

## **Rutgers Around the World - Episode 13: International Student Interviews**

*[HOST, MUSIC UNDER]*

**HOST:** The following is a production of Rutgers Global.

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**HOST:** Welcome to Rutgers Around the World: The podcast with the finger on the pulse of all things Global at Rutgers.

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**HOST:** Did you know that close to 6500 international students from all around the world attend Rutgers University each year? This is something we are really proud of and we wanted to highlight the international student experience in this episode of Rutgers Around the World. We are fortunate to be joined by three international students in this podcast. We will hear from each of them about what it was like to be at Rutgers during the COVID pandemic, about why they chose to attend college in another country, and why specifically Rutgers, and we will hear about their plans for life after college.

Let's get started and meet our guests.

**MILLY:** Hi, my name is Milly Chu, I was born in China, moved to Singapore when I was nine, and grew up there before coming to the U.S. for high school. I am double majoring in Philosophy and Human Resource Management, I am a sophomore this year and my anticipated graduation year is 2025.

**MARIAM:** Hi, my name is Mariam Basta, and I am from the United Arab Emirates, I am originally from Egypt, and I'm currently doing my Masters in Public Health at the School of Public Health, with a concentration in Global Public Health, and hopefully I will be graduating in next May by 2023.

**SHINE:** My name is Shine Macawan, like sunshine, but just Shine, and I'm a senior and I'm majoring in Bioenvironmental Engineering, and I was born and brought up in India. I just came to the U.S. for my college, so shout out to all the Indians. I'm doing a 4+1 program, which is four years of bachelors, and then one extra year, and then I graduate as a master's, so I'm going to graduate in 2024.

**HOST:** What was it like to attend Rutgers University during the COVID 19 pandemic? Here's Mariam.

**MARIAM:** I did start at Rutgers, you know, without the pandemic, so it was great to be out and about. But unfortunately, COVID hit my senior year right before graduation, so I didn't get to graduate on time. They did make a makeup graduation, so that was great. But starting grad school in the middle of a pandemic was a little hard too, because the school is a lot smaller. You don't really get to see people in your classes. Half of your classes are online, very few are in-person and even with masks, you can't always recognize people, so it was really hard to communicate with professors and communicate with other students during that time.

**HOST:** Here's Shine.

**SHINE:** During the pandemic, I am a transfer student, so I did my first year in a community college and then I transferred here in my second year. In my sophomore year, or my first year with Rutgers, COVID hit, and it was all online. For the first half of the pandemic, I was here in the States, but I was just online, and then for the second half, I just visited my family in India, and I was doing online school from there.

I would stay awake the entire night and sleep during the day too, all the classes were synchronous, so that was great. My junior year was my first time on campus, and so I felt like a freshman in my junior year. I used to get lost all the time.

**HOST:** How did you participate in activities and get to know the Rutgers community during the pandemic? Here's Milly.

**MILLY:** In my opinion, the transition from high school to college was a lot easier for me because I was on campus, and I was able to attend various in-person activities and events like the involvement fair at the beginning of the school year and in-person dorm meetings to meet with my dorm mates. Coming to Rutgers, it had this challenge because I was not used to seeing this many people on campus. I felt really overwhelmed at the start, but eventually I started meeting people that I really saw an interest with and that's how I found my community and how I started becoming more involved in the community.

**SHINE:** I had the similar experience, so my first year on campus, again, as I said, was in my junior year. When I came here to New Brunswick, I did not know anyone at all in New Brunswick or at Rutgers. I was like, okay, this is not going to work out, so I just attended every single club meeting, every single event. I met people that I didn't even know existed. I met all these people and had all these awkward conversations, but because of those awkward conversations, I realized that the awkwardness that I'm feeling, they're feeling too, because everyone is post-pandemic right now.

So yeah, instead of avoiding the awkward, I embrace the awkward. And I made so many good friends and I build up my community with friends and people that are like closer than, you know, friends that I've known from India, like, for so long. So just showing up to the event, even if even if you're just going for the free food, just go and talk to people and you'll make friends.

