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Fall 2015
Internship Reflection

This semester, I interned at the World Affairs Council of Atlanta as a Graduate Research Associate supporting the Robinson Country Intelligence Index. My internship was grounded in international affairs. Since the indexing project is a collaborate effort between the Robinson College of Business and the World Affairs Council, it incorporates both political science and international affairs, as well as economics and business operations.

Organization Overview

The mission of the World Affairs Council of Atlanta is “to provide a forum for dialogue, a source of expertise, and an engine for research on the international issues that matter to Atlanta” by facilitating discussion through events and research about global issues targeted at the “corporate community, government leaders and the general public” while supporting Atlanta’s (and the region’s) economic development. The organization is non-partisan and is supported both by grants and its membership.

The Robinson Country Intelligence Index

Working as a research associate required an in-depth understanding of and advanced proficiency with an analytical tool under development at the Council. The Robinson Country Intelligence Index (RCII, formerly the Robinson County Risk Index) is the result of collaborative efforts between the World Affairs Council of Atlanta and Georgia State University’s J. Mack Robinson College of Business. The index is an interactive risk analysis tool that is a repository of ten years of data (to date) from over thirty sources like the World Bank and the IMF that ranks and scores up to 195 countries based on variables in four dimensions: governance, economics, operations, and society; it has eighty-seven sub-dimensions.

The governance dimension uses the World Bank's World Governance Indicators and includes voice and accountability, political stability and the absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.

The economics dimension data is pulled from a variety of sources including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, Peterson Institute for International Economics, and more. Its variables include macro-economic indicators within the categories of broad economy and finance, and market access variables within the categories (or sub-dimensions) of trade profile (trade index and barriers to trade) and investment profile (foreign direct investment flows and stocks).

The operations dimension data comes from sources like the World Economic Forum, the International Telecommunication Union, and OANDA. The dimension's main categories are business transactions, logistics, and operational landscape (the former two are expandable). The business transactions category has additional subcategories within it that contain variable pertaining to starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting investor, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, and resolving insolvency. The logistics category contains the following variables: customs logistics, logistics infrastructure, international shipments logistics, logistics competence, tracking and tracing logistics, and logistics timeliness.

The society dimension examines data from the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and Yale and Columbia Universities. Its main categories are health, education, demographic dynamic, gender gap, middle class propensity, and environmental sustainability, as well as subcategories within each of those. The health sub-dimension includes variables related to major health indicators and diseases. The education sub-dimension's variables include basic education indicators and variables related to higher

education and training. The demographic dynamic is home to statistics like population and birth rate, whereas the gender gap sub-dimension includes multiple types of markers for female/male economic participation and opportunity, female/male education attainment, etc. The middle class propensity sub-dimension relies heavily on the GINI Index and also contains consumption and poverty indicators. Finally, the environmental sustainability sub-dimension contains additional subcategories and variables about air, water, and land quality.

New Skills/Knowledge

I both learned and enhanced various skills during my internship at the Council. The skill that I most developed was data analysis and manipulation. I most used this skill while pulling data for the index and reformatting the source data to fit the structure of the index. I put my analytical skills to use when constructing a country profile based on index variables that incorporated recent events and trends of particular relevance to the country (eg. Ireland and business tax regulations). Aside from data-related work, I bolstered writing skills by writing marketing materials to support Council events.

In addition to the skills and knowledge I learned through my day-to-day duties at the World Affairs Council, I also expanded my knowledge of international affairs through attending council-sponsored events. Two events I attended were particularly interesting, Challenges Facing Europe, which featured a panel of German foreign ministers, and a terrorism briefing which was organized immediately following the November 13th attacks in Paris.

Critical Experience

The most important experience I had during my internship was assisting with the evaluation of a new set of variables about gender-based physical security. The variables included statistics like one-child restrictions, prevalence of early marriage, and gender-based violence.

