

NOVA Testimonial – Aswin Rengarajan



Aswin Rengarajan (India, Northern Virginia Community College – Annandale, Business Administration, 2019-2020)

Aswin Rengarajan studied at NOVA between 2019-2020 during his exchange year with the CCI Program. He had always wanted to study abroad and experience different cultures. When the chance to study at NOVA came along, Aswin immediately knew he wanted to attend the program.

During his exchange year, Aswin met his current partner Luisa, who also attended NOVA during the CCI Program's 2019-20 program year. Back home, they continued to maintain their relationship and even started their own podcast called Masala of Cultures, where they discuss their year abroad and talk about interacting with various cultures. For Aswin, studying in the United States at NOVA was an irreplaceable experience because he was surrounded by diversity and a wonderful community of fellow students and scholars.

Tell us a little about yourself and your background prior to studying in the U.S. (your interests, education, and professional experience):

Since high school, I've always wanted to study architecture, and I did get into a top architecture school right after graduating. I also just came from a high of representing my state in the national games playing cricket, a very popular game in India, during my senior year of high school. Unfortunately, I had to drop out of both architecture school and cricket a year later. Little did I know how my life was going to change in the next few years.

Right after dropping out, I joined the business school and the first year went pretty well. I also started a digital marketing agency with a friend, as I was naturally curious about new technology, and social & digital media was growing tremendously back in 2017. Things took a drastic turn in the second year

when I was competing and winning business competitions across the state and our digital marketing business expanded. By that time, I realized that things happen for a reason and that business suited me better than architecture.

This was also when I got to know about the CCI Program from my senior, who spent that year in the US as a part of the program. I applied for it nervously, questioning a lot about how every single cost of traveling across continents and oceans will be borne by someone else. When I completed my second year of business school, I got my visa to travel to the United States!

What classes did you take at NOVA?

I studied Entrepreneurship at NOVA, complementing the business education I was taking back home. I had some first-hand experience running a small digital agency, but I wanted to learn more about how I could scale better by solidifying my foundational knowledge in the subject. Luisa and I had some overlapping classes like English, Principles of Management, Sales and Marketing Management, and Organizational Behavior. I also had Principles of Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Small Business Management, Business Law, Financial Management, and Nutrition.

What would you tell another international student coming to study at NOVA?

With NOVA being located close to the nation's capital, the richness in diversity is a big plus. You will never feel like you're out of place as the people there are warm and helpful. The facilities are top-notch with accessibility given the utmost importance. The curriculum is modern and customizable to one's needs.

Also, the professors are highly qualified with relevant working experience to better teach concepts that can only be done with practical knowledge. NOVA has a lot of partnerships with top universities in and around the area that help people transfer easily after their associate programs.

The college is easily accessible by road and public transport. Even after finishing our night classes, we were able to take a bus back home. Campus security is also helpful in aiding students at night to reach the bus stop or other places safely. It might sound too good to be true, but honestly, I had a terrific time at NOVA!

What career and/or educational pursuits are you exploring?

I was doing some digital marketing projects along with a friend for a couple of years before coming to the US. It helped me land a digital marketing internship with a startup in DC to handle their in-house marketing efforts. The experience made me realize that this is what I wanted to do as a career. Being a digital marketer brought both the analytical and creative sides of me to the fore, much to my liking. After coming back to India, I finished the final year of my undergraduate business program.

With my work experience, business education in India, and Entrepreneurship certificate from NOVA, I was able to land a fully remote digital marketing role at an early-stage startup based out of Boston with employees from 6 different continents. It's been two years now and I've thoroughly enjoyed my time

here. Alongside this, I've been running a nonprofit on peace and sustainability called IYOPS with friends from around the world.

And as Luisa mentioned, we've also been podcasting about our experience of being an international student and a long-distance/intercultural couple. We want to expand on this by creating an inclusive platform for such couples to connect, learn, and grow together in their diverse relationships.

What was your favorite part about attending NOVA?

Traveling and studying in a different country has always been a dream, but seemed far-fetched as it was very expensive. The CCI program was more than what I expected, with academics, cultural exchange, leadership, and more aspects packed into one effective package. It was a no-brainer for me to decide to go. It really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to stay, learn, and grow alongside people from different parts of the world. Who would say no!?



The CCI Program is a one-year, non-degree academic program designed to build participants' technical skills, enhance leadership capabilities, and strengthen English language proficiency. The program also provides opportunities for professional internships, service learning and community engagement activities to build relationships between U.S. citizens and other countries. Northern Virginia Community College administers this U.S. Department of State program in cooperation with the NOVA-led Community College Consortium. For further information, please contact CCI Program Director Leeza Fernand at lfernand@nvcc.edu and/or the NOVA CCI Team at CCCIP@nvcc.edu and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at eca-press@state.gov.