**MILLY:** I could totally relate to what Shine has said about joining different clubs and how just meeting people really helped in feeling supported in the community. For me, I am still in the process of trying to find what organization that I am interested and passionate about. This year I was involved in the orientation team, and I'm also a part of Rutgers Global Student Advisory Community, so we just helped organize activities for international students and built that connection between domestic students and international students.

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**HOST:** Here is Shine.

**SHINE:** I became a part of ROC, which is Rutgers Oasis Church. I also became a part of another community, which is similar to that, but it is more holistic, well-being of a person, and then I became a part of NRHH Teach, which is National Residence Hall Honorary. It is a community service-based group, and I also became an orientation leader for my junior year and my senior year. And yeah, that's basically it.

**HOST:** Let's talk about the challenges and bright spots. Here's Miriam.

**MARIAM:** It is honestly a challenge for international students to really fit in. You know, the world is a lot more connected with social media and the Internet now that it's not as much of a culture shock, but it still kind of is. It's still hard to get out of your shell when you're in a completely new country, and like try to interact with people that have, you know, different upbringings and to really try to connect with people. We all faced a lot of challenges differently, whether you actually got COVID or not. I know we've been studying a lot in my classes that COVID has had a lot more effects on people, especially in mental health, than just, you know, actually getting the disease, and even people who did get COVID, like are more predisposed for like mental health illnesses and like, it's a bit depressing, but there's a lot of challenges that we're all facing.

A lot of people, you know, got this social anxiety as well that we're seeing in classes. There's less participation. People are, you know, talking out less. So that's, I would say, one of the biggest challenges that everyone is going through. But on the bright side, I feel like having things virtually allowed you to have more opportunities overall, so like, for example, a lot of our, you know, professors that might have moved away can still give the class and you can still attend their section because it's virtual. The more we, you know, adapt to that virtual environment, the more opportunities we will get and the more chances we would have to interact with a lot of other people in different disciplines and all that.

**HOST:** Shine?

**SHINE:** I'm going to be honest, in my first year with Rutgers, because it was virtual, like everyone who is from New Jersey is like, oh, Rutgers, whatever. But like I came from the other side of the world to come to Rutgers, right? I had such high expectations for Rutgers. And I was like, yes, I'm finally inside, and this is great! Rutgers was trying to figure it out. I was trying to figure it out, I was trying to figure out online classes and Rutgers and the U.S. curriculum out, I was just so confused into all of that, me being away from my family for such a long time. Like, I think I visited my family after one and a half years. And so, yeah, as an 18-year-old, I was like, I've always been with my family and we are like four really close-knit people, so it was hard during that time.

But on the other half of the pandemic, when I was visited India, it was also hard because now I have my family, but now my online schooling is like I'm staying up all night and I'm sleeping during the day, and I was like, wow, this is great. But on the bright side, I feel like I grew up a lot during the pandemic, which if it hadn't happened, I would have just been less matured I guess in ways, and also that I got to spend time with my family while I was in school.

**HOST:** What made you want to come to a different country to go to college? Here's Mariam.

**MARIAM:** My parents always had the dream of sending us abroad just because, you know, education is perceived to be better abroad. I've always wanted to start, you know, somewhere different and to gain experiences. I would say I was a little spoiled growing up, so it was a good chance for me to be more independent, to learn to cope to a whole new environment and of course to get a great education, you know, one of the best public health programs in the country, so that, you know, really pushed me, and inspired me to come, and Rutgers was my first choice, so I'm glad I'm here.

**HOST:** Shine.

**SHINE:** Honestly, I looked at every single country, every single college, not every single college, but every single country and many colleges in the entire world to find out like what I want to do, where I want to go, so I started my college hunt when I was in ninth grade, and I looked at the UK, I looked at Canada, I looked at Australia and New Zealand, and for some reason, the U.S. just slipped my mind, and I just, I looked at Czech Republic, and I didn't even know that existed before my college, so that was great. But the U.S. just skipped my mind, and then my childhood friend who came to the U.S. with her family like ten years ago, came back to visit us and she was like, What about the U.S.? And I was like, huh?

