

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 this week we are continuing our series with graduates of the Nunn School who have received STEM or STEM-related minors. And for this episode, we would like to welcome Lucia Lombardo who received a Bachelor of Science in International Affairs, a Minor in Environmental Science—that's the EAS—and a Certificate in European Affairs.

Sydney Piwonka: At Georgia Tech, Lucia was the Active District Officer for the Omega Phi Alpha National Service Sorority, part of the Georgia Tech Salsa Club, a Legislative Aide for the Georgia General Assembly, a Trainee in the European Union Parliament, and participated in the European Union Study Abroad Program. After graduating, Lucia was a Sustainable Infrastructure Fellow for the Cities Team at CDP and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy, MALD, at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. In the MALD program, Lucia's concentrations are on International Environment and Resource Policy and Negotiation and Conflict Resolution.

Stephanie Jackson: So, welcome and thanks for joining us, Lucia.

Lucia Lombardo: Thank you so much, Sydney and Stephanie, for having me on this podcast.

Stephanie Jackson: Wonderful. Wonderful. Much of our conversation today will be about your experiences—those that Sydney just listed—and it seems like some of those are the foundation for these experiences may have come from your earning a Minor in Environmental Science. So, my first question for you is what led you to pursue a Minor in Environmental Science?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, that's a great question. When I first came to Georgia Tech, I was not planning to minor in any sort of STEM field. I was leaning towards minoring in either language or in the Public Policy program. However, I took one of those required labs.

Stephanie Jackson: Yes.

Lucia Lombardo: The one, the one that I ended up taking was the Habitable Planet—EAS 1601. I believe Dr. Reinhard taught that at the time. And after I took that, I realized that I had a passion and an interest in the field broadly. And thankfully, the EAS program was very easy for me to minor in, and so, I was able to take a lot of really interesting courses over the next three years to get that minor.

Stephanie Jackson: So, how do you think your perspective in international affairs changed with that minor?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah. I definitely came into the Nunn School with more of a diplomacy focus for my degree—how, you know, how I wanted my four years to go, where I saw myself after graduation. After picking up the Minor in EAS, I realized all of the areas within international affairs that are climate-

focused, it's environment focused. As you know, climate change is taking over the international conversation in a lot of different fields, including international affairs. And this entire world of employment opportunities, academic opportunities opened up to me that I, I wasn't even aware existed before I decided to minor. Things, you know, just as a quick example, climate policy—which I believe there's a class at Georgia Tech on climate policy—energy policy—I know I took that class from Dr. Brown, as well. Things of this nature that go very well with having that, that scientific background in EAS.

Stephanie Jackson: So, to kind of elaborate on that a little bit, how did you envision the minor shaping your career choices after finishing your undergraduate degree?

Lucia Lombardo: That's a really good question. So, I knew I wanted to go straight to graduate school. And so, picking up the minor did not change that trajectory for me. However, it did dramatically impact what I concentrate on in grad school. So, I think Sydney mentioned this at the beginning, but one of my concentrations is International Environment and Resource Policy. That is actually my main concentration. That led directly to my Fellowship at CDP last summer. And also, it's played a major role in my job search for after graduation this spring. Without obtaining that minor, I don't doubt that I would have gone to graduate school. I, I would have gone regardless. Whether or not I went to the same school I ended up attending—the Fletcher School—is another is, you know, a separate conversation. I'm not sure if I would have ended up there. I certainly would not have ended up concentrating in what I concentrated. You know, I would have been on a completely different career path than I am right now. So, it, it definitely, it changed the foundation of my academic studies and my future career path.

Stephanie Jackson: I'm so glad you talked about that because we, we're gonna have some questions for you a little bit later about your choice in graduate school and your choice and concentration, but I'll let Sydney ask you some questions about your time at Georgia Tech.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, so, now we would like to focus a little bit on what opportunities you held while being at Georgia Tech. And so, you were a Legislative Aide for the Georgia General Assembly, correct?

Lucia Lombardo: I was.

Sydney Piwonka: Okay. And so, what was your role in this position?

