

Irina Iles

AY 2016-17 All-S.T.A.R. Fellow

College of Arts and Humanities

Department of Communication

Doctoral Candidate (4th year), GA



My experience as a graduate assistant at the University of Maryland represents a transformative chapter in my life that continues to change me both as a scholar and at a personal level. When I first came to UMD, I started off as a teaching assistant—a seemingly insurmountable challenge for an international student. Contrary to my fears, teaching American undergraduates was one of the most efficient and enriching cultural experiences of my life. I would describe it as a crash course in American culture – everything from social norms and history to humor and popular culture. After my first year of teaching I was much better equipped to function in a society that is so different from the one I came from.

For the past four semesters I was offered the wonderful opportunity of being a research assistant and Assistant to the Director for the Center for Health and Risk Communication. This allowed me to focus exclusively on my scholarship and carry out personal research projects under the guidance of my advisor and other faculty mentors. In addition, being part of grant-funded research projects helped me better understand the necessary elements of cutting-edge research and the importance of collaborative work and interdisciplinary knowledge creation. It inspired my own research, improved my writing skills, and helped me fully understand various statistical techniques that I plan on using further in my career.

UMD's culture of excellence and encouragement to be fearless inspired me to push my boundaries and become the confident, determined, and passionate scholar I am today.