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.

Stephanie Jackson: Welcome back to *Now That's INTAresting*. I'm Stephanie Jackson.

Sydney Piwonka: And I'm Sydney Piwonka.

Stephanie Jackson: And starting today, we would like to shift the focus of our podcasts a little bit to speak with our Nunn School students and alumni who are completing or who have completed minors in STEM fields. The Nunn School prides itself on creating the next generation of policymakers to address 21st century challenges. So, we do this by offering programs that are flexible enough to integrate international affairs with science and technology. And some of our students enhance their studies to delve further into interest in computing, analytics, science, engineering, and more. So, for this episode, we would like to welcome Madi Wickett, a graduating International Affairs and Modern Languages major with a Minor in Computing and Intelligence.

Sydney Piwonka: While at the Nunn School, Madi was a Research Intern at the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, a Field Intern for Gretchen Whitmer for Governor, a Student Assistant at the Center for Academic Success. A Press Intern at the Consulate General of France in Atlanta, a Corporate Social Responsibility Intern at Keysight Technologies, and the Nunn School Academic Services Student Assistant. Madi has also studied abroad in both Paris, France and Dakar, Senegal.

Stephanie Jackson: So, welcome, Madi, to the podcast.

Madi Wickett: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Stephanie Jackson: So, when you worked at the Nunn School, you were aware of some of the behind the scenes—if you will—of this endeavor. So, we're very glad to have you here to join us today as a guest, we will cover a range of topics that helped shape your overall undergraduate experience. But to start this conversation, we would like for you to tell us a bit about your pursuit of a Minor in Computing and Intelligence. So, what led you to pursue that minor?

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, originally, when I was a freshman at Georgia Tech, I found that I really loved international affairs. And I knew I wanted to have my career in international affairs. But my favorite classes, were turning out to be my math class in my computer science class, because I had also done a lot of those in high school. So really, I just first got into it, because I missed that analytical side and having those, quote unquote, right answers to a problem. So, I pursued the Minor in Computing in Intelligence, because it was the minor that allowed the most hard coding. So, I really didn't know much about artificial intelligence. When I first looked into the minor, I just knew I had a lot of coding a lot of math. And that was something that I was missing from, you know, my day-to-day studies. But once I got into it, I was really fortunate to find how applicable it was to international affairs. And it's given me a lot of great skills that have helped with internships and future graduate school and things like that.

Stephanie Jackson: So, tell us a little bit more about that intersection between International Affairs and Computing and Intelligence. What does that look like?

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, the later classes at the minor are all in artificial intelligence and machine learning, which gives you skills in Python to analyze large sets of data. And this was also a really good pairing with Dr. David Muchlinski who teaches INTA 2010 in R and also just added a new course in International Affairs and Machine Learning. So, while I was simultaneously learning, you know, the hard behind the scenes of machine learning with all the math and the coding in Python, I was also using those methods in my international affairs classes to analyze large sets of data about democracy and violence and things like that. So, I really saw like, oh, these huge datasets exist in international affairs, and you could really apply all these methods that I'm learning in my computer science class to do some really rigorous quantitative analysis.

Stephanie Jackson: That's exciting to hear. I think because a lot of students aren't aware of that that connection, like you said, between the huge data sets that might be in international affairs or the social sciences and being able to apply those skills to that is important. So, tell us a little bit more about the impact that this minor has had on your academic choices in terms of your classes, or the things that you've pursued to study?

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, it definitely led me to start seeking out classes in international affairs that focused on the intersection of science and technology and policy. So, when I was at Sciences Po in Paris, in particular, I took a lot of classes that were about algorithmic ethics and regulation of science and technology. And that really spurred my interest. And then, when I came back to Tech, I pursued courses like Dr. Muchlinski's, and I really enjoyed Dr. Kumar's classes as well, that also highlighted that intersection at Tech. Because obviously, being situated at Georgia Tech, a lot of our faculty do try to focus some of their research in that area.

Stephanie Jackson: Right. And so, has this had any impact on how you, what you thinking about in terms of your career choices and your career path?

