

INTRO

Stephanie Jackson: Now That's INTAresting. This podcast is about the Georgia Tech Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, its graduates, their careers, and how the Nunn School has helped to shape their future. Take a listen.

SJ: Welcome to Now That's INTAresting. My name is Stephanie Jackson, with the Nunn School.

Sydney Piwonka: And I'm Sydney Piwonka.

SJ: And today we would like to welcome our guest, Suraj Sehgal, an alum of the Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering—and that's ISYE—here at Georgia Tech, who graduated with a Minor in International Affairs in addition to a Certificate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

SP: While at Georgia Tech, Suraj studied abroad as a Summer Scholar in the European Union Program, acted as a Visiting Research Assistant at the United Nations University, and worked with Epic Intentions, an on-campus student organization focused on consulting, in addition to many more activities. Following graduating, he worked as an intern for Global Health Corps (GHC) and now works as a Human Capital Analyst in the Government and Public Sector at Deloitte.

SJ: So Suraj, does that capture your experience kind of in a nutshell?

Suraj Sehgal: I think so.

SJ: Okay, great. Great. So, my first question for you is when you were an undergraduate student, what led you to wanting to pursue a Minor in International Affairs?

SS: Yeah, I think, for me, I took an International Studies class in high school. And that was the first time that I was really opened to what was going on around the world, different current events, and different issues, and that really led me to, to have a vision for wanting to work in International Development and learn more about that space. So, when I came into Georgia Tech, I kind of already knew that I was going to be pursuing International Affairs in some way. And I immediately, I remember even before I had accepted Georgia Tech, one of the things that really pulled me towards it was a lot of these study abroad opportunities and specifically the European Union study abroad, which I ended up going to.

SP: Awesome. Yeah. And so, how do you think that an international perspective has affected your current career path?

SS: Yeah, I think, so, what comes to my mind in particular was the European Union study abroad program. When I, that was a faculty-led program that was over the summer—about 10 weeks—where we learned about the European Union, took four International Affairs classes, related to the European Union and U.S.-EU and U.S.-NATO relations, and we had a chance to go and visit four different European Union cities and be able to interview officials and think tanks and members of the European Parliament. I think that whole experience combined like, one-by-one, it just opened me up to thinking about organizations and issues that I had never even known existed. You know, I, in my mind when I was sitting in the U.S., when I thought about Global Development, I thought about the UN, and the European Union. But, when, as we were on this trip, like we were talking to so many like members of think tanks, members of intragovernmental organizations, nonprofits that were doing like policy work, and that sort

of thing and I, that really broadened my perspective to realize that there's so many ways to have an international impact. I think it really opened my eyes to seeing that it's not just the big names that we think of that have, that can have an international impact, but it's also these smaller organizations that are, that might be doing policy work or working for think tanks or consulting for these organizations.

SJ: So, for students that might be considering studying abroad or even maybe thinking about attending the European Union study abroad program what kind of advice would you give them?

SS: Sure. I think the biggest piece of advice would really be to, to go in and be willing to speak up and to ask questions. I think the, it was, looking back, I'm just amazed as what an opportunity it was because where else will you have a chance to learn something in like, in the classroom and then suddenly, the next day, be able to interview the person who maybe wrote that article or interview the person who's actually working for that country that you just read about. And so, I, the biggest opportunity that I had, and that these study abroad programs offer, is that sort of immersive experience, especially the ones that are offered by the International Affairs School. So, one incident that stands out to me in particular is when we were studying European, like France's military policy and specifically their contributions to NATO. It was really interesting because we had a really diverse classroom with students from all over the world and students from all different disciplines, and yet our conversation, I think, was still pretty U.S.-centric. And in a lot of our readings and discussions, we basically talked a lot about how the U.S. was the primary contributor in terms of funds and military equipment to NATO. And then, we were actually in Paris, and so we had a chance to go talk to members of a think tank, a French Think Tank, that like specialized in, you know, the, France's military involvement and different foreign affairs issues. And it was incredible because one of the questions that one of the students asked, I remember, still remember this. He just kind of, he asked a question where it was kind of assuming like, why doesn't France like pick up the slack—which was very presumptive like it just was laden with this assumption that like yeah France, France is not really doing anything for NATO. And it was so interesting to view the think tank members like responses and the way that they snapped back. And they were like, well actually, and they started listing out all of these different contributions, and they're like, like this or this contribution and this military equipment like this is all done, because of French's military involvement. And I think that was a very real moment that I, that really embodied like what I wanted out of the experience and what I never really, I mean I think I never really anticipated how amazing that would be of really testing and putting to test the things that we're learning in the classroom in real life by having that opportunity to like go to those museums and those sites and interview those people that know it firsthand.