Lucia Lombardo: Yes, so I did that, I believe sophomore year spring--so Spring 2017. And this was through the Georgia Legislative Internship Program (GLIP) which I believe still exists. And I was assigned to be a Legislative Aide in the Senate working for the Majority Whip, who at the time was Senator Gooch. I believe it is still Senator Gooch who is the Majority Whip in the Senate. And this opportunity arose from the Office of Government and Community Relations within Georgia Tech where I was a Student Assistant for a few years as well. And I really, really enjoyed this, this opportunity. You know, it was full time, sometimes very long hours, as, you know, legislative sessions tend to be, but it gave me my first glance into a highly professional fast paced environment--like the Georgia Capitol. It gave me a lot of exposure to the world of politics, to the world of all of the staff who, who help politicians, of which I was one. And it really opened my eyes to the process to making, to making laws, how lobbyists play a role in this. You know, how bureaucracy can also play a role in this, and there's so many other invaluable pieces of information that I learned while working there.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, and so, you talked a little bit about learning more about the policy side, policymaking side of, of a government, and so, how did you see what you learned in your international affairs degree or in your EAS minor directly overlap with this, more specifically?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, that's a really good question. So, I can tell you that this internship led directly to me being interested in climate and energy policy, specifically. So, I, I took those classes in the semesters following that internship because I was so interested in finding that intersection of policy and EAS, which you know at the time, and still is, energy policy, climate policy, these are, you know, large fields that are still emerging and nationally and internationally, especially now under President Biden. And so, that was a direct result of that internship. Within the internship itself, I don't believe I touched any environment-related bills directly. Bills that I, that I touched significantly were of relevance and importance to my Senator, so transportation bills--because he was the Head of the Transportation Committee. Rural internet broadband access was a huge issue the session that I was in. So that was another bill that I touched extensively. I don't, I don't remember having my hands in any environment bill specifically like I said, but I will say that, that internship, allowed me to broaden my understanding of what an EAS Minor and the field could do when mixed with an International Affairs degree.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, that's awesome that it gave you that perspective and actually led you to getting your EAS minor and I guess going more into the EAS field, a combination of policymaking with that. That's super interesting. And so, what advice do you have for students who may be interested in pursuing a similar position?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, that's a good question. So, you know, I would say it's important to take, of course it's important to take, general government policy classes to understand how government works, how bills become laws, and, you know, the background of policy, the bureaucracy how it works, who is in it, things of that nature. But I also do think it is important to have a specialization or a passion within that, because policy is extremely broad. Right? You have transportation policy, national security policy, climate policy, all sorts. For me, it really helped to have that concentration in climate, in environment, in energy to be able to say, I understand our policy works; I understand how government works; and I understand it through the lens of a STEM field. And that it also, in my opinion, allows you to become more employable as well, because not only do you understand how government works because lots of students go and they study government and they graduate with degrees in, you know, international affairs or government of some kind, but not every student is going to graduate with a concentration within that. For me, it was climate and energy. For someone else it might be a different concentration, but I do think that that concentration is critical.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay, so let's switch gears just slightly. So, before your internship with GLIP, you participated in the European Union Study Abroad Program?

Lucia Lombardo: Yes.

Stephanie Jackson: So, tell us a little bit about your experience there.

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, that's a great question. So, I participated in the European Union Study Abroad Program the summer after my freshman year. And that was an extremely eye-opening experience for me, I have to say. This was before I decided to Minor in EAS, and so, this is when I was thinking 'oh maybe I'll specialize in the European Union,' in terms of, you know, getting my International Affairs

degree. That was likely, and I've had a lot of really great experiences associated with Georgia Tech, but that was likely the single best experience that I had while at Georgia Tech. The program was incredible. The year that I went it was, I mean I think it's still led by Dr. Birchfield. But the year

Stephanie Jackson: Yes.

Lucia Lombardo: That I went, Dr. Fabry was the second Professor leading it. I believe it's a different Professor now, but at the time it was Dr. Fabry. And he was teaching on human rights in Europe, and human rights law. And that, it was an incredible experience, truly. I, I don't even know how to accurately describe that, but I will say that I highly recommend every single student, if you have the opportunity, to do one of the study abroad programs. One of the sticking points and selling points of the program—and correct me if this is not the case anymore—but it's all students pay in-state tuition for the study abroad programs. So, if you're an out of state student or international student, you'll pay significantly less for that semester of classes, then you would have paid for a regular semester.

Stephanie Jackson: Yes. That is still true.

Lucia Lombardo: Okay, good. That was, that was a major determining factor for a lot of the students on the program my year. We had multiple international students who were on the program.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay.

Lucia Lombardo: It was an amazing experience, the places that we visited, we visited all of the major EU institutions, the Council, the Commission the Parliament—which led to my Traineeship at the Parliament, a few years later, actually. We also traveled to multiple EU member countries like Sweden, France, Germany, Poland, Denmark, and visited political institutions in those countries as well—both EU and national level institutions. And I came away from that experience with a much more nuanced understanding of what international affairs meant outside of a US context, because the EU, you know, it's a very interesting institution and very complex, I think, especially from the outside looking in. And so, I was able to feel like I really understood that institution, and, and in understanding that institution, I was able to understand international affairs from a different perspective than I had before.

Stephanie Jackson: So, do you feel like that study abroad program or maybe even earning that certificate changed your perspectives on your career path?

