1. I wanted to know what motivated you to pursue this particular program instead of other programs (either in the social sector or others like masters in a particular academic discipline or an MBA)

* I chose Harris over other programs because of its focus on quantitative skills as applied to the impact assessment in development sector. By the time I applied to Harris, I had a 5 years of research experience in education and public health. I liked research work and wanted to learn more. I did not think about MBA or other programs because I was sure that I want to work in the research/impact evaluation space. Harris is a good place to be if you have similar career aspirations. I am not sure if it would be a good choice for people with different career aspirations like consulting etc.

2. Since I am an international student (from India), I wanted to know what proportion of the graduates stay back in the US after the course vs going back to their home countries?

* I do not know. Harris publishes placement statistics for every batch. I find them fishy. There is no way to know what proportion of international students get placed in the US. Based on my limited interactions with fellow students, I can say that getting a job in the US is very challenging for international students, mainly due to VISA issues. My general advice to international students investing hefty amounts in American education would be to choose programs that give substantial scholarships (at least 50%). I was always sure that I wanted to go back to India, so I never searched jobs in the US. You should definitely talk to other students who have first-hand experience of searching job here.

3. Could you shed some light on how you funded your program?

* Fulbright-Nehru Master’s Fellowship and some scholarship by Harris covered my tuition costs. I paid for my living expenses. Staying in Chicago (specifically Hyde Park) is comparatively cheaper as compared to other campuses (Boston etc.). If you don’t have any extravagant expenses, you’ll live decently with monthly expenses of around $1200. I’m giving my monthly expenditure breakdown below to help you estimate your expenses:
* Rent: 600
* Bills(electricity+gas+internet) = $110 (this is my share of the bills. I share the total bill with two other people in my apartment)
* Phone: $19 this is the cheapest plan of LYCA
* Groceries: $300 (you can easily find common Indian grocery items)

4. The website mentions that taking the data analytics certification will make my degree STEM eligible. Is this all I need for getting the OPT extension or is there some other procedure to apply for it?

* You have to apply for a certificate and then complete the requirements by taking courses. Recently there have been some issues about this. MPP is not a stem eligible program. You are eligible for stem extension IF you complete certain requirements. After you complete the requirements, the university gives you a new I-20 with a revised code. Because of this change in I-20 code, recently some students were asked for extra documentation by the American government. I am not fully aware about what percentage of students got the STEM extension in the end.

5. What was your favorite part about the course? What are particular skills I should purposefully develop through this program?

* To make the most out of your time here, have some realistic plan. I wanted to learn more about quantitative research methods, and gain some hard skills (R, python etc.). The program is quite hectic so it’s good to have your priorities lined so that you know where to spend more time and which things can take the back seat. For instance, I know that eventually I want to apply to PhD. So, I spent most of my time taking mathematics heavy courses. To make the coursework manageable I used to take 2 difficult course and one relatively easier course in each quarter. Another general advice would be to come prepared. The coursework is challenging and moves very fast. It was hard for me to adjust with the fast-paced quarter system. If you do not have a strong economics/mathematics background, I strongly (very strongly) encourage studying following courses to brush up your knowledge:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/economics-finance-domain/microeconomics>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/math/calculus-1>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/math/statistics-probability>

I have seen many students with non-econ or non-math backgrounds having a really hard time with the coursework. It can be really frustrating and stressful. COME PREPARED!

6. What are some of the organizations that are the highest paying employers of Harris MPP graduates? How do we prepare for such recruitment?

* I have no idea about the job market scenario. All I can say is there are no formal structures at Harris to support student placements. All those who got the jobs, more or less got them through their own efforts.

7. For research assistantships and TAships, how many students are actually able to do these? How competitive is it to work with the professors and projects we find interesting?

* UChicago has some of the best professors in the game. But the opportunities of working with them are limited. You’ll have to start reaching out to people as soon as you land here. If you are good at R, Python and Econometrics you’ll have a good shot at working with professors. In my opinion, part time job during the quarter is a bad idea, unless you are academically well-prepared, or academics is not your priority. Getting jobs with professors or labs is very competitive, you’ll have to be very good to get those jobs. But it’s not impossible.