

Internship Report World Affairs Council of Atlanta

This summer I had the opportunity to complete an internship as a research assistant at the World Affairs Council of Atlanta, a nonprofit organization under the wing of Georgia State University through the J. Mack Robinson School of Business. The World Affairs Council of Atlanta is a member of the World Affairs Councils of America (WACA) based in Washington, D.C., which has more than 90 member councils across the country. My work with the research team was supervised by Dr. Christopher Brown, Vice President of Research and Analysis at the World Affairs Council of Atlanta and a political science professor in Georgia State University.

The main purpose of the organization is to create a platform of dialogue between the corporate community, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the general public, concerning global and local issues. The World Affairs Council of Atlanta engages in international affairs through several different programs, including Young Leaders conferences, the Global Strategic Leadership Forum, presentations and discussions with politicians and diplomats, and the Robinson Country Risk Index (RCRI). As an intern, I was part of the RCRI research team and my main responsibilities included data analysis, data pull and development, and data checkup.

The RCRI is a complex tool that measures risk in 126 countries through more than 260 variables. The RCRI index recognizes that risk is not solely determined by economic conditions, but by a combination of various different factors. Thus, the variables are organized into four different sections, called GEOS: Governance, Economics, Operations, and Society. The RCRI is a mash-up index that assigns weights on the different variables and calculates each country's

ranking. The tool allows for direct data manipulation, including comparison of data and countries, reassignment of weights, and design of graphs and diagrams.

The information used in the index is manually pulled from a variety of sources, including the World Bank, CIA Factbook, and the Environmental Performance Index. This information is usually updated several times during the year, which requires the index to be updated as well. The research team is responsible for doing a data check-up and several data pulls throughout the season, and this was my main task as a research intern during this summer. I developed several valuable skills, including advanced Excel skills, data research, and preparing and editing definitions of the new variables. I also learned how to pull and cite data for the first time for the new variables. Even though my academic background is largely based on a theoretical understanding of world politics and political risk, this internship helped me gain extensive exposure to the practical ways in which risk factors can be coded and organized with the use of computer software.

I was also involved in the preparations for the publication of the index: WACA has decided to make the RCRI available to educators and students through an interactive online platform. My task was to find and study different indices available online and then contact the developers and inquire about the data software tools they use. I prepared a memo that presented the indices and rated them in terms of data visualization and data manipulation. In the process I had the chance to talk on the phone with World Bank's DataBank specialists and MIT Legatum Center researchers.

Furthermore, in July, the WACA helped organize a luncheon with the Ambassador of Ireland to the United States and the Ambassador of European Union. They lead a discussion on

the future of the European Union that was mediated by Dr. Cedric Suzman, the executive vice president and director of programming of the council. The luncheon was an invaluable opportunity to have an engaging political science lesson from some of the leading diplomats of our age. I was also very pleased to meet a number of distinguished faculty members of Georgia State University.

Thus, this internship undoubtedly taught me a lot about the risks of international business and the workings of a non-profit organization involved with international relations, the field that I am professionally interested in. However, what I value the most from my experience with the World Affairs Council is team work – I had the opportunity to work with several amazing researchers with various different cultural and educational backgrounds. I also learned to appreciate team management of data projects, as well as the importance of both computer software and person-to-person contact in a non-profit organization.

Moreover, Dr. Brown was a great supervisor and a mentor, and he challenged me to develop my research skills. In addition to data management, he gave me mini projects involving researching and composing short written and PowerPoint presentations using the RCRI index. Working with such a comprehensive conceptual tool has helped me see the importance of software and manual data work in matters of international relations, and I am interested to be able one day to use the index in my own projects involving issues of international security; Sewanee students can also greatly contribute from the index after it is published online. Finally, I am very grateful that I had the chance to intern with the World Affairs of Atlanta and I will certainly use that experience in my future professional endeavors. I am certain that the skills I have gained will help me in both my career and academic aspirations.