankful for the people and support networks around me that helped me to get to where I am today. Life is hard, but it's the people around you that can make life easier.

That's all to say that I wanted to devote some time to reflecting on the personal connections and lessons I've learned along the way.

Put simply, the school would not be the same without the people you meet - and the uniquely GPS interactions you have with them. Whether it's working on project ideas over a round of billiards, discussing class theory at a beach bonfire or suddenly realizing you are in what seems like 100 different Whatsapp groups, there is always something quirky to love about the daily interactions here at GPS.

However, maybe given the social side effects of being online for too long, it can feel difficult to make the concerted effort to talk to and meet people outside of the digital boundaries of WhatsApp group chats or Zoom meeting squares.

There are so many intensely smart and interesting people walking all around you at GPS. It may seem daunting, but initiating those conversations and creating those connections is what matters at the end of all of this.

I still remember the first dinner with people from my cohort. It was intimidating being around so many smart people, but this group of friends became the foundation for some of my best GPS memories.

It takes courage to open those lines of communication, but being bold enough to say yes to opportunities like having dinner with new people, grabbing a coffee with a professor or a drink with new friends makes all the difference.

It's difficult to overstate the impact that the people at this institution have had on me. I am thankful to everyone I have interacted with thus far: the professors with genuine interest in my success; my peers that are going through the same academic aches as I am; the friends challenging my - at times - outrageous takes; and the student community providing a remarkably welcoming yet stimulating environment.

It's all served to help me grow not only academically and professionally but as a

person as well. I imagine this is not a unique experience; many of my peers likely feel the same way.

For those of us who are second-year students, we only have a few weeks left together at GPS, but the lesson I've learned is widely applicable to the entire student base.

Say hello to that person you always see walking down the hall after class. Ask that professor that burning question you've had for the last year. Go out with new friends to new places.

In five years, what will you remember: the assignment due Wednesday of Week X in Quarter Y, or the memories and connections you made?

Adrian Rodriguez Valdez is a GPS Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Fellow and a 2022 [Master of International Affairs \(MIA\)](#) candidate.