

John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the 'Cuse Conversations podcast. I'm John Boccacino, Senior Internal Communications Specialist at Syracuse University.

Adya Parida:

I was especially interested in Syracuse because the emphasis on research, it's an urban research university. I did not have prior research background before coming to attend college. But here now, ever since my freshman year, I got involved in research. I got to learn those skills. We also have a wonderful organization here on campus called The SOURCE, which is for undergraduate research, and they helped me so much. I was able to do research. I never expected myself to get into research at any point, but I was able to do that here at Syracuse.

John Boccacino:

Well, we are so thrilled here on this episode of the 'Cuse Conversations podcast to welcome on a junior who is studying computer science in the College of Engineering and Computer Science. She's Adya Parida. She again, is a really talented student who has a great story to share with our campus audience today on the podcast about the experiences of being an international student here at Syracuse. Adya, with the fact that you are here at Syracuse, you're from India originally, give our audience a little background. What drew you to Syracuse from India?

Adya Parida:

Ever since I got into high school, I always knew that I wanted to study abroad because I love learning about other cultures. I wanted to experience that for myself. The US especially attracted me because I knew that the education here is much more holistic, that it's not only about your grades, only about your exams. Even in the admissions process, I was asked to talk about my extracurriculars, about my campus, my school involvement, about my volunteer work. The process itself was so holistic that really attracted me. Also, in the education system here, the emphasis on research, the ability to engage in extracurricular activities while you're studying, that really attracted me. So that was the reason why I looked at Syracuse in particular too.

I got to know about Syracuse through an organization called the NextGen Organization in India. They basically partnered with a few colleges here in the US. Based on your preference, they connect you with the admission officers in the respective colleges. Then the process takes on from there. I already was interested in Syracuse and then I saw that they are partnering with Syracuse. I'm like, "This is the perfect opportunity for me." They offer scholarships for students to go to these universities and study there. I'm here on a full tuition scholarship, the 1870 Scholarship, and in my year there was only one student, that was me, who was awarded that. But ever since, they have started awarding it to more and more students each year.

This year they have about, I think, five or six students coming in. That is fantastic and I'm so happy to see so many more Indian students coming in, especially undergrads to come and study here. When I first heard about them, I applied, the same process. I submitted my application on Common App. There were a bunch of interviews. I was constantly in touch with the organization and also the admission officers here at Syracuse and they helped me throughout the process. They interviewed me. They answered my questions. Overall, the process was made much more smoother because of their help.

I was especially interested in Syracuse because the emphasis on research, it's an urban research university. I did not have prior research background before coming to attend college. But here now, ever since my freshman year, I got involved in research. I got to learn those skills. We also have a wonderful organization here on campus called The SOURCE, which is for undergraduate research, and they helped

me so much. I was able to do research. I never expected myself to get into research at any point, but I was able to do that here at Syracuse.

Another thing that I loved was I had heard about its alumni network, the Orange Family, and it is true, once I got here, I got to see that it's not just an alumni network, it really is a family. No matter where you go, people, if they see that you went to Syracuse and if they're an alum, they would go out of their way to try to help you, to answer your questions. It truly is a family.

John Boccacino:

I'm curious though, you mentioned you had heard of Syracuse before coming to campus. What was that interaction like? What were some of the exposures that you had to this university before coming here?

Adya Parida:

I wasn't able to visit any of the colleges that I applied to, but I would look at different websites. Basically, I was looking for engineering colleges and Syracuse came up in the list. Then I would go to the website. I would look at the majors offered, then the different courses within the major that is offered. Then I also looked at the clubs on campus. Basically, I did my own research in a sense that once I heard about a university, I just went to their website and tried to do my own research and try to see if it has the things that I'm looking for. That's how I got to know.

Also, I think one of my dad's friends had studied here at some point. My dad had heard of it. When I told him, "Okay, I was looking at this university," and he's like, "Oh, okay, my friend studied there too." I'm like, "Okay, that's cool, then I'll look into it even more."