SJ: Oh, wow, that's, that's an interesting scenario that you paint there. But it's, it's great to have that up front and up close, you know, experience with the organization. And I'm, I'm glad that that study abroad opportunity provided you that.

SP: And so, I guess following off of that. How, particularly, either in terms of what you just talked about or in other ways did the European Union study abroad program change your perspective on what you wanted to pursue, more so in terms of your career, your future career path?

SS: So, I always knew, especially after high school, that I want to be involved in some kind of international space, whether it was nonprofit work or just International Development work. The European Union study abroad program, in particular, just honestly opened my eyes to the variety of that work, and the different dimensions that that work could take in. So for example, you know,

understanding that there's, even within the United Nations, there's so many different aspects and places that require different expertise and different skill sets. And then even with all the cities that we went to the organizations that we met or learned about, I realized like there's so, just so many different facets to what international work could entail. You could be working on trade, economics, public health, data. So, I majored in Industrial Engineering. And with Industrial Engineering, I really was thinking, how can I contribute and where can I best fit in. And so, I found out, it was just really interesting to notice that, oh, like even within a policy think tank space, there's a need for that skill set of people who are able to take in data sets and people who are able to have those, you know, come up with policy decisions or at least inform policy decisions by using their technical skills to evaluate a data set, and evaluate things that are coming in.

SP: Yeah, definitely. And so, going off of your Industrial Engineering Major, did you feel like you were coming into maybe working at these, or attending these think tanks, and talking to these people, or even throughout some of your internships, that you had a different perspective going in than maybe someone else who was an International Affairs Major, who was a different major? Do you feel like Industrial Engineering gave you a different perspective on those, those opportunities?

SS: Definitely. I personally felt like Industrial Engineering, that major and felt like, it was something that brought me like a hard skill or like a skill set that was maybe more technical that I could then think about how it could be applied in a more humanitarian, humanitarian sort of setting. And so, I was always, Industrial Engineering has really given me that, I think it's been very focused on process improvement and optimization. And so, it's the mindset, being able to come into a conversation, even if I'm not well-versed in the subject matter, at least always thinking about, you know, those basic principles and seeing how they can be applied in that skill set, or in that environment. One example that comes to my mind in particular was, I remember attending a health and humanitarian logistics conference that Georgia Tech hosted I think it was in my junior year, and I was really amazed to see people that were really implementing that in real life, like they were taking Coca-Cola's Industrial Engineering and logistics knowledge about supply chain and then implementing that and using that to work with the Red Cross to make sure that vaccines were getting into the remote villages that Coke is usually found in, you know, Coca-Cola.

SP: Yeah.

SS: And so, it's I think that's a really interesting thing to be exposed to and to bring with me to different spaces—that mindset of, wow like, even though I may not be a subject-matter expert in this particular topic, I have skills that can really translate and be useful to this space.

SP: Yeah. And so then, how does, from I guess the flip side of that, how does International Affairs weave into your Industrial Engineering Major?

SS: In my experience, I've found that a lot of the skills that I've learned from International Affairs, a lot of it has to do with dealing with ambiguity. So, and that, that's part of the reason why I really enjoyed taking the International Affairs Minor is that, while I was taking science classes, where you know when I'm taking Physics WebAssign like I know that there's only one right answer or the answer has to be within a certain range, and that, I know the computer can check that and say 'yep, this is correct' or 'this is incorrect'. But when I'm walking into a discussion class like Global Citizen—I think I took a class on Global Citizenship. You know, when we read a book, and are discussing that book or discussing a paper.

