

The life and times of an MPP student

In a Q&A complementing our Flickr tour of a day in the life of Gustavo López, the 2020 MPP candidate reveals what attending GPS looks like today

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News



At the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS), we are leaders in addressing the crucial challenges facing the border. Attracted to the school's prime location, Gustavo López has always been interested in the complex issues of immigration. Born in Jalisco, Mexico, but raised in Indiana, he was thrilled to attend a school that was highly international, interdisciplinary and coastal for this Midwest transplant.

"I came to the school because I really wanted to improve my quantitative skills and research. Working in Washington, D.C., I saw the importance of facts and data," said López. "Situated at the busiest border in the world, GPS offers a unique opportunity to do immigration research."

Learning the fine art of time management is key to success in the [Master of Public Policy \(MPP\)](#) degree program, as López also works as a graduate student researcher at the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, looking at policies of immigration in the U.S. and how it affects Mexican immigrants. Presenting his latest [report](#) to Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights in March, he is impressed with the opportunities GPS has afforded him.

When not studying, López can be found at home in Golden Hill, one of his favorite neighborhoods known for its incredible views of downtown or studying in his favorite nook at Influx Café. This summer, he hopes to work at a multilateral to further his research on migration studies.

For the full story, check out our [Flickr album](#) as we follow him around his life at GPS.

What is your area of specialization and why did you choose it?

“My area of specialization is program design and evaluation, specifically immigration policy. I was really interested in gaining more quantitative research skills - data analysis, econometrics and survey research. This track highlights how governments design programs and how we evaluate them in a rigorous and fiscal way. For my interest in immigration, it’s a great fit.”



What drove you to GPS to pursue your MPP?

“After graduation I worked at the [Pew Research Center](#) in Washington, D.C. where I did survey research and demographic analysis on attitudes about immigrants and the Latino population. After three years working in this topic, I realized that in order to continue forward in my career, I needed to expand my skills by going to graduate school.

Working at a think tank made me realize I was really interested in how governments create policy about migration, especially in the last few years since it has been such a salient issue. It pushed me to look for a degree program that was very quantitative and that focused on research but could also be translated to real-world policy decisions.”

What’s been your favorite class so far and why?

“I have really enjoyed “Economics of Migration” with Professor [Gaurav Khanna](#). The course goes with my topics of interest, but in a totally unique way. It’s an econometrics class using equations and models to estimate different effects of immigration across the world.

I really like Professor Khanna as he has a wealth of experience and is very nice. Since it’s a second-year class, I get to learn about my cohort’s research and what to look forward to in my second year.”

What general advice do you have for admitted GPS students?

“Start researching early what you want to do. Think about what classes you want to take, look through the website and definitely reach out to current students. The quarter system goes by really fast so be prepared. Think about what professors you want to work with too.”



What motivates you to come to campus every day?

“My classmates are great. I don’t think you realize when you apply to graduate school, just how much time you will spend with your cohort. You are with the same people sometimes nine to twelve hours a day for two years. I’m glad that I have a core group of friends that I can work with, to lean on when things get stressful or simply to have fun.”

Amid your rigorous academic schedule, in what ways do you strike a work life balance?

“I make sure to take time every day to stop and see the ocean. I love the Gliderport Lounge. It’s a great place to take a break or study. I try to keep all my work at school, so when I go home, I can relax, cook, read or just explore San

Diego. I love baking, I'm trying to master bread right now!"