John Boccacino:

I want to go back to the part about engineering and computer science. Obviously, you've had great success here at Syracuse studying computer science. Where did that interest in computer science come from? Was there a light bulb moment when you said, "Aha, this is what I want to study"?

Adya Parida:

For me, it wasn't a light bulb moment like I was going in one track and then I completely switched tracks. It built up. I could see myself doing something in STEM. Since I was in grade six or seven, I was always interested in math. I loved math and science. I first got introduced to coding when I was about 13 or 14. My brother is a computer engineer and he also got me interested. Ever since I saw that I could actually apply those math and science skills into a computer program and I can see real tangible results, I can actually see those skills applied, so I thought, "This is a fantastic field to be in." It's exciting and there's a lot that you can do within it and it's growing. So I thought, "Yeah, why not?" It wasn't really like a light bulb moment. I expected it all along and then when the time came, I chose it.

John Boccacino:

What are the biggest ways that you found yourself emerging and becoming more accomplished with your studies to set you up for career success?

Adya Parida:

The big resources that ECS provides, I would say, are not just limited to its classrooms, not just limited to lectures. Of course, we learn technical skills. We learn our subject content in lectures, in our labs. But I feel like the biggest thing that helped me was the other opportunities that ECS provides. For example, we have our career fairs. We have our alumni networking sessions where the alumni come talk one-on-one with you, give you advice, answer questions, and just some of the other programs that ECS has. For

example, last summer, the summer of 2022, I did a program called Invent at SU. It forces you to go out of your comfort zone, think about an innovative solution, work within an interdisciplinary team. I guess opportunities like that is what ECS truly stands out in.

Those other factors that go behind job search, or career advising, or networking, or having those different affinity groups within engineering. I'm part of Society of Women Engineers, Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers. There's IEEE for electrical. ECS does a really good job of not just teaching you the technical skills, but also equipping you with the different professional skills that you would need in your future once you graduate.

John Boccacino:

You talk about internships and the power of getting that hands-on experience. I'd love for you to talk to our audience a little bit more about the impactful internship you had with the Federal Reserve Bank and how you think that might be a good stepping stone for you once you graduate.

Adya Parida:

I feel like my internship experience this past summer, it was amazing. It was my first taste of working in a corporate culture. Being in academia, working on projects with your own classmates, with other college students, working with your professor is very different from working with a manager or working with your team head or the department head in a corporate setting. The internship was a fantastic way for me to learn those soft skills of how you communicate with your team members, how do you communicate with people of very different ages, very different backgrounds, and how you thrive within the company culture, because that is a big thing too.

I guess the biggest thing that I learned out of the internship was how to be a team player, how to know when to ask the right questions, how to ask the right questions, and being flexible and having an open mind to question yourself, question what's going on, question your team members about different things, because you are not going to have all the answers from the beginning. But knowing how to ask for help, knowing how to work with your team is super important. I was in Manhattan. It was my first time living in the city. It was all part of the experience. I mean, just going to work every day, taking the subway and going down to financial district, it was a different experience.

I remember a few years back when I visited New York as a tourist, I was on Wall Street and I'll be like, "Wow, these people are so cool, these buildings and everything." Little did I know that one day I would work there. It was a dream-come-true moment for me and really an experience that, I guess, you can never get. You have to do it in order to know how it feels. But at the same time, of course, there were challenges. There would be stumbling blocks. Because this is such a different culture, there would be things that you would not know as part of the company culture.

I also found two Syracuse alum actually at the Fed. I talked to them too. It was just really nice. The moment you find someone from Syracuse, you just instantly connect with them. It doesn't matter if you didn't know them a few seconds earlier, you just instantly bond with them.

John Boccacino:

It's that real sense of camaraderie that you get by coming to Syracuse. I want to switch subjects a little bit from camaraderie to community. Knowing that you didn't get a chance to come visit campus yourself, you just went online and did all your own, which I commend you for doing your due diligence and your research, and really you made the right choice by coming here to Syracuse to study computer science, how difficult was that adjustment for you to go coming to this domestic campus, finding friends, finding community? What was that process like?