There is no right answer, right it's all about the perspective that you bring, the perspectives that you take into account and the way that you negotiate that and use examples to be able to back up why you have a certain perspective that you do. And I think that is a really important skill that I, has been particularly useful in the field that I'm currently in—human capital consulting. One of the things that International Affairs, I think it's really played really well into my current role as a Human Capital Analyst, particularly, you know, helping me keep in mind the fact that there's often no right answer and no perfect solution because you have to negotiate people's, different people's perspectives and be able to come up with something that works the best for everyone's sort of expectations and, and outcome that they're driving for. And I think it's really, it's really important to keep in mind, especially with Industrial Engineering that, you know, you might have a technical solution where you've put a bunch of factors into a model and you've come out with this output that says, you know, this is the most optimum system that you need to implement. But, at the end, it requires people to implement that, so if you're not taking into account the people in the system, you can't ensure that it's actually going to work properly. So, I think international affairs has really given me that people and policy perspective, recognizing that it's not always about having the perfect technical solution, but also thinking about that technical solution in the context of culture, and policy, and the people on the ground.

SJ: Okay, so that's understandable. So since you've brought up some of your internships, I want to ask you a couple questions about those experiences and how they may have further shaped your career path

SS: For sure.

SJ: So, you were a Visiting Research Assistant with the United Nations University?

SS: I was really blessed to come across the opportunity. I actually found out about the United Nations University through the International Affairs Career Blog, so I'm very thankful for that. I think, I think what I knew, because I was majoring in Industrial Engineering, but had more international and like policy-oriented career goals, I knew that, you know, CareerBuzz was not always going to have the perfect opportunity for someone like me. And so, I really, I tried to search out and seek out those opportunities, and I think that the International Affairs Career Blog was like one space where every week I would just like refresh the website to see, you know, what else can I apply for. And I was writing almost like cover letters and recreating my resume two or three times every week during that period, really trying to get that perfect internship. With the United Nations University, what I found out was, so United Nations University is based in Tokyo and it's a research arm of the United Nations. And they have different institutes across the world that are focusing on different research questions. And the one that I was a Visiting Research Assistant at was in Macau, China—Macau which is a special province within China. And there, it was the Institute on Computing and Society, so it was really focusing on this field, known as ICTD, Information Communication Technology for Development. And it really felt like this perfect blend of taking my technical background in Industrial Engineering and then that interest in technology and really marrying that with International Development, seeing how can this be implemented on the ground with people that are, you know, either doing any kind of like International Development work. Specifically, the lab that was working in, was on UN Peacekeeping Troops. So, it was really looking it was looking at all these focus groups that have recently with members of the UN Peacekeeping Mission and seeing, you know, doing a qualitative analysis of, of those interviews and

those focus groups, to be able to pull out what are the themes, what are their needs that they have, and how can technology maybe assist, or be changed, in helping them implement their goals.

SP: Yeah, that sounds like such an awesome experience that you were able to have. So, now that I guess we're moving into some of the more global issues and Global Development that you have worked in, is that either being the United Nations University, your experience there, or some of the other work that you have done, is that what helped you to decide to apply for the Global Health Corps internship?