Madi Wickett: Definitely. Right now, I'm also an Intern at the Carter Center. And that's been my first huge practical experience in using data to analyze democratic transition in election security and things like that. And it's definitely taught me that I can take these skills in both directions. So, I can both apply an international perspective to technology companies, and work with their global ethics or compliance teams. But I can also bring my technological skills to international affairs, nonprofits, or government organizations and help sort of with the quantitative side. So, there's sort of two directions I can go, and I'm really interested in both of them.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay. Exciting

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, that's awesome. And then speaking of careers, you've also held a number of different internships while at Georgia Tech. And so, one of these was you were a Field Intern for Gretchen Whitmer for Governor. And so, what did you do in this position as a Field Intern?

Madi Wickett: So, that was pretty standard campaign volunteer work. I was making fundraising calls and doing canvassing. I also worked a lot with, you know, gathering data in a small form and that way, just any sort of general event support or administrative organizational support they needed during the campaign.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah. And so, you mentioned a little bit about collecting, on a small-scale, collecting data for that. So, did you see any overlap between either your INTA coursework or your CS coursework during this internship?

Madi Wickett: There was a lot, it was good to have exposure towards things like CRMs, I don't remember what the long acronym is, but basically, large data management systems, because those are becoming a lot more popular. And also, just familiarity with how the political system worked, gave me a lot of insight and made me really appreciative of the different electoral systems that I learned about later in my classes.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, for sure. And do you have any advice for students who may want to pursue opportunities on political campaigns similar to this one?

Madi Wickett: They're always looking for people. So, just be available and just be enthusiastic. And definitely seek out a candidate you like, not just you know, whoever's local to you. Because you can get really passionate about your candidate and it makes you enjoy the work even when it's sometimes mundane.

Stephanie Jackson: Yeah, there's always a political campaign, always somebody, somebody's always running for office, right. And we get a lot of, you know, internship and volunteer analysis, which we posted on the blog. So, people can always find some opportunity if they're interested in political campaigns. So Madi, you were also a Press Intern for the Consulate General office here in Atlanta for France. Tell us a little bit about your role there at that internship.

Madi Wickett: Sure. So that internship consisted of writing articles in both French and English about news at the consulate doing press reviews about the southeast region and news related to France or just general political news. And also, my biggest project there was probably preparing the brochure and promotional materials for the France-Atlanta event series, which often has a lot of crossover with Georgia Tech. It usually occurs in the fall. And that job, I think, I got to use my technical skills in a in a tangential way. So, in addition to computer science, I also like to familiarize myself with things like Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator and just general computer literacy and how to learn new programs. And that was definitely a huge asset.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay. Did you have that internship after your study abroad in Paris?

Madi Wickett: Yes.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay, so tell me a little bit about how your study abroad experiences may have shaped your interest in diplomacy or wanting to work in diplomacy?

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, definitely going to Senegal the first time was a huge part of that, because our coursework was actually focused on diplomacy, specifically in Africa. So, that was when I first learned about the formal rules of diplomacy and protocol. And then going to Paris, I just really enjoyed being in such an international, in such an international city. And a lot of the students around me were also international, because it's a very popular school for exchange programs with universities all over the world. So, most of my classmates were international students rather than other native Sciences Po students, which was definitely an interesting transition. But I definitely felt like I had a huge asset when I was interviewing for the consulate, and I could say, Oh, I'm in Paris, right now, taking class in French.

Stephanie Jackson: Exactly.

Madi Wickett: Yeah.

Stephanie Jackson: Good. Good to hear that.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah. And so, you also held an internship at Keysight Technologies as a Corporate Social Responsibility Intern. And so, tell us a little bit about your time in this internship.

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, at that internship, the role of Corporate Social Responsibility Intern was, first I was helping them transition from one reporting framework where they could report to their investors about their sustainability initiatives to another one that was becoming more popular. So, that was just a very research-heavy, technical-heavy role. But I also was able to draft briefs for the public company website about their human rights and their sustainability policies, which was great. And I definitely felt like that was one of those cases where I was able to sell my international, international relations background to a technology company. They make electronic measurement equipment. And I was able to say, at least with some competency, I can understand what you do here. And I can, you know, I can speak to your technical experts or your software engineers, and I'll understand what they're saying. But I can also take your company mission, and transition that to a global Corporate Social Responsibility framework.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, that's awesome that you were able to implement some of the stuff that you were learning in international affairs courses throughout this. And similarly, did you see your Computing and Intelligence Minor or the coursework that you did in computer science overlap with this?

