

# INScription

Department of International Studies (INS)

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*Yuting Wang*

# MEET THE FACULTY

In each issue of *INScription*, we ask one or two faculty members to tell us a bit more about themselves. In this issue, the faculty members under the spotlight are Dr. Pia Anderson and Dr. Poonam Singh.

## Dr. Pia Anderson

I am an archaeologist and anthropologist. I was born in Chicago, but spent much of my childhood in Southeast Asia, as my parents were academics and my father's work in environmental anthropology took us to several countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia; as well as Berkeley, California. Living in these varied environments led me to love experiencing different cultures. I lived for a while in the UK, where I received my BA and MA from the University of Cambridge; in Australia, where I attended the Australian National University for a year; and in the US, where I completed my PhD at the University of California at Berkeley. My fieldwork and research have allowed me to continue traveling, from the windswept Scottish island of St. Kilda to Papua New Guinea. I have worked in Hawaii, the Marquesas Islands, American Samoa, Scotland, Ireland, France, Spain, Greece and California. Before joining AUS, I worked at the American University of Cairo and excavated ancient Egyptian sites. I am so grateful to have lived in the UAE and experienced the growth of this country. My current research includes the history of fishing communities in Britain and the impact of Brexit, and the exploitation of natural resources in developing countries such as Papua New Guinea.



## Dr. Poonam Singh



Dr. Singh obtained a PhD in Anthropology from Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA. Her career in academia spans over two and a half decades, during which she has held roles in both senior leadership positions as well as in teaching. Currently she also serves The American College in Spain, Marbella (International Center of Broward College, Florida, USA) as a member of ACS Board of Trustees. As a visiting faculty, she teaches courses in anthropology and sociology at ACS. Prior to this, she worked as a Community Development Specialist / Rural Sociologist for United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya) for development projects in Nepal and Myanmar, where she engaged and interacted with community at the grassroots level. During her brief stay in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania, she also had the opportunity to work in a senior leadership position at a high school. While she was a teaching assistant at Syracuse University, she was awarded a Junior Fellowship by AIFS for research in India. Her research examined the symbolism underlying craft patterns and gender roles in a community of traditional craftspeople in western India. She loves listening to music and enjoys long nature walks—just as long as there's no encounter with creepy crawlies! She strongly believes that all students are great learners and that the learning process is a partnership between her and her students.

# MEET THE STUDENTS



In each issue, we will invite one or two students to share their feelings about college life or showcase their achievements. Feel free to contact us if you would like to participate! In this issue, Vini shares with us her aspirations and experience as a double major student at American University of Sharjah (AUS).

## Double Major Psychology & Physics

*Vini Rupchandani*

I was always a curious child, questioning my parents about the wonders of this complicated world. But what made learning fun for me wasn't the act of gaining new information that quenched my curiosity; it was the ability to link all the pieces of the puzzle together and understand how everything combines to explain the world both inside my mind and around me.

My choice to double major stems from this love for learning; combining psychology and physics, which seem like two distinct fields, actually allows me to have a richer understanding and experience of the world. I believe that real education is learning how to use different resources to create your own path, and while mine may seem untraditional, it is what brings a smile to my face every day when I wake up to attend my 8 a.m. classes! It is fulfilling and liberating to be able to deviate from the "expected" standards and discover life in ways that I truly want. Part of my purpose is to also inspire change and reform institutions to become empowering spaces for students to figure out their own unique paths in life.



# CONVERSATIONS WITH ALUMNI

What happens next after graduating from AUS? Are you interested in pursuing graduate degrees? We invited some of our star alumni who are pursuing master's degrees to share with us their experiences in applying for graduate schools. The department will hold a panel discussion to further discuss the details of the application process on March 8. Please stay tuned!



Our first guest for this series is Hassan Al Suwaidi, an Economic Affairs specialist at the Department of Economic and Trade Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in the UAE. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in global affairs and diplomatic leadership at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA).

## How did you decide which master's program(s) to apply for?

**Hassan:** After graduating AUS in 2020, I joined the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy as a trainee diplomat. Upon graduating and starting my job as a diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC), the opportunity came to enroll in the academy's master's program, so I took it since the master's was fully covered by MOFAIC and they are enormous benefits of taking it when it comes to your career in MOFAIC. I look forward to applying for another master's program that aligns with my aspirations, too.



## What was your process of research to find the right programs and universities to apply to?

**Hassan:** I think each person would have a different process—there is no right and wrong in this. What I would suggest is to first see what field you're mostly interested in studying and then taking it from there and comparing the programs and universities in relation to the field you want to study.

## How do you suggest students to manage their university days in order to draft a strong master's application?

**Hassan:** A good balance is important. I think academic achievement is very important, but your extracurricular activities are very important. One of the reasons why I was selected to be a diplomat and joined the post-graduate diploma program and then the master's program in the academy is because of that. I was also a part of several boards and roles at AUS like the Academic Support Center, AUS Model Congress, and AUS Model UN. The exposure and experience all this provided was very valuable. I think students should see what interests them and they should engage.

