This summer I did a research assistantship with Sewanee economics Professor Aaron Elrod. I was assisting him with his and Sewanee economics Professor Theyson’s paper, “The Effect of the Clean Water Act on U.S. Outbound Foreign Direct Investment.” Since I was his research assistant, I technically interned with the University. My responsibilities were to expand and refine the existing research. Last summer, I did a research internship with Sewanee economics Professor St. Pierre. I worked as his research assistant here on Sewanee’s campus doing collaborative research work. This past summer’s internship with Professor Elrod was a much different experience. This internship was done through long-distance collaborative work. This required a different type of thinking on my part. Instead of being able to meet in person, we exchanged many emails. This required me to have more discipline than if I was working with him in person. I had to focus and plan ahead to keep myself on track for meeting my research goals. This summer I was adding to existing research, as Professors Elrod and Theyson have a working paper. Last summer I was creating new project from scratch, which is very different from adding to an existing project.

One of the tasks of my research internship was to expand on the literature review section of the paper by finding published papers that were relevant for Elrod’s and Theyson’s research paper. They already had a literature review section, so I was searching for articles they had overlooked or that had been published recently. This required me to look through several different sources for articles. I started by looking at the referenced authors and papers of the articles Theyson and Elrod had mentioned in
their literature review section. If I saw a reference with a title that may relate to the
research, then I would look it up using either NBER’s (National Bureau of Economic
Research) online catalog or through one of the economics databases listed on the
Sewanee library’s website. After I exhausted the referenced paper possibilities, I moved
on to searching the economic databases and NBER’s online catalog using key words
and phrases that related to the research. I would then go through and read any articles
that had titles or descriptions that might hold relevance to the research. When I found
an article that may be relevant, I would a link to it in a word document that I would send
to Professor Elrod every week. This was the most time-consuming task I had this
summer, because I had to be very thorough with my searching. I was able to find
several articles that will probably be included in the next edit of the literature review
section of the research paper.

Another task I had this summer was to try to find missing data points. Professors
Elrod and Theyson had already found the majority of data they needed for their
research. They were missing only a few data points that would increase the robustness
of their results. Most of the data I was trying to locate was shipment data for three
mining-related industries. They wanted domestic (U.S.) import and export shipment
data. I searched through various United States’ bureaus attempting to locate this data.
I emailed an economist of the U.S. geological survey trying to get my hands on some of
this data. This entire summer I tried every link and source I could think of trying to find
some of this raw data. I was unable to find exactly what Professor Elrod was looking
for, but I was able to find some type of shipment data for two of the industries. It is not
exactly the shipping data he and Professor Theyson need, but it could be useful for
constructing more economic variables. For the rest of the data, I did research into using the Freedom of Information Act to send a request for the data they needed. As of right now, Professors Elrod and Theyson are probably going to submit a request to get the rest of the data.

I gained valuable experience and knowledge about myself from this research internship this summer. I learned how to do research more effectively. Searching through hundreds of articles helped me refine a method for determining if an article would be useful for my research topic. This is a great life lesson that I will be able to use for future research papers and projects. I learned how to submit a freedom of information act request. This is a skill that will be useful for me if I need to use government data for another research project. The worst part of my internship this summer was me the long-distance aspect. I like being able to talk to a person face to face. I feel like you get more accomplished in a physical meeting than in a couple of emails. However, learning how to communicate long distance is something I should know how to do. It should serve me well as I enter either into graduate school or the business world. Because of the long distance nature of this internship, I had to be self-driven. I had to plan and do work by myself; I did not have someone checking my work daily. I had to focus and plan to stay on top of my research. In this new global economy being able to work long distance with another person and be self-directed is an important skill. I went into this research wanting to be an economist. This summer’s research just confirmed what I already want to do. I need to be able to do good research to be a good economist, and this summer helped me refine my research
abilities.