

# The future is female



**In time for International Women’s Day on March 8, we spotlight five GPS alumnae and their professional achievements since graduation**

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News

With the [World Economic Forum’s 2017 Global Gender Gap Report](#) findings telling us that gender parity is over 200 years away, there is a strong call-to-action, to keep motivated and #PressforProgress, this year’s [International Women’s Day](#) (IWD) campaign theme.

In time for IWD on March 8, we tracked down a few UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) alumnae who have proven themselves as leaders in their spheres of influence, representing true global leaders in all corners of the world.

In uniting their stories here, we celebrate a collective voice of communities – influencers in the fields of environmentalism, clean energy, global peace and gender equity.



## **Annie Schowalter O'Connor, MPIA '10**

**She works as...** a management consultant and advises companies on how to improve business performance through investment in gender equity.

**The best part of her day is...** tending her community garden plot and using what she grows to make dinner with her husband.

**Advice every GPS student should know is...** mastering the “soft skills” is what makes your hard-won expertise actionable.

O'Connor exudes excitement when she talks about the impact of GPS on her career and her current work alongside fellow alumnae Kimberly Ascoli Almeida '09 of the Levi Strauss Foundation, and Tamar Benzaken Koosed '09 and Carlued Leon '09 of MANAUS.

“We are using nearly every tool GPS gave us,” said O'Connor. “The team is working to develop, implement, and measure [strategies to improve gender equality](#) in the apparel supply chain.”

While at GPS, Almeida and O'Connor were members of the Baja Project and spent many hours driving between San Diego and Mexico.

“We used to talk about jobs where we could achieve social impact through business. It took a few years for us to rejoin forces after graduation, but here we are doing what we dreamed about,” said O'Connor.

Women's empowerment, and how to include men in that process, has always been an interest area for O'Connor. Through her work as a senior consult with ICRW

Advisors, she is also helping to build the evidence base and support companies to advance gender equity as the next frontier of sustainable business.

O'Connor explained that from the Sustainable Development Goals to the Time's Up movement, we are finally seeing gender equity become more material to businesses. Looking ahead, she is also setting her sights on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help accomplish these goals.

"The GPS curriculum was challenging at times, but I was fortunate to have a really collaborative cohort. We matched our strengths and all made it through," said O'Conner. "It also helped me to focus on how grateful I was to be there - the pressure is a privilege. That's still true."



**Carolyn Kenney, MPIA '14**

**She works as...** program officer for the Women Empowered Initiative at Project Concern International (PCI) in San Diego, Calif.

**The best part of her day is...** working to make the world a better place with like-minded colleagues who have become good friends.

**Advice every GPS student should know is...** you will be most successful in your job search through referrals and recommendations by people in your network. They can provide a recruiter with much more personal information about how you might fit into the company culture. That's what worked for me! Your network is your personal character witness in an age of high job competition.

After traveling to Nicaragua with her family at the age of eleven, she knew her passion would be working to reduce or eliminate extreme poverty around the world.

In her current PCI role, the initiative has reached more than 500,000 members across 13 countries, all in the name of women's social and economic empowerment - including building skills and capacities, self-esteem, and promoting collective action and community organizing.

"It became clear that [PCI's](#) development philosophy matched mine; a sustainable, positive impact comes through working with communities to identify their needs and building their capacity to take action and make changes for the better," said Kenney.

With more than 15 active projects across 10 countries ranging in size from 180 members to over 30,000 members, Kenney thanks GPS for teaching her fundamental lessons in perseverance and remaining calm under pressure.

"The general nature of the degree, the statistics experience and soft skills and the connections I made at GPS built the foundation to my success in this current role," said Kenney.



**Calla Allison, MPIA '00**

**She works as...** director of the Marine Protected Area Collaborative Network, covering the coastline of California.

**The best part of her day is...** knowing that what she is doing is making a

positive difference and sharing her love for the ocean with her son.

**Advice every GPS student should know...** follow your passions or at least be aware that your passions may follow you. Acknowledge and breath air into what makes you happy and proud, rather than spending time and energy fitting into someone else's mold.

Having worked as an ocean lifeguard and for a wetsuit company in New Zealand, Allison was eager to dive into international business when she entered GPS in fall 1998.

"I quickly realized that I was better at policy than business, although my interest in the ocean never wavered," laughs Allison.

Frustrated by the top-down model of resource management, Allison helped create a model that fostered locally driven stewardship and empowered communities to feed, meet, adapt and implement government driven policy where it mattered most.

"I wanted a model on the ground and in people's backyards. We needed solutions that worked for both the ocean and the critters that lived there as well as the local communities striving to have a voice in the management of their natural resources," said Allison.

Starting in 2006, Allison got the opportunity to work locally on resource management for the City of Laguna Beach and helped to build a powerful and diverse collaborative in Orange County.

Fast forward to 2018 and the network has expanded to 14 coastal collaboratives, collectively managing all 124 of California's marine protected areas. This [MPA Collaborative Network](#), comprised of over 600 members representing 385 organizations, brings in an estimated \$15 million of in-kind contributions to MPA management annually.

"This takes marine resource conservation beyond just a policy and into a reality. I think being surrounded by such intelligent and capable people from all kinds of backgrounds at GPS made me realize my greatest value may lie in supporting the value of others," said Allison.



## **Heather Shepard, MPIA '95 and Elena Foukes Lucas, MPIA '12**

**They work as...** chief associates in Treviso Partners as of Spring 2017.

**The best part of Shepard's day is...** having the time to learn - read a report, attend an event or listen in on webinar or ask questions from someone in my network.

**The best part of Lucas' day is...** working with people I like and with people who are changing the world for the better.

**Shepard's advice to every GPS student is...** that it's about "who you know" and also "how you know" them. Staying connected to people you have worked with, even if just on a small project, is so critical. These are the people who know what you bring to the table, can speak to your skills and can help you way more than a superficial LinkedIn connection. Taking the time to keep those "deeper" relationships active is really important. GPS is a great opportunity to showcase what kind of collaborator you are and start building a network you can tap into throughout your career.

**Lucas's advice to every GPS student is...** take innovation classes in the engineering department. It gives you a perspective from outside the GPS universe.

Sometimes it's just better to work with friends. [Treviso Partners](#) is a 100% women-owned and managed business services firm, with two of their five clients led by women in the sectors of clean tech, sustainability and social impact.

"We are also committed to helping diversify the world of tech. There is a lot of

work to be done on this front but we are making small steps,” said Shepard.

Hosting community events, Treviso Partners believes that meeting and connecting with new people and ideas is good for the world. They themselves met while working at the Center for Sustainable Energy. After several years advising other companies, they were ready to branch out together and utilize their GPS network.

“A common thread from GPS up until today is the benefit from collaborating with smart, results-oriented people who are passionate about the work they do,” said Shepard.

When asked about working together, Lucas appreciates the shared vision, both focused on providing the most value to their clients, helping them get customers, attract talent and build their professional reputation.

“We only work with people and companies who are doing great things professionally,” said Lucas. “We enjoy helping great people translate what they’re doing into ‘grandma speak’ - a phrase I picked up from QM at GPS.”