

Studying for a PhD presents its own challenges. From deciding where to study to the application process and finding the ideal work/life balance, can be a different experience for each person studying at different countries. Or maybe not?

We spoke to members of GMPA associations who are currently studying or recently graduated, and this is what they had to say about their experience.

**Dr Seyed Hassan Amini, PhD – Research Scientist, West Virginia University**

Dr Seyed Hassan Amini shares his experiences as an international student who undertook PhD studies in the USA.

**What admission requirements do international students need to be aware of, for example, visas and funding?**

For international candidates, acquiring a student visa is probably one of the last stages of entering a graduate program at a US academic institution.

The application process may start with reviewing university and program minimum requirements for different categories, such as GPA and English language scores for TOEFL/IELTS and GRE. Universities will request supporting documents such as resumes, statements of purpose, official transcripts, and letters of recommendation. Following this, international candidates may then directly contact department faculties, and search faculty research websites to identify potential advisors with common research interests. There may be several online interviews to discuss research interests while learning about the active projects of faculties.

A successful PhD candidate may receive admission and, ideally admission plus an offer letter for a Graduate Research Assistantship. Candidates can then schedule an appointment with US embassies regarding an application for a student visa. While an official admission from a university is the critical requirement for acquiring a visa, an official Assistantship offer may assist with an application.

**Why did you choose to study outside your country?**

Studying abroad is a challenging decision for any international student. This decision may be more difficult when you know that you may receive a "single entry student visa", meaning that if you leave the US during your graduate studies, you need to reapply for the visa.

I chose to study in the US because I wanted to experience living in another country where I could meet people from diverse backgrounds, and to be more independent in my personal and professional life, and to start my professional life based on my abilities.

Iran has an excellent education system with outstanding scholars in the mining engineering field, as well as mining programs with exceptional facilities for conducting fundamental research. However, a difference between the education systems, is the closer relationship between academia and industry sectors which prompted me to continue my education in the US.

**What type of support does an international student need?**

I believe the most important support needed by international students is financial. While academic institutions may support international graduate students, I also think scholarships offered by the Society of Mining, Metallurgy &



Exploration (SME) are important; I was fortunate to be able to buy my first car, in August 2014, after receiving a SME WAAIME Scholarship.

Social and professional support is important for international students; helping students to develop a sense of belonging to the community they live in, the field they're focusing in, and the professional society they can contribute to. I think academic institutions provide an immediate community, and SME as the primary professional society is pivotal. SME, for example provides a fantastic variety of technical divisions and committees to attract international students and scholars with different backgrounds and interests and create a sense of belonging. Expansion of professional engagement groups could increase both professional and mentoring support for international students, allowing for further sharing of experiences and challenges being faced by while studying and living internationally.