Adya Parida:

It was definitely challenging. It's never easy to stay away from your family, especially when there's no chance that you can go see your family anytime you want. It's not a five-hour drive or anything. The least it is, it's a 20-hour flight, and it's expensive to go back home. Luckily for me, my roommate was a local, so she told me how to adjust to the weather here, how to get the right kind of jackets and coats and stuff like that. Another thing that I always recommend freshmen to do if they're coming here is to be part of a living learning community. I'm currently a living learning community RA. I truly see the relationships that the students, the residents, make with each other, because they personally helped me a lot when I was here.

All of my friends were either from my same major or they were from engineering and all the engineers would live on the same floor. We would hang out together. We would work on homework together. I guess that really helped me form or at least feel like family and have that sense of belonging here, especially in my freshman year. I am still friends with them. We still hang out. I feel like that freshman year, that first semester, who you hang out with and how much a part of campus you feel is really important and really defines what your next few semesters or your entire college experience is going to be like.

Of course, there's challenges with the weather. Of course, there's cultural differences. But I feel like the people have truly been really supportive. You can go and ask anyone, literally anyone, and they would be willing to help you. They would be willing to answer your questions. I would say having that open mind, and of course, there's going to be feelings of homesickness every once in a while, but I guess you have to find your own community here at that point and try to find resilience through that. That's something that I've done.

John Boccacino:

I want to go back to something you said at the very beginning of the conversation and you mentioned coming to Syracuse and coming to a US school for your holistic development. Give me a progress report. How have you seen you develop beyond just the academics by being here at Syracuse?

Adya Parida:

I feel like I've developed much. Academics, it happens no matter which university you go to. But I feel like Syracuse has truly stood out in the other opportunities. I mentioned about the Invention program, and that truly helped me look at myself as an inventor. That was something that I never thought I would be. Our team eventually went on and won the competition. Now, we're working with the launchpad here on campus working on commercializing our product and technically, we're entrepreneurs. I never looked at myself like that. The other opportunities I was talking about earlier, of course, there's your lectures, there's your classroom teaching, but these additional opportunities that Syracuse provides, I feel like that's what truly makes your college experience worth it and truly makes it different.

In terms of other campus involvement, I mentioned I am an RA and that has again, helped me develop my leadership skills, how to work in a team, how to be a mentor, how to be a resource for other students, navigating the same problems that I used to navigate in my freshman year. Being part of the Society of Women Engineers, being part of SAS has helped me be part of a community, relate with other engineers who have similar identities as me and discuss and talk about the different problems or challenges that we might face. Other than that, I'm also active in my faith community. That has again, helped me a lot. I'm a dancer, so I'm also part of the performance clubs here. I've performed for the International Center a lot of times, for the Hendricks Chapel a lot of times.

So I was able to do a lot more than I ever thought I could. Syracuse has given me much more than I could have ever asked for in terms of the extracurricular involvement, in terms of research, startups, everything.

John Boccacino:

It's really been a pleasure getting to meet you, getting to tell your story here on the podcast. She's Adya Parida. She's making quite an impact here on the Syracuse University campus. I want to thank you again for making the time and sharing your story with us today.

Adya Parida:

Of course. Thank you so much, John. It's a pleasure to be here.

Angelica Molina:

I wanted to be the best version of myself for me to be able to serve for my community. That's what brought me into the MPA and IR master's program. I wanted to gather the economic ability, the quantitative and qualitative skills basically that Maxwell really does a good job in providing them and a good balance on both of them. Then after that, I'm ready to contribute everything to my community.

John Boccacino:

I am pleased to welcome on Angelica Molina, who is a first-year master's student here in the Maxwell School of Citizenship, studying public administration and international relations. We wanted to give Angelica a chance to share her story as what it's been like to be an international student here at Syracuse. Angelica, thank you for making the time to join us.

Angelica Molina:

Thank you for being interested in my story. I'm excited to be here.

