

Mayukh Datta

Travel Report

Conference: Harvard Project for Asian and International Affairs

Majoring in chemical engineering with a minor in environmental economics, I am deeply interested in environmental and energy policy. Specifically, I want to explore the legal and socioeconomic impact of environmental injustice, especially in the face of climate change. On campus, I am pursuing this passion not only through a diverse curriculum but also through my extracurricular activities, from Engineers without Borders to undergraduate research. I am also pursuing this passion by participating in various conferences and summer programs, and with the help of the Shackouls Honors College and the Bagley College of Engineering, I attended the Harvard Project for Asian and International Affairs (HPAIR) Conference at Harvard College from February 14th to 21st to participate in the Environmental and Energy Sustainability Track.

HPAIR is a student-organized, biannual conference held at Harvard College in the Spring and in an Asian country in the Fall (This year, it's going to be in Kazakhstan!). Not limited to environmental and energy policy, HPAIR is composed of five different tracks: Geopolitics and Conflict Resolution, Entrepreneurship and Technology, Energy and Environmental Sustainability, Arts and Media Culture, and Social Justice & Policy. Within each track, participants hear from world-renowned academic and industry leaders who work in the Asia-Pacific region. At the end of the conference, students have a chance to participate in an impact challenge where they provide a solution to a real issue.

In the Environmental and Energy Sustainability Track, the first day I heard from a panel specializing in water sustainability in Asia, and on the second day, I heard from a panel that specialized in nuclear technology. Part of this, I had the chance to network not only with professors at Harvard but also with students from around the world. At the end of the conference, I also participated in the HPAIR Humanitarian Impact Challenge where students were asked to find a solution to the refugee crisis in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Myanmar. Along with delegates from Australia, Taiwan, and Japan, I drafted and presented a solution to food insecurity in Yemen. Though we did not place in the impact challenge, the experience itself was marvelous because I proposed my solution in front of Joung-ah Ghedini-William, the head of Global Communications at the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

With delegates present from nearly 40 different countries in Asia, the conference also gave delegates plenty of time to learn about each other's cultures. With events such as iNight and HPAIRx, a TEDx-type event at HPAIR, delegates had a chance to learn about each other's work. This conference was an amazing experience, and the friends I've made at HPAIR will last my lifetime. However, because this conference is expensive, HPAIR is accessible to those who are extremely wealthy or to those who, like me, had supporters who would recognize the value of this conference. That is why I hope that future MSU students apply to HPAIR and that the Shackouls Honors College is willing to support them in this endeavor.