Madi Wickett: It definitely gave me enough familiarity to understand what the company did. And it also, you know, kind of throughout my jobs, whenever I've had large data problems, it's been nice to sort of know how to manage that data and be able to, be able to make things more efficient for myself. Like, honestly, one of the biggest skills I've learned from doing a Computing and Intelligence Minor is just getting such a deeper computer literacy. Because with every new computer science class, you have to teach yourself, maybe a new language or a new IDE, or just new things. So, I was really able to market, the fact that, you know, I can, I can be self-taught. You can give me a software or a program that I know nothing about, and then I've had so much experience and just figuring those things out through practice that I'm really comfortable kind of taking on anything.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, that's awesome that it's given you that experience to be able to do that and kind of adapt to those situations, which is awesome. And so, as a kind of wrap up of your internships, what advice overall can you give to students who want to pursue internships during their time at Georgia Tech?

Madi Wickett: Probably the biggest things that have helped, helped me land jobs is just my ability to learn new things and to be self-taught. Because you don't have to have direct experience with every program that they're asking you to know. But if you can say, oh, I've worked with something tangential, or I've taught myself how to use something in a similar situation. That's really been helpful. And also to just follow, you know, follow things that don't, don't seem exactly perfect for you, but, because you can actually learn a lot from them. Like I didn't think or, when I started at Tech, I thought all of my internships would be at the UN or the, this amazing thing. But you know, I got, I actually got amazing professional experiences from you know, these internships I've never heard of or these things that just

sort of came along? So, even if it doesn't seem like the perfect thing you exactly want to focus on, so many careers in international affairs are about transferable skills.

Stephanie Jackson: I think that's a great point, Madi. Thank you for emphasizing that. That is important. You know that having this wide variety of internships, and the exposure, you've had to so many different roles, and so many different functions, you know, and how you've been able to still use your international affairs coursework. You know, what you're learning in your classes, as well, as you know, the coursework and the learning you've had in technology certainly opens lots of doors for students who are studying international affairs. And so, it's important, I'm glad to be able to share this experience with us today. I want to shift a little bit more, and now to talk about some of your on-campus experiences and opportunities. And so, you were a Research Intern with Ivan Allen College. Is that correct?

Madi Wickett: Yep.

Stephanie Jackson: What was that like? What was that, what was your research focus? What was your role in that position?

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, this was part of the Freshman Research Internship Program, which was an initiative by Ivan Allen College, to give incoming freshmen a scholarship to do research under a faculty advisor. So, I worked with Dr. Alberto, Alberto Fuentes. And I did research on Education Development in India, which now seems so, so different from like, where I am now, my research interest as a freshman and now my research interests as a senior. But it was an incredibly valuable experience, because I was able to crash course so much about how research works and how to frame research questions. And also, design your own research project with, as a freshman, with the help of an advisor really gave me a lot of confidence and a lot of connections with professors early on that I really appreciated.

Stephanie Jackson: Do you find that it helped shape your interest in maybe getting your minor at that point?

Madi Wickett: I think so. Definitely. As I moved in further into the project, and I was starting my computer science classes, I was starting to, you know, understand where qualitative data is important and where quantitative data is important. And so that was really, really helpful to have both that experience of mostly focusing on qualitative data and analysis, and then shifting to quantitative, I really valued that.

Stephanie Jackson: Right. You've been exposed to both. And I think that's important that you said, you, this is something that happened your freshman year. A lot of times, we teach our Empirical Methods course for students, we intend for them to take it their freshman year. But I think getting that early start helps students kind of define what it is they might want to do much earlier, as opposed to waiting to take it later on. So, that's good to know.

Madi Wickett: Right.

Stephanie Jackson: And do you have any suggestions or advice for students who might be considering research on campus, either, you know, with a faculty member or trying to pursue any of the other grant opportunities that might be available?

Madi Wickett: Yeah. So, I know a lot of professors are doing really interesting work. And if you just talk to them after class, I know that's a stereotypical advice, but genuinely just telling a professor you're

interested in their work. And the PURA Grant is a great opportunity. But that's definitely an opportunity that you have to approach really, rigorously to apply because it is a, it's become a really competitive award, and work with your advisor to complete an application.

