

# MIA Fundamentals 2020: Chances and Challenges in a Digitalizing World

by Martina Rothenberger and Nolwenn Rumeur



The MIA Fundamentals 2020, while taking place on campus, but with some limitations, were very special - due to the current pandemic but also as a highlight for new students starting the reformed MIA programme.

As two students who embody the international and multicultural dimension of the Master's in International Affairs and Governance at the University of St.Gallen, we would like to report on the highlights of this introductory week. Nolwenn is from France and enrolled in the double degree programme between MIA and Sciences Po's Master's Degree in Finance and Strategy. She spent a year studying at the London School of Economics and, after a gap year realizing various internships, set foot in Switzerland for the first time this year. Martina, in contrast, is from St.Gallen itself, and is also a dual degree student between MIA and the Paris School of International Affairs. She spent her first year of study in Paris, and has now come back to her native town to start her second year at HSG. Both of us have different backgrounds but were happy to meet each other personally during this week and get in touch with other students from our programme.

It is nowadays impossible to talk about an event without mentioning the sanitary conditions and the programme's modifications that took place due to the Covid19 pandemic. Even though some social events had to be cancelled, such as the BBQ or the company visit, it was an occasion for everyone to meet old and new friends, after a long time of not having had real contact with university life.

The MIA Fundamentals 2020 focused on the “Chances and Challenges in a Digitalizing World”. In line with this theme, we started with a thought-provoking keynote speech, delivered online, by **Ria Thomas**, Managing Director at [Polynesia Advisory](#). Based on her extensive experience advising global firms before, during and after a cyber crisis, Ria gave us fascinating insights into cyber corporate governance and resilience strategies. Following this keynote, **Dr. Benedikt Wechsler**, MIA alumnus and currently Consul General of Switzerland in San Francisco, warmly welcomed us in the MIA programme through a video message. He highlighted the important nexus between development, sustainability and big data. His note then led to a panel discussion, moderated by **Prof. Tina Freyburg**, with **Ria Thomas**, **Dr. Dominik Isler** and **Guillaume Gabus** (both MIA alumni) as well as **Prof. Anna-Lena Horlemann**. The panel agreed, that in face of cyber attacks, the problem is often human vulnerability rather than a technical issue, calling for the need to collaborate in the fight against cybercrime.



Over breakfast on the second day, we met with faculty teaching the MIA compulsory courses, followed by the kick-off for the more practical part of this integration week. Students were either assigned to work on a case study with Ria Thomas or to work on a research question, both still on the subject of cyber-security and digitalization. After



an intensive day of teamwork, the results were presented on Wednesday and we received detailed feedback by our keynote speaker and faculty respectively. It was a great opportunity to reconnect with academic work after the break devoted to holidays or internships for most of us. On Thursday, we worked on defining our individual “USP” together with HSG’s Career Service Center, an enriching workshop connecting the academic world with our professional future.

To conclude, we were both happy that we were able to participate in the MIA Fundamentals – with restrictions, but in person - in order to get to know our peers and start this special academic year at HSG.