Then she told me that there's this great school, it's Rutgers, and she doesn't even go to Rutgers, but she was like talking so much about it. I was like, okay, and so she just went online and showed me all the majors, and honestly, I was just giving her the time of day. I had like my college picked out, I was like, this is where I want to go, and I was just giving her the time of the day, and she was just scrolling through the majors and there

came Bioenvironmental Engineering, and I was like, that's what I want to do, so I scratched all my plans and then I planned for the U.S.

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**HOST:** What makes Rutgers University a special place? Here's Milly.

**MILLY:** Rutgers has a lot of special qualities that makes it special, but one of the main ones would probably be how much opportunity it provides because of how big the school is, everyone is able to find something that they are interested in being involved in, and I also truly enjoy how there are so many majors and minors available to students. I think college is the most perfect time to start discovering one's interest and developing oneself, so it's just really special how Rutgers enables students to do that.

**SHINE:** Yeah, I totally agree with Milly. There are so many opportunities like 700+ clubs and organizations at Rutgers, so there is something for everyone. But I would also like to add that the office at Rutgers, is like there to push you towards your goal. If you don't know what your goal is, great, they're here to help you find it out. If you know what your goal is, they're here to help you, you know, propel towards it, so I've seen like every single office, there is so much passion to push you forward to your goal and to make you successful. I just love that part about Rutgers, so yeah.

**HOST:** Let's talk about future plans. What do you think you might want to do? Here's Mariam.

**MARIAM:** I'm not sure. Honestly, I feel like a lot of people aren't sure, and, you know, the job market also, like, it just changes all day, every day, so I really, I would love to be in academia, but I would also like to get more hands on work in the field in the beginning, at least of my career, so I'm hoping to be involved with non-government organizations that are really dealing with significant health issues facing vulnerable populations, and that's really what I want to work with. I want to understand how NGOs work, I want to be involved in program planning and implementation, health programs and interventions, that sort of thing. I'm also interested in research, but really that depends on, you know, availability. It's not always easy to get into research because like funding issues mostly with professors and stuff, so I'm open really to going anywhere. I'm open to a lot of different areas, especially that public health is a very interdisciplinary and really broad field.

**HOST:** Here's Milly.

**MILLY:** For me, as of right now, I do plan on continuing my academic career. I am planning to attend graduate school after I graduate undergrad, but I'm not 100% sure about what field I want to go into, but something that I have considered would

probably be a field that is related to the management area, as I love working with people, and helping people, so it's something that's really drawn to me.

**HOST:** Shine?

**SHINE:** For me, I am, as I mentioned, I'm doing a 4+1 program right now, so four years of bachelors and then one extra year, and then I graduate as a master's, so that is what I am at right now. But after I finish my master's, I would like to go do my Ph.D. because I'm very passionate about research and all of that, so I'm going to pursue my Ph.D. and I really like teaching and researching, but my family is like business all the time, so like, I also want to start up my own business, so we'll see where the path leads me. Maybe I'll be a professor and do research on the side or have my own business and do research on the side, so yeah, that's where I'm at right now.

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**HOST:** What's your dream job? Here's Mariam.

**MARIAM:** A dream of mine, I guess when I first envisioned going into public health was, you know, founding my own NGO, especially to cater to mental health issues among youth in the Middle East. You know, that's a topic that, you know, I grew up not talking about. It's something that's kind of taboo. It's getting better now, but I don't think it's there yet, and I really think that it's an issue that needs to be addressed among young people.

**HOST:** Here's Shine.

**SHINE:** I've always been drawn to renewable energies since the third grade when I was like, what? The sun can give us energy? That's crazy! So, I was like renewable energy, so I would like to research in renewable energies, and then if I'm teaching, I don't know if renewable energy is like a very specific topic, so but we'll see about the professorship. But for my business, I would also like to go into renewables after graduation.