The process to introduce these variables was very in-depth and involved assessing each data source for validity and bias as well, choosing variables that would be suitable to the index (met timeline and country-number needs), and defining the variables so that both made sense to index users and also accurately represented their statistics. One hang-up that the team had during this process was how to define a variable known at its data source as “missing women.” The variable described the discrepancy between male and female birth rates due to gender preference and policies (eg. China’s one child policy). The variable name was written to bring attention to the fact that some societies are in fact “missing women” due to these choices; however, since the proposed sub-dimension also dealt with human trafficking (especially trafficking of women and girls) the team felt would be unclear to index users if the term “missing women” referred to women never born into society or women who were disappeared from society. To-date, the director is considering feedback, and will make a decision before the inclusion of the new sub-dimension.

This topic was particularly important to me as I feel strongly about women’s issues, especially in developing countries where gender-based discrimination and violence are most systemic and the governmental systems offer no or severely limited legal recourse. Furthermore, I feel that human rights issues should be seriously considered by countries or governments looking to do business in or with countries who commit human rights abuses. Hopefully, the inclusion of gender-security in a tool with which type businesses and governments consult to make these decisions could prompt more careful consideration of such issues.

Career Implications and Personal Aspirations

Prior to beginning my internship at the World Affairs Council, I had begun to entertain the idea of pursuing a career in political risk analysis. I knew that risk analysis in a business environment usually refers to the financial decision making process by assessing economic trends and predicting the success

of future projects; however, within the operational aspect of financial risk exists political risk. Political risk (some parts of which are referred to as 'country risk') includes assessing macro and micro risks related to governance and the economy.

Working on the RCII project has enabled me to see the processes through which risk analysis is conducted. Although the internship was more data-heavy than I typically prefer as I enjoy analytical writing and there was little need for individual interpretations of the information, it was very helpful to me to become more adept at data manipulation and to see the process from beginning to end.

Working on the RCII project has certainly given me more insight into the field of risk analysis and I feel confident in my initial impressions of the field and that I would enjoy that type of work. In my upcoming job search I will of course seek out risk analysis opportunities although I would prefer to work in a position where I could put my analytical writing skills to use.

Nunn School Learning Outcomes

Scientific analysis of international affairs:

One of the most positive aspects of my internship was that I gained a better awareness of how to manipulate data and use indices to understand and interpret international affairs. Data source evaluation for the index included reviewing the source methodology which provided great insight into empirical methods for social science analysis.

Communication skills:

During my internship, I most developed my communication skills when working in conjunction with the programming team to prepare marketing materials for Council events. I prepared materials for

upcoming events by researching the content of the event and using the index to visualize relevant data pertaining to recent news articles about the contents of the event in order to provide insight about the event topic to potential attendees. We found that posting these marketing materials on the Council's social media sites helped to engage event attendees and Council members.

Cultural and ethical awareness:

The research team that I was a part of at the Council was made of a group of diverse individuals from multiple countries. Cultural awareness was especially important to my team when completing an assessment involving the home country of one of our team members, but that scored poorly on the index (eg. Colombia). Additionally, our international team members were especially helpful in providing contextualization for the data regarding their home countries. It was incredibly helpful to have first-hand experience with and knowledge of places that we studied using the index.

Ethically speaking, I know that the RCII's board of directors hope to expand the Index's use beyond that of the World Affairs Council. Because of that, I know that there are ethical decisions to be made when considering possible expansion to other academic institutions or even commercial expansion in the distant future.

Teamwork skills:

Oftentimes, our research team's efficiency suffered due to poor task management and redundancy. In turn, I instituted the online task management tool Trello amongst the interns to coordinate both our individual and shared projects. My fellow interns were very pleased that I introduced the tool to our team because it allowed us to reduce redundancy and keep up momentum when completing our tasks and shared projects. We used Trello especially frequently when preparing marketing materials for the Council's events.

Problem-solving skills:

During the course of my internship, I was able employ problem-solving skills on multiple occasions when working around technological difficulties that we encountered with the index. Because the index is being constantly built out, oftentimes we had to consult with the computer programming employees and interns to understand and fix problems. Additionally, we beta-tested

Professional development:

The portion of my internship was most helpful to my professional development was my informational interview with Ambassador Shapiro (please see interview write-up for details). Because I worked on the research team rather than the programming, I had relatively less opportunities for professional development exercises like networking as my work was more data-driven than communication-driven.

Additional information:

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