Why GPS: Discovering a passion for all things math

As part of an ongoing series, we give students the creative liberty to opine on their favorite memories from the School and “why GPS” is a solid fit to pursue their graduate education

By Bryce Thomson, 2018 MIA candidate | GPS News

In 2014, I graduated from California State University, Long Beach with a B.S. in International Business Administration and a B.A. in German Studies. Wanting to improve my German and see some of the world, one week after graduation, I moved to Germany where I worked at a bank. A few months later I moved to Austria where I was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in a tiny town in the Alps.

I spent two years in Austria where I fell in love with teaching and was convinced that was what I wanted to do with my life. During my second year there I applied to more than a dozen Ph.D. programs, but when responses came in, it was a resounding “thank you for your interest, but…”

Feeling confused and disheartened I then received an email from the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) with a real explanation of why I had not been accepted. I simply didn’t have the correct skillset for the Ph.D. program, and if I wanted to come to their Master of International Affairs (MIA) degree program instead, I could develop the needed skills.

A few months later, I was in San Diego attending GPS. I first started off in the School’s Prep Program and I recall thinking “do they know I’m here for international relations, not calculus?” All of the math was a complete shock to me, in part because I didn’t realize the importance of mathematics in the study of
international relations. The quantitative skills learned at GPS are what sets the student body apart from the thousands of other international relations-focused students in the country.

Despite my initial resistance to the barrage of math, I have gone from someone who avoided math, or anything math related at all costs, to someone who enrolls in elective quantitative analysis courses and is a quantitative methods and economics tutor at GPS. If you had asked me two years ago if this is where I would be or what I would be doing, the answer would have certainly been anything else.

The reason all of this has been possible is first, the faculty. Being surrounded by a group of brilliant experts in their respected fields makes it clear how much is truly possible. They have opened my eyes to what opportunities are out there, and while I still want to be a professor someday, there are some other things I’ve realized I want to do first.

Their passion for the subjects they teach makes the classes that much more enjoyable. They are helpful, interested, encouraging and will always challenge you to push yourself a little bit further.

While the faculty make classes interesting, the only real way to get through GPS is with friendships and having a team to work with. The amount of friendly faces at the School continues to blow me away, and it really makes the program feel like a big family.

Outside of the academic world, the School’s career services staff work tirelessly to find everyone an internship for the summer and a job when they graduate. Their ability to remember every student’s story and goals is uncanny, and it really goes to show how much they care.

While in a lot of ways GPS is not where I expected it to be, in nearly every way it is so much better than I could have imagined. While attending GPS I have grown immensely. I have made some incredible friends, figured out what I want to do with my life, or at least what the next step is, and I have had the opportunity to learn about how the world works while doing it. I don’t know what more I could have asked for.