Stephanie Jackson: Great.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah. And then, you also, on campus, held two positions as a Student Assistant here at Georgia Tech. One was for the Center for Academic Success. And then the other was as an Academic Advising Student [Assistant] here at the Nunn School. And so, tell us a little bit about each of these experiences.

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, I really enjoyed both of these experiences, obviously. Center for Academic Success was, again, one of those things to just came in at the right time. I was on campus for a semester and wanted to work. And I learned a lot about academic services, or, yeah, academic support services that I had no idea about before. And that kind of shaped my experience at Georgia Tech, too, because I was always, you know, recommending to my friends after that, I was like, oh, you're struggling in your class. You know that they have tutoring all day at the Center, like you can go get it. And so, it opened my eyes to all the services that were available to students. And I think the same thing happened when I worked at the Nunn School. I was like, oh my gosh, all this stuff is going on. All these you know, internships and jobs are available to students. So, I really like advocated to other international affairs students to take advantage of these opportunities and, you know, read everything, there's so many cool events going on. And it also gave me just really valuable professional experience and professional recommendations for future jobs. And just being able to show to employers even on a base level, you know, I'm a responsible person that will show up to work on time and get my work done on time. And also working for the Nunn School, I got to, again, learn a bunch of new software's and websites that I've never heard of before. So, I could continue that trend to be able to self-teach when necessary.

Stephanie Jackson: Yeah.

Madi Wickett: Little things like Canva and Twilio, I think it's called, and more about WordPress.

Stephanie Jackson: Yeah, I appreciate that, Madi. Yeah, I certainly cosign that you are a quick learner. And I appreciate that. Because I know I threw a lot of things at you. and I was like how did you figure this out? So, thank you. I certainly will always promote that in your recommendation letters, or conversation. And considering all of your varied internships and class experiences, how has having this the minor been specifically beneficial to your IAML degree and your future career path?

Madi Wickett: Sure. So, in my IAML coursework, since I started this program, it's been really nice to be able to do data driven research for my classes, even when the class isn't necessarily data driven. So, for my capstone, I did a machine learning analysis of data which was, which I was just able to do, because of my experience with other courses. And also, being able to explore how international affairs affects technology and technological regulation. And then, in my job search, in my career search, I think even people just knowing your computer literate makes them think you can do anything. It's a little bit how people say that if you speak another language, you're seen as a better communicator. It's just one of those skills that people take on sort of its own meaning to it. And so being able to do you know, quantitative work alongside understanding international affairs, really gives you a well-rounded appearance as a as a student and as a potential employee, which has been really valuable.

Stephanie Jackson: Any other advice you'd have for students who are particularly thinking about a Minor in CS or any other STEM-focused minor?

Madi Wickett: Sure. I would honestly say, you know, don't look for the STEM minor that you think is going to give you the most career opportunities, or the most, or the shiniest resume or whatever you think. Honestly, everyone I've seen that's been successful with their minor has just pursued something they love, and they found ways to incorporate it into their career into the coursework. You know, if you're really love design or architecture, pursue a Minor in Design or Architecture, and then, you can find out how you can leverage that in both international affairs settings and how you can leverage international affairs in a design setting. So, really, just don't try to completely maximize you know, your career and earning potential. Follow what you're actually interested in, and you will find ways to incorporate it into your career.

Stephanie Jackson: One last question, what are your plans after graduation?

Madi Wickett: Sure. I'm, I've applied to grad school and I'm waiting to hear back from the last couple ones. So, I will be attending grad school for the next one to two years, and then seeing where that takes me.

Stephanie Jackson: Sounds good. Sounds good. Well, thank you for your time today, Madi. It's great to hear about all of your experiences during your time here at Georgia Tech, and especially to hear about how the impact that that Minor in Computing and Intelligence is offered for your academics and your career. We hope you're staying safe and healthy, and we're very excited to hear about your future successes. Thank you.

Madi Wickett: Thanks.

Sydney Piwonka: Thank you.

Stephanie Jackson: Thank you.

OUTRO

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