John Boccacino:

I'm always curious, and we talked about your story and telling your story here as part of this international theme podcast, you come here to Syracuse from Colombia. What was it that made you want to study here at Syracuse University?

Angelica Molina:

Yes, so Maxwell's has a really good reputation, even abroad. I know that Maxwell was the number one school in the US for master's in public administration. That was what caught my attention initially in Maxwell. Then as I went farther into it, I realized the faculty, they have all my career, they would all work in organizations or corporations that I personally want to pursue. That was something that I was really excited about. It's basically the quality of the education, the quality of the faculty. Now that I'm here, I'm actually really loving the campus. It's a beautiful campus. So that was what I was initially interested about Syracuse and Maxwell more specifically.

John Boccacino:

Did you get a chance to come and visit campus physically before you started your master's program or was your first exposure to the campus when you started your studies this year?

Angelica Molina:

No, I didn't have a chance. I just got here and that was my first time seeing campus, but I did have the virtual tour. I remember I was doing the virtual tour that they have through the website. I was able to see images, some of the buildings. I was able to recognize them once I was here. That was a good opportunity for me to get a little bit familiarized with the campus.

John Boccacino:

Why public administration, international relations? What was your thought process as to why that was what you wanted to study here on campus?

Angelica Molina:

My answer to that would be that I've always been interested in public serving and working for people, working for a community. That was what initially brought me into that field. I wanted to be able to contribute obviously with professional skills. I wanted to be the best version of myself for me to be able to serve for my community. That's what brought me into the MPA and IR master's program. I wanted to gather the economic ability, the quantitative and qualitative skills basically that Maxwell really does a good job in providing them and a good balance on both of them. Then after that, I'm ready to contribute everything to my community.

John Boccacino:

I love the way you framed that, realizing the best version of yourself. That's such a noble aspiration for a student. Obviously, you're self-aware of the importance and the role you play in your community. Who do we give credit to for bringing out that sense of service? When did you learn that giving back to others should be a prominent role in your life?

Angelica Molina:

Honestly, I think every single person I've met has taught me something, has made me want to help. If I had to pick two people, that would definitely be my parents. My dad, I remember he used to say a lot when I was back home in Colombia with him in Spanish, "[Spanish 00:22:05]." The English translation would be he who does not live to serve, does not serve to live. It's just basically something that he said a lot. What he meant by that is that whatever you do, make sure you're doing it in the purpose of helping others because that's just the purpose of life. That's what would keep you moving. If you do something that would make it good for the community, then that's just fulfilling. And definitely my mom, I could see it by example, that she was always helping people in her surroundings. So I would say my parents are my inspiration for that.

John Boccacino:

I know you've got this dual concentration of both international relations and public affairs. You talk about doing good and service to others. How do you envision putting your Syracuse degree to good use once you graduate with your master's?

Angelica Molina:

To be honest, I'm still debating on where exactly do I want to go, but definitely, I have already contact several organizations. One of them is called Ashoka. It's an international nonprofit organization that they do a lot of job in regional concentration. One of them is Latin America, which is the one that I would be focusing on. What they do is that they contact with local entrepreneurs of the area and they help them into building up their businesses and what they need to do. They make sure that the entrepreneurs that they're collaborating with, they have an environmental aspect into their products, they have a social aspect. And we just basically help it. I think that's an amazing job because it will help create a lot of impact in fostering the community. That's one of the ways I envision myself.

The other one is that I recently joined the ICMA student chapter at Syracuse University. I am just starting to explore local government. I have just learned the local government have really good impact on the community as well. I am interested in seeing how I could contribute to the community through local government as well.

John Boccacino:

The whole theme of this podcast has been talking to current students about their experiences being an international student at Syracuse. How would you describe your transition and how you were able to get acclimated? What has your experience been as an international student on campus?