## Did you look for scholarships? What was your process for finding them?

**Hassan:** As I mentioned previously, my current master's is covered by MOFAIC. For future master's, I will be seeking a scholarship on that. I think it's important to have a good recommendation when applying for scholarships; at least in my work if I get an acceptance and a good recommendation, an opportunity for a scholarship might pop up in the future. I think it's important to do thorough research on entities and companies who if you get hired and work for them in a few years, you might be eligible for a scholarship grant they might offer. It's not any easy process for sure, but doing research and talking to people with experience on this is very important. Some universities offer scholarships, and I think depending on the program and university you will need to do some research on that.

## When is the right time to start looking for universities to apply for a master's?

**Hassan:** Junior year felt like the right time for me. Discussing this with professors, seniors and master's students is also often very helpful like it was for me.

## Do you have any other advice you want to give to students?

**Hassan:** I graduated during challenging times at the height of the pandemic back in 2020. My dream has always been to be a diplomat, but I thought it was a long shot. I applied to so many places, but I had no response. However, opportunities do come, and I ended up applying for the academy and I go in. As cliché as it sounds, do not give up, good things do happen. I think patience is a key element here, especially during these times. If an opportunity comes, seize that opportunity. It might open a number of doors, like it did for me.

# JANUARY IN REVIEW

## Psychology Program Events Review

The Psychology Club held an internship information and Q&A session with Dr. Chasity O'Connell, the Psychology Program Internship Coordinator. During the event, Dr. O'Connell tackled the concerns of psychology majors as they prepare for their internship this summer. The same general guidelines previously covered by CAS Career Services regarding internships were covered during the event, in addition to more specific information and advice related to internships in the field of psychology. Students also had the opportunity to ask Dr. O'Connell and the faculty present internship-related questions.

Psi Chi held a mixer event for its members and the psychology faculty. During the Psi Chi mixer, members got to meet each other face-to-face for the first time and enjoy food and fun activities together. In an aim to create a fun and comfortable environment for the members, card games and board games were provided. Psi Chi members got the opportunity to ask the faculty members any questions they had about their career path and the importance of education. Overall, it was a pleasant and informative evening for both students and faculty.

## INS Colloquium

### Dr. Brien Ashdown

During the Department Colloquium on January 26, Dr. Brien Ashdown presented his research on the importance of maintaining cultural capital in community psychology and development. In his talk, Dr. Ashdown pointed out that while aspects of the community capital framework have been effectively utilized in community development, community psychology and sociology (such as Putnam's arguments regarding social capital in "Bowling Alone"), cultural capital has not received as much attention in the literature. He explained that cultural capital is the assets community members share that help them create and maintain meaning and wellbeing and can include intangibles such as attitudes, beliefs and values as well as tangibles like food, literature and music. He argued that ignoring cultural capital in programs of community development, community psychology and/or international aid can have major long-lasting consequences on the community and on individual community members long after those involved in the program have left town. In his talk, he discussed past research and theory on the topic, some of his own empirical work, and his theoretical ideas and suggestions for better practices moving forward.

### Dr. Alejandro Bonvecchi

Dr. Bonvecchi's talk on February 16 focused on the subject of lawmaking under authoritarianism. His research examined how legislative institutions are designed in authoritarian regimes. The discussion highlighted differences within this type of regime, too; more concentrated power leads to less legislative power compared to more distributed power structures. However, the cases of authoritarianism studied did not support the generalization of claims that ordinary people may generally believe to be true. Some regimes did not support the hypotheses. This talk exposed the attendees to contemporary matters of lawmaking and authoritarianism. The discussion also made the audience better aware of methodological nuances. Overall, this was an intriguing talk for both INS faculty and students.



# UPCOMING EVENTS!

Events listed below are subject to change

February 25-27: AUS Model United Nations (AUSMUN)

March 8: Graduate School Application Panel

March 16: Department Colloquium Series: Dr. Rick Miller

Week of March 21: Week of Psychology:  
Organizational/Industrial Psychology

March 30: Department Colloquium Series: Scott Erich, The  
"Seas of My Kingdom:" Rights, Commons and the Extractive  
Seascape of Southeastern Arabia

## Contact Us!



INSA - [@insa\\_au](https://www.instagram.com/insa_au)

Psi Chi - [@psichi.au](https://www.instagram.com/psichi.au)

AUS Model UN - [@aus\\_modelun](https://www.instagram.com/aus_modelun)

Psychology Club - [@auspsychclub](https://www.instagram.com/auspsychclub)

AUS Model Congress - [@ausmodcongress](https://www.instagram.com/ausmodcongress)

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