**HOST:** After graduation, do you plan on staying in the U.S.? Here is Milly.

**MILLY:** For me, because I don't have a set path of where I want to be or what I want to do in the future, it's really open and I am excited to see what the future holds for me. I think that for school I might want to study in the U.S. and continue setting in the U.S. just because I already am familiar with the academic areas in the U.S.

**HOST:** Here is Mariam.

**MARIAM:** Settling is a hard word. I don't think I'm the type of person that would want to settle somewhere, especially in the global health field. I do want to travel a lot. I want to

experience different cultures and I want to deal with different health issues among different populations, but for the foreseeable future, I do think that, you know, I could get some really valuable experience from the U.S., so for now, I want to gain experience, gain skills, just build on that, and then hopefully one day, you know, when I feel like more equipped to travel and to do more important work and hopefully then.

**HOST:** Here is Shine.

**SHINE:** I have two options, right? There is the U.S., where they're so strong about the environment, and so there are so many opportunities, but then on the other hand, there is India who is like not so strong on the environment, so there is new horizons, so honestly, I don't know yet what I am going to do. As of right now, I'm doing my PhD in the U.S., so yeah, just when I graduate, I'll just look at the opportunities offered in the U.S. or the new horizons that are offered in India and I'll choose then.

**HOST:** Any advice you would give to an international student? Here is Milly.

**MILLY:** I think it's okay to not know what the future holds and to be flexible with things, sometimes you can. Sometimes, an opportunity can appear and you're interested in that and you want to try that out, and sometimes you realize after trying out, you don't really like that anymore, and it's totally fine to change the plans that you have already before coming to college, but I also think that sticking to the larger direction is also important. Figuring out your values and what you what's the most important to you and sticking to that, while being flexible in the everyday school life, that's something that's important for me.

**HOST:** Here's Shine.

**SHINE:** Yeah, mine goes in the similar lines as Milly. My dad always says that have a direction, because if you don't have a direction, and if you increase your speed, you'll go to the wrong place fast, so that's what I remember all the time, that before you come to college and before you come to Rutgers, make standards for yourself, set goals for yourself, and it doesn't have to be like, a major, or you know, whatever career goals. It can be your personal goals that after I finish college, I want to see myself like this, I want to have this, I want to have these skills, so make standards for yourself before you come to college and stick to the standards while you in college so that you get to the goal after you graduate college because once you come to college and then you're like, okay, maybe I'll do this, or maybe I'll do that. Rutgers has so many options that you will get confused as to like, should I do this? Should I do that? So, make standards, whether it be personal, whether it be career-wise and stick to them, even if it means skipping hanging out with your friends, or skipping hanging out every single night, you know, watching the movies or whatever. Stick to those goals, make those standards, and follow them and you'll succeed.

**HOST:** Here's Miriam.

**MARIAM:** I love Rutgers. I love how diverse it is, and there's just so much going on, and I think that every student needs to take advantage of that. There are so many cool classes, so many organizations, so much extracurricular activities you can be involved in, and it makes me sad to think that people focus on academics and focus on grades so much that they forget that there's so much more to Rutgers to enjoy, and my advice is to just calm down, you'll do fine. You know, just experience what it's like to be at Rutgers, and like, experience all these different things that, you know, you may never know, you find a hobby that you might stick with for the rest of your life. You know, apparently Rutgers had an underwater weaving class or something. There's so many cool things out there that you could do at Rutgers, and, you know, that's one of my regrets, I guess. Well, I don't like using the word regret, but I wish that I was more involved at Rutgers. I wish I did more fun classes and not completely be focused on my grades because you know what? It turned out fine. I did well. So, I just wish I took more advantage of the opportunities at Rutgers.

**HOST:** Thank you to Mariam, Milly and Shine for sharing their experiences with us, and reminding us why Rutgers is such a special community for international students.

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That's all for this episode of Rutgers Around the World. Be sure to visit our website at [global.rutgers.edu](http://global.rutgers.edu) for episodes and more information on everything global at Rutgers.

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