SS: Yes. I think especially after the study abroad program, and then the United Nations University experience, I really, the study abroad program opened my eyes to wow, there's so many more opportunities across the world that you have to be able to just keep your mind open to and keep applying for. United Nations University was very research oriented, and I think that opened my eyes to being more research oriented. And I kind of realized that maybe that wasn't the perfect space for my interests. And so, I really started, I actually took a class in Healthcare Management, which, you know, had people from all different majors and had a lot of different guest speakers that, that tried to expose us to different elements of public health, of health in general. So, whether it's public health and hearing from people from Emory's Public Health School, or like FinTech and people that are having startups and investing in how, that intersection between healthcare and finance or, you know, hearing straight from doctors who are on the ground working in the ER. So, I think that class in particular, you know, I thought, it seemed really interesting and I knew the professor. And I took a chance on it. And I realized like health was a really interesting space that requires a whole lot of different perspectives, like, not, not just, not just that medical knowledge, which is really important, but also people who have skills in, you know, thinking strategically and thinking business mindedly and thinking about how to manage budgets properly and dealing with data in order to make sure that like, our interventions are actually working and, and that sort of thing. So, I think, in combination, that sort of really opened my eyes to wanting to seek out an experience that was more public health oriented, and that's how I came across Global Health Corps. With Global Health Corps in particular, it was actually, it was really interesting because it was essentially like a global version of a student organization that I was president of at the time. So, I was president of a local student organization—Epic Intentions—which does consulting projects on a semesterly basis with various nonprofits in the Atlanta area. And so, what we were doing—I was on the Executive Board—and what we would do is reach out to local nonprofits, and then reach out to students who are interested in working in those nonprofits or working on those specific projects, and then helping to create that perfect student team to meet the needs of nonprofit. Global Health Corps was like that on steroids, like they were working with five, like in five different countries with like in country staff in each of those countries, looking at local, like, nonprofits doing global health work on the ground. And then they have a Co-Fellow model where they would have at least two positions that they would negotiate with each of those nonprofits of like, oh, so you need like an IT person here, or you need like a community development person here, and then they would provide a year-long fellowship for young professionals who are interested in either, you know, maybe they were coming in from an MPH—a Master's in Public Health—and wanted to get, you know, real world experience, or they were somebody that was a professional looking to dive into the space of health. And so, they really were trying to target young people and bring in like new, young leadership into the space of public health, and then pairing them with nonprofits that were like a good fit for them. And so, it was really interesting because I had an opportunity to work more on their outreach side and like their communications and recruitment side

of things. And so, I was really helping them to think strategically on like how to get the word out and how to reach out to specific positions that are sometimes harder to recruit for.

SJ: Right. Because it does, it takes, you know, I, normally I say it takes all kinds, but it does. It takes all kinds of skills and functions to make the organization run or operate efficiently. So, you know, you're right, having all sets of skills from analytics to global public health all of those things are important, for sure. Indeed, it helps shape you experience, I guess, now in consulting.

SP: And, so going on to your current career. So currently, you're working as a Human Capital Analyst in the Government and Public Sector at Deloitte, so tell us exactly about what that entails.

SS: Sure. I'm still learning, so I joined in August, but I'm basically working in the Government and Public Sector, which essentially the way Deloitte is set up is that within their, within Deloitte Consulting, they have the commercial side of things which means that they're focusing on serving commercial clients and then they have Government and Public Sector which involves national, local agencies as well as nonprofits and educational institutions. So, my client base is, you know, Government and Public Sector, and then, within the consulting space where I kind of provide value is within Human Capital. So, what is Human Capital Consulting? I think the best way I like to describe it is like it's really thinking about humans within a workplace and everything from how do you recruit and, and find the talent that you're looking for, as well as once you have that talent, how do you onboard them, train them, how do you provide them like upskilling—which means like providing them trainings to provide new skills for them and if they need, you know, more training to be up to speed, or all the way from that and also how do retain them, and that sort of thing and salary and benefits. And so, it's, it really covers that whole spectrum. In my experience in particular, I've, you know, recently started so I'm still in my first year, and I've had the opportunity to work on a few projects, really looking at, so far what I've been doing has been workforce assessments, so far. And, and what that means is, it requires a lot of, again, putting on that kind of qualitative assessment mindset, which I've kind of learned through these various internship and International Affairs class experiences. We enter in—in the two assessments that I've done—we entered into a branch about 30 to 40 people. We work with the leadership and do workshops with them to see what is their vision, and where do they see the future of their industry kind of going in the next 5 to 10 years, and what are their top concerns and priorities. And then, you know, with that, taking that lens, coming up with an interview guide, and then interviewing each of the full-time employees within that branch to see what are their current skills and challenges, what are their thoughts on the future of the industry that their in, that landscape, and what they anticipate being the future needs. And then being able to put all of that together and looking at industry practices and best practices and outputting like a set of recommendations that say, based off of what your goals are and what the industry that like what people are doing and what's been working well, here's what we recommend in terms of dealing with, with current problems that you might be facing and transitioning your staff to be able to, really set yourself up for success 5 to 10 years down the line, whether it involves, you know, providing more data training and to increase the data fluency of your staff or looking at the people that you're hiring and being a little bit more strategic in hiring people that might allow you to create more of like a training pipeline rather than just trying to find the perfect expert that fits the exact thing that you're looking for.

