

My reflections on the LSE-SIPA MPA dual degree



In this blog post, Laura Muller explains her motivations for pursuing a dual-degree Master of Public Administration from the London School of Economics and Columbia's School of International Public Affairs (SIPA), New York, with a concentration at SIPA in International Finance. Laura's professional background is in Finance, having worked in Goldman Sachs (Wealth Management), J.P. Morgan (Emerging Markets) and Morgan Stanley (2016 Global Sustainable Finance Summer Fellow). She is interested in finance as a force for positive change, whilst unlocking value for investors

Why did you decide to pursue a Master of Public Administration (MPA)?

The MPA is one of the few graduate degrees where a student can really cater the degree to their interests. An MPA has the potential of becoming a hybrid degree across a variety of disciplines such as Economics, Finance, Politics, and Urban Planning etc. I strongly believed the MPA was the most suitable degree for me to explore how the private sector, namely finance, could drive positive social change.

Why did you pursue a dual-degree between the London School of Economics with Columbia's School of international Public Affairs?

The LSE-SIPA dual-degree strongly influenced my decision to return to graduate school. The MPA is a diverse, international and highly technical degree with a core focus on both domestic and international policy. I felt the MPA dual-degree maximised my studies, as I experienced two different countries and two prestigious and established institutions. LSE provided a very solid grounding in Economics with a heavy focus on academic literature and quantitative analysis. SIPA provided a wide variety of classes and exposure to topics relevant to an MPA student (e.g. Central Banking, Gender Studies, Cyber Security, War and Peace studies). In my opinion, the technical skillset built at LSE combined with an exposure to multiple MPA focussed specialities at SIPA was an invaluable learning experience.

What were the most valuable and interesting parts of your time at LSE and SIPA:

The most important take-away from the dual-degree programme was being able to interact daily with multi-national, high achieving and passionate students. The discussions and learning's outside of the classroom were as significant as the teachings inside the classroom. There is no standard MPA student. Every student comes with their own experiences, background, interests and desire for change. LSE's student body is smaller, so getting to know everyone and develop long lasting friendships was straightforward. SIPA's student body is larger and more diverse. NYC's entrepreneurial spirit definitely lived in the students too, I was always learning from fellow students' new ideas and social enterprises. I had two graduations, one from SIPA and one from LSE. In both cases, I felt proud and overwhelmed to sit amongst a group of people who will one day be Presidents, CEOs, Nobel Prize winners and individuals that change the world for the better.

How has the dual-degree benefited your career & life prospects?

Studying at both LSE and SIPA was one of my best decisions. I gained valuable exposure to different teaching techniques, students and subject matter.



LSE provided a very solid technical grounding in Economics, Econometrics and Political Science; this taught me to truly appreciate the importance of critical thinking, especially when using data to draw conclusions. This skill set is invaluable in a world where we are growing more reliant on data usage. LSE's strong affiliation to the political sciences meant that we gained a rigorous understanding of various political systems. In a constantly changing world, it was interesting to dive into the fundamentals of political theory and apply this framework of analysis to shifting political systems (e.g. Brexit).

Studying at SIPA changed the trajectory of my career and life prospects for two reasons. Firstly, it gave me a better understanding of the United States. Only when you have lived in the USA do you truly understand and appreciate its complexity, diversity and importance on the international stage. It was eye opening to live in the America, especially New York City, at time of growing racial tension, rising inequality and polarity in Presidential candidate choices. When you live in Europe, your main source of information is the news and the views expressed on social media. Having lived in New York, I was exposed first hand to the issues facing one of the world's most powerful countries. It was fascinating to engage in conversation and to try and understand the views of various Americans. This experience puts me in a good position for future work in an American firm or with American colleagues.

Secondly, it helped me develop the skills required to pursue my dream career in emerging market impact investing. At Columbia I took a class in Private Equity and Entrepreneurship in Africa from Columbia's Business School. The class included a group-advisory project for a multi-million dollar business based in Nairobi. Working in Nairobi revealed the investment opportunities that can bring about social impact (e.g. investment in technology, infrastructure, renewable energy). My time at SIPA really cemented my interest in this career path, which put me in a good position for this past summer's work as a Fellow in Morgan Stanley's New York based Global Sustainable Finance group.



Laura Muller is Swiss and British and was born and grew up in Asia. She has a Bsc. in Economics and International Studies from the University of Warwick. She is currently a Director at Lion's Head Global Partners, a financial institution based in London and Nairobi, focusing on emerging markets and more specifically Sub-Saharan Africa. Lion's Head provides financial advisory services across a range of sectors, including agriculture, health care, education, financial intermediation and infrastructure. Laura splits her time working on the African Local Currency Bond Fund, for which Lion's Head is the fund manager, and advisory projects.

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