Angelica Molina:

My experience as an international student has been great. Obviously, there's been some challenges, and to be honest, the biggest challenges I have faced here is the weather. I was absolutely not used to this weather. I come from a very tropical country. I didn't know what snow was. That's been the biggest challenge I've faced right now. I'm still debating with it, learning how to layer up and dealing with the weather. But other than that, my cohort, the MPA and the IR, have a lot of international students. That's really great because there's a lot of diversity. I have colleagues from different countries that come from different continents as well. That is great. It further enhance my cultural awareness.

And then we also all share this international experience. It's like we're together in this. We all come from different countries and yet we're here. That has really helped me have a home-away-from-home and feel more confident in this new place.

John Boccacino:

Through the MPA IR program at Maxwell, what are some of the ways maybe socially or culturally you've been able to form bonds and find that community with your fellow international students?

Angelica Molina:

Definitely, once I got here, I was able to bond fairly quickly with my colleagues that are also from Latin American countries because of the language. I think that really facilitates to create a bond. But then I have also been able to talk, and it's mainly through, I have a group work and then through those group work, it helps me to know farther the person and create connections with them. I've learned from every single one of my colleagues now. I feel that I've been able to build some bonds that hopefully would last even after the program.

I have now built up a new comfort zone here that they're basically my family in a sense, that I live with them. We struggle together. We thrive together. It's basically, I do have those instances where I miss my food, where I miss my family, but every single time there's somebody here that would make me feel better, make me feel that I can count on them. It's just like a new family that I'm also very grateful for, if that makes sense.

John Boccacino:

What advice would you share for other international students who might be dealing with some of those same feelings or needing to figure out how they fit in on campus?

Angelica Molina:

Go out and explore your resource. Sometimes, and I have to deal with it sometimes, you don't really talk to other people, you don't really explore your resources because you feel, I don't know, anxious, you feel shy. But then once you take yourself outside and then you talk to the Center for International Services, you talk to the Office of Engagement, you talk to Career Services, you attend some of the events. For example, I know GSO, the Graduate Student Organization, they do a lot of events for graduate students. And all of that, all of those events, all of those research, all of that people that I meet, they're really there to help you. They really make you feel better. They really make you build up your comfort zone and they really create a home for you.

John Boccacino:

I do want to thank our guest, Angelica Molina, for coming on to share her experiences as to what it's been like being an international student from Colombia here at Syracuse University. Angelica, I know you'll do nothing but great work with your master's program here. Best of luck and thank you for the time.

Angelica Molina:

No, thank you. I hope I was able to share some useful information, and thank you.

Yajie Lan:

Another reason why I chose Syracuse University to study architecture is because of the study abroad program that SOA provided. The study abroad program is pretty good. During the spring of my third-year semester and the fall of my fourth-year semester, I went to Florence and London to study abroad. That was a fantastic experience. I'm really glad that the school can provide those kind of resources to us.

John Boccacino:

I am pleased to welcome on our next guest on the podcast. Lanie is a fifth-year senior who is studying architecture here at Syracuse and has a great story to share with us of why they chose Syracuse University, the impact of their education. Lanie, thanks for making the time. How are you holding up these days?

Yajie Lan:

Thank you. Thank you, John. I'm doing great.

John Boccacino:

Give our audience a little background on yourself. I know you're from China originally and you're a little far from home coming from China to Syracuse. What made you want to come over to Syracuse to study architecture?

Yajie Lan:

Five years ago, I applied a bunch of schools including big university like Syracuse, but also small architecture school. When I got to make a decision, I decided to choose a big university, because I think there will be more activities or resources that can be involved. Also, the architecture school is good here. Another reason why I chose Syracuse University is to study architecture is because of the study abroad program that SOA provided. You can go to either New York City, or Florence, or London, or you stay in Syracuse and other visiting credits. I come to Syracuse and teach here. So I think the study abroad program is pretty good.

During the spring of my third-year semester and the fall of my fourth-year semester, I went to Florence and London to study abroad. That was a fantastic experience. I'm really glad that the school can provide those kind of resources to us. I mean, it's really hard to imagine that you even get a chance to study architecture in all of those places, and especially they offer those curriculums or studio over there. I think it just really open-minded.

