My Experience at the World Affairs Council of Atlanta

For approximately nine weeks this summer, I worked as a member of the research team at the World Affairs Council of Atlanta, a non-profit organization, which provides a forum for dialogue that broadens the community's understanding of international issues. The research team currently does the majority of its work on the Robinson Country Intelligence Index (RCII). The RCII is a reconceptualization of data that ranks 195 countries across four main dimensions—Governance, Economics, Society, and Operations. The Index can be used to build a variety of interactive graphs, maps, and charts to investigate how to best make potential business and policy decisions. Working on the RCII provided me with a broad range of useful skills such as proficiency with Microsoft Excel and data analysis. Besides the RCII, the World Affairs Council of Atlanta holds events such as public forums on a variety of international issues. I was able to participate in the Summit for Global Health, Health in Latin America and the Caribbean. I was privileged to attend the event and to listen to highly qualified people discuss issues revolving around health in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Robinson Country Intelligence Index reconceptualizes data from a variety of sources, including the CIA’s World Factbook and the World Bank’s World Governance Indicators, to name a few. As an intern on the research team, one of my tasks involved extensive data pulling and rechecks, to be certain of the accuracy of
the data in the Index. This provided me with a new breadth of Microsoft Excel skills and it taught me to always work carefully and diligently to provide high quality work.

As Dr. Chris Brown, founder of the RCII, often says, “The numbers start the conversation.” I have learned to analyze data in numbers as a starting point to further research a topic and discover more about it. Through analyzing the data in the RCII, I also have a better understanding of current events internationally. The research team worked together this summer to build the About Page for the Index. This was exciting to work on because I gained marketing skills through researching the strongest ways to sell the tool. Along with the About Page, I researched how other websites that sell data similarly to the RCII set up their pricing and subscription services. This was interesting to me because along with studying political science and international relations, I am an Economics major.

I was also able to practice leadership skills while working on the research team. I led a few projects including researching subscription solutions for the Robinson Country Intelligence Index and comparing other data tools to the RCII. While leading these projects, I also gained knowledge about how to effectively present ideas and undertakings to others. I was able to collaborate with my teammates for projects. I am grateful for the group project opportunities because they gave me new insights into leadership skills and how I can best use my skills to work effectively in teams.
It was a joy to work on the research team, as there truly was camaraderie among us. I worked with other college students and recent graduates who were mostly political science majors, as well as Ph.D. students. Being around others who share a passion for public policy and learning gave me a larger interest in politics and has opened my eyes to other career options that I had not previously considered, such as the foreign service or becoming a professor one day. Everyone at the Council has a passion for travel and it was exciting to listen to stories and future travel plans. I now encompass a stronger passion for international relations and plan to work with other nonprofit organizations in the future, because of my incredible experience at the World Affairs Council of Atlanta.

Although it was challenging at times to figure out problems when pulling data for the Index, it was so satisfying to complete tasks and cross them off the extensive to-do list we had for the summer. I learned many Excel tricks that I was unaware of before working with the research team. When I would figure out an easier, more efficient way of pulling and reading data, it was very rewarding. I learned the importance of focus and extensive editing while interning this summer. Both by watching others complete projects and by working on them myself, I was reminded that even when a project seems complete, it could still be improved and changed tremendously. This brings me peace of mind for when I am working on projects in the future and feel “stuck” or like I have writer’s block. With the help of my peers, I can see new outlooks on how to solve problems. This is one of the major
insights I have gained from working with the research team and will take with me to Sewanee and beyond.

Charlotte Turner along with fellow interns, Ross Leach and Christy Tarallo at the 2015 Atlanta Summit for Global Health, *Health in Latin America and the Caribbean.*