Sylff Fellows translate vision into reality

Meet our current Sylff Fellows - two rising leaders who are gaining access to a world-class education thanks to endowed fellowship support

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News

“The world is one family, and all mankind are brothers and sisters.” - Ryoichi Sasakawa

At the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS), we are internationally recognized for our excellence, attracting the best graduate students from across the globe. In 1991, a $1 million dollar endowment created the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (Sylff) Program to support the education of outstanding graduate students with high potential for global leadership.

The Sylff Program is a collaborative initiative of The Nippon Foundation and was created to serve as sustainable sources of funding to support the education of outstanding students who will overcome differences in nationality, language, ethnicity, religion and political systems to tackle global issues. With over 16,000
fellows worldwide, in 44 countries, program alumni represent true global citizens.

“Over the past 30 years, the program has been incredibly important in attracting great students to GPS, who in turn have contributed to our thriving alumni community and have pursued great careers,” said Professor Ulrike Schade who serves as the program chair. “Every year we benefit from having the Sylff Fellows in our classes and at our university. Our alumni group of fellows is an impressive group and has opened doors for us around the world.”

Here is what two of our current GPS Sylff Fellows are doing domestically and abroad to shape cutting-edge solutions for a transforming world, thanks to endowed fellowship support.

**Conservation is King**

**Ryan Ellis, 2021 Master of Public Policy candidate**

Growing up with a love of hiking and camping in Northern Virginia, first year student Ryan Ellis has always wanted to ensure that our natural resources are protected. With a passion for legislative and regulatory affairs, GPS was the perfect place to obtain a public policy degree in energy and the environment.

“I always felt very at home in nature. When I go to a national park, I find it very meaningful to walk around these natural resources that have been preserved,” said Ellis. “They only exist because people go out of their way to protect them.”

Working for over five years at the Interstate Mining Compact Commission, Ellis studied and executed policy issues for state mining regulatory and environmental policy issues in Washington, D.C. His work ranged from writing congressional testimony to leading legislative campaigns as the director of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs.

“You learn pretty quickly how important it is for community advocacy to be focused on environmental work and conservation,” said Ellis. “I found that this
field of work is important on so many dimensions. It’s a perennial problem that is cutting-edge in how we must learn to better evaluate environmental resources when making policy decisions.”

While in D.C., Ellis also designed and authored U.S. Congress bill H.R. 2937 to enable NGO water treatment efforts which was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in 2017. This heightened his thirst for advocacy and desire to expand his impact.

“This was the first bill of its kind to be passed by the House of Representatives in 20 years. It was gratifying to find something that both sides could agree might work,” said Ellis. “After graduation, I’d like to stay and learn more about California’s environmental issues. There is a lot of work to be done here.”

Excited to meet his fellow cohort, he looks forward to what the Slyff fellowship will bring, which he hopes will allow him the opportunity for research and networking with people in different fields all over the world, all changemakers in their own right.

“Part of being a Sylff fellow is moving beyond the differences between people to focus on global issues,” said Ellis. “It’s really important and I’m happy to be associated with that perspective. Collaboration and diplomacy are at the heart of what makes good policy.”

**Peace Building in Latin America**

**Talor Gruenwald, 2020 Master in International Affairs candidate**

Growing up in New York City, Gruenwald was always interested in the Spanish language and social justice work, which led him to study international relations and Spanish at State University of New York at Geneseo.

“My dad is a public interest lawyer who offers free services to underserved
communities. I always have that in the back of my mind, to pursue meaningful social justice work,” said Gruenwald.

After graduation, Gruenwald set his sights on Colombia, a place he felt would offer a unique development experience. Feeling adventurous, he moved to Medellín, teaching English to students in public high school. Eager to experience even more, he moved to Ibagué to work at a program called Heart for Change, which is contracted by the national Ministry of Education and is responsible for implementing the ministry’s bilingualism program.

Today he is focusing on international development and nonprofit management at GPS, where his global focus continues to be on Latin America. Most recently he worked on a USAID-funded project on peace-building and reconciliation in the wake of Colombia’s fifty-year civil war, traveling all over the country as an information and communications specialist.

“I think the Sylff fellowship really looks for people who have a commitment to service, especially from an international angle,” said Gruenwald. “It’s an incredible opportunity. I will find a way to give back based on this opportunity at GPS.”

Inspired by his summer internship at MicroEnergy International, a renewable energy/environmental consulting firm, he is eager to research energy access in the developing world. And this December, Gruenwald will attend the Santiago Climate Change Conference, the 25th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 25).

“I definitely plan to explore these topics further – both mitigating climate change with renewable energy and a variety of energy access issues,” said Gruenwald. “Development is a big wide arena, but I hope to contribute in meaningful ways thanks to the Sylff program.”

Learn more about GPS’s Sylff Fellows.