I think one of the key reason why I chose Syracuse is because there's snow over here. I know it sounds so ridiculous, but because in my hometown, I'm from the southern part of China and we don't have a lot of snow over there. We got to pay money to travel to two hours away from our city and climb to the mountain, and then we can see snow. We got to pay money to buy the ticket. I mean, but I can see snow for free over here.



John Boccacino:

What was it like, that first snowfall here on campus?

Yajie Lan:

I was super exciting. It was so great that the moment that you open your window, it's, everything's white.

John Boccacino:

But it's great to hear a little bit about your background. I was wondering too, with the process, you mentioned applying to a bunch of bigger schools for architecture. Am I right to assume you did not get a chance to visit campus before you came to Syracuse?

Yajie Lan:

Yeah, that's true. Even I didn't come to United States before I become a freshman over here.

John Boccacino:

What was that process like of adjusting to a school that you had never seen until the first day you were on campus?

Yajie Lan:

Before I came to school, I did a bunch of research online. I searched the school's official website. I talked to the Illumina. I don't know, just because I knew some of the programs that architecture school provided, and I somehow had a sense of how the school it's look like and just go by the flow. I don't know. But I'm glad that I made the right decision.

John Boccacino:

Well, we're glad you came to Syracuse. The reason I asked that question is I think a lot of domestic students take it for granted. They're able to come, for the most part, and tour campus and see the facilities. How did you go about getting used to the resources that were available to you with the School of Architecture and how did you go about finding friends and community once you had made it here?

Yajie Lan:

For the resources part, I either searched it online. I think all of the resources that are post online. But you can just frequently talk to your professors or your supervisors. For example, I'm looking for a study abroad opportunity. I probably just go to find my campus supervisor and they're going to tell me different kind of programs that I can join according to my curriculum or what.

John Boccacino:

From a community perspective, how were you able to go about finding friends and finding a community, so you felt like you had a place here on campus?

Yajie Lan:

I think there's just a lot of student activities, offices, or I don't know. For example, International Student Office, they always host a lot of activities and they send your email and you can just go to chat or enjoy the dinner with other international students. Also, Cuse activities. I used to have a music club. I don't know, you can just apply for either you want to establish or you want to build a club or you can just join in whatever club that you want to at the beginning of the semester. For our own architecture school, we

had our own activities. I think the platforms are a lot over here, including the school-hosted and also architecture school-hosted, and also I pretty much host a lot of party as well.

John Boccacino:

I know the School of Architecture has such a good reputation as being rigorous and challenging and meeting the needs of our students. When did you realize that you wanted to study architecture, and what do you hope to do with your degree?

Yajie Lan:

Actually, I decided to study architecture when I was pretty young. The answer that I used to tell people was pretty complicated, but recently I found a more easy way to explain why I want to become an architect. I think it's a very challenging, interesting, and not easy subject. I really enjoy solving problems, actually. I think architecture is a way to solve problems. Also, I think it's a very comprehensive subject. It requires you to think a lot of questions when you are designing or you are solving a problem such as structures, materials, the geological locations, the social environment, the history and the functional, all of those kinds of things, and your clients and your client's preference or blah, blah, blah.

I think I'm really intrigued by process when I'm thinking about all of those problems. I found out that actually what really makes me happy or what I'm really looking for is to know more about the world, the society, the relationship between people, and just know more about me. I think that really makes me happy.

John Boccacino:

That's a really reflective answer and I can't wait to see you're able to do to put your architecture degree to good use once you graduate. It seems like you've really had a good experience here at Syracuse University. But we've really enjoyed getting to tell the story here of Lanie, a fifth-year senior studying architecture here at Syracuse. We wish you nothing but the best of luck moving forward with your studies. Keep up the great work and thanks for stopping by the podcast today.

Yajie Lan:

Thank you so much.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the 'Cuse Conversations podcast. My name is John Boccacino, signing off for the 'Cuse Conversations podcast.