SJ: So, thinking about, you know, current students by majoring in ISYE or any other major on campus, what advice would you have for them to consider opportunities such as this, either in consulting or integrating international perspectives into their majors?

SS: The biggest thing for me, and the biggest lesson that I learned in my four and a half years at Georgia Tech in, with regards to my, my major and my minor and what I was choosing to study, is that at the end of the day, like your major and your minor can really open a lot of doors for you, but it's your choice and what you choose to pursue on a daily basis, that can really shape the opportunities that come your way. So, for me, even though my major was in Industrial Engineering and CareerBuzz a lot of the options were very traditional supply chain, and industrial oriented, industrial, Industrial Engineering oriented jobs, like for me, I knew because I wanted to go into the international space, I was always looking for different avenues and opportunities that were more oriented towards that mindset and that vision. And so, I applied to a lot of, I did a lot of cold emailing, a lot of LinkedIn finding to try to find that job or that policy job or that global health job that could really match what I was looking for. And in general, what I would say is, in, for me, like the benefit of the International Affairs Minor was: one, being able to do that that study abroad experience and you don't even need to have a minor in order to study abroad and have that kind of immersive experience, and two, it really allowed me just, all I did was like put that label on myself, you know, I, that minor isn't going to show up on my diploma and people aren't really fact-checking to make sure that like I, I have that minor, but I think being able to speak to in interviews and highlight that on my resume that like hey, I've taken, I've taken this minor. I've taken the classes. I've really immersed myself with the study abroad program and with these internship opportunities, like this is a field that I really care about. I think what you, your actions really speak louder. And so, being able to show and speak to those experiences, was much more important than to be able to tell them, you know, I took these three classes. Right. And so, I think, that's a really important perspective to keep in mind is that even if you're not able, you know, I was lucky and blessed to be able to have enough credits that I was able to add in a minor to the four and a half years that I, it took me to finish my major. But for some people who don't have that opportunity, like, go ahead and take one or two classes that you're really interested in and that you're able to take from International Affairs or Public Policy or whatever and, and really feel that passion, because that's the thing that's the thing that speaks in the interview, not the fact that like, you know, yes I studied this. But it's, what speaks louder is being able to say, you know, this class that I took really got me to think about this, this, and this in a very creative and different way, and that's what I bring to the table—is different perspectives and an open mind.

SP: Yeah, definitely. I think that that's especially important, is showing that you have had all that experience, which is so awesome that you have been able to have such an amazing time with both all the internships that you've had as well as your current career path and integrating those.

SJ: Well, that has been great to hear that this has been so illuminating and effective for your particular career path. Are there any last words of advice you want to give students, either, like I said, may be thinking about studying abroad or about research or thinking about a minor or certificate or maybe an internship that you think might be able to assist them in pursuing those opportunities?

SS: I think the biggest thing that really helped me anything that I learned was—or one of the things that really helped me—was just staying motivated and realizing that there are so many opportunities out there, but a lot of times, it's just a matter of being prepared at the right time and in the right moment to allow, you know, luck is a combination of chance, as well as preparation. And so, I think it's really important to, to understand, whatever opportunity that you're seeking to make sure that you're prepared on your side. So, for example, if you're interested in doing research abroad or a study abroad program that's really unique or different, keep in mind that you might have to work a lot harder in terms of having different resumes and having different cover letter templates. Work with the Career

Department; work with your mentors to make sure that you have the necessary preparation. That, for me, it took like almost 50, for every 50 cover letters and resumes that I sent out, cold emails, LinkedIn, Google searches, I got one interview. Right. And it definitely felt discouraging at times, but I think in the long run, I look back and I realize that those two to three weeks of feeling super stress and pushing through and reaching out to my network, getting people to update my cover letter and my resume to edit, make edits, provide me feedback, all of that was really worth it in the end, because it gave me this opportunity that taught me a lot about what I want to do in the future and gave me an experience that I can look back and be proud of.

SJ: Great. Well, thank you for your time, Suraj. It has been a pleasure hearing from you and learning about your experience and your career path. And we certainly here at the Nunn School want to wish you the best in your future. And certainly, we hope that you'll be able to come back and maybe share more as your career path develops in the future.

SS: Of course, thank you so much for having me.

SJ: All right, thank you.

SP: Thank you.

OUTRO

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