Lucia Lombardo: It certainly did. Yes. For a while following that I was contemplating—and still am contemplating—a career in climate and energy policy but within the EU, or within the European Union, broadly. So, there are a good number of think tanks who do a lot of climate policy work between the EU and the US. That's a field I did not know existed before I did the study abroad and then chose to minor in EAS, so that is, that's a career field just as another example that's a career field I didn't know existed. And then learned that, of its existence through a Georgia Tech program.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah. So, you mentioned a little bit about how the EU study abroad program directly led to you wanting to pursue this position in the European Union Parliament, so tell us a little bit about what your position, looked like in the European Union Parliament.

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah. So, for one summer, I was the Trainee in a Member of Parliament's office at the, at the Brussels headquarters. So, I lived in Brussels for the summer, and I worked for a Lithuanian MEP Austrevicius. I believe he is still an MEP from Lithuania, working there, Assistants, and then me as his Trainee. So, it was the five of us in an office. So, it was a very, very close-knit team, and I really enjoyed that. I got to know my, my team very well over the course of that summer as well as him, and he was very accessible to me as a politician and as a boss. Within that role, my main duties entailed attending meetings, either with him, and taking notes or attending meetings that he was not able to attend and taking notes and then submitting those notes to him in the form of a memo or a summary of the meeting. And these are political meetings, right, official Parliament meetings. Other meetings I attended like political action meetings, or you know, external interest meetings on subjects, running, you know, a wide gamut of topics, but I concentrated on issues that are relevant to him--so the threat of Russia since he's from the Baltic state. He was also interested in renewable energy in the Baltic states, and then also the Greek migrant crisis because he was at the time of serving on one of the Parliament Committees on the migrant crisis. So, I attended a lot of external meetings on those topics, and then I would also prepare memos and briefings for him based on the information that was shared. So that was, I would say the main job that I did was attending meetings and writing briefings for him. The other part of my job was compiling and sending a weekly newsletter to his constituents, which I think is a relatively common task for most Legislative Aides Trainees, you know these are interchangeable terms. Most politicians will have a weekly newsletter that goes to their constituents, and so, I was also in charge of that. And I did get the chance to travel to Strasburg, which is where the actual Seat of the Parliament is, but they only travel there once a month for when they're in session. The rest of the time they're at the headquarters in Brussels. I was given the opportunity to travel to Strasburg for the session, so I traveled there for a little less than a week and was able to sit in on the actual session. I was able to hear multiple heads of state give speeches. I was able to attend high-level briefings within the building, and I was also able to explore the city. And so, that was a, that was a singular experience within that summer where I, you know, what's, what's the word. There are times when, there are times when you kind of focus in on your life and you realize, 'Wow, I'm, I'm really here I'm really doing this.' That was one of those times for me. Sitting in the plenary, listening to, you know, the president of Luxembourg speak was a, one of those moments where I realized 'Wow I'm here.'

Stephanie Jackson: Yeah.

Lucia Lombardo: I'm working and, but I'm also sitting here listening to this Head of State talk about the future of Europe. So that was, that was an experience that has imprinted on me.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah, that's awesome. And I think you mentioned this a little bit, but you talked about how you were also somewhat focusing on renewable resources. And so, did, while you're pursuing your Minor in EAS, did any of this, I guess, change your perspectives during that minor?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, good question. So, I actually informed my boss that I was concentrating in, you know, environment, climate, and so, he felt comfortable sending me to some of those meetings because he knew I would understand the technical aspects of, you know, renewable energies--like wind, solar and things like that. I understood the technical side of it through the EAS Minor, and so, I was able to go to these meetings and then I was able to translate that information into something that was, that was readable for him.

Sydney Piwonka: Yeah. That's awesome that you were able to, I guess, use your minor while you're in this position. And so, do you have any advice for students who may be interested in working internationally, whether for the EU Parliament or other organizations?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah. It's a good question. Do I have any advice? Yeah, I do. I have a lot of advice. I don't know how relevant some of it is, I would say. You know, the culture shock is real, just be prepared for that. I had less of a culture shock going to Europe because it's obviously very similar to the US in a lot of ways, but for my friends who, who worked or studied abroad in other regions of the world, just be prepared for that. Also, and for my specific experience, the work ethic is very different in Europe than it is in the US. And so, that was something I had, had to adjust to. So, again, being, being very flexible about your work, with, you know, that flexibility really served me well going into a foreign environment. I also did not speak Lithuanian or Russian, so the working language of the Parliament is technically French. I spoke some French when I went. My office did not speak French, and I did not speak Russian or Lithuanian. So, we communicated in English, which was fine for me because I, you know, was better to communicate in English than to communicate in French. But that was another aspect that I think is just important to be prepared for. I had to wear translator headphones 95, honestly 100% of the time. I had to wear translator headphones in all of the meetings I went to, because there are something like 23 official languages of the EU. And so, Members of Parliament are allowed to speak in any of them when they're in meetings. And so, you would have Members of Parliament speaking to each other in two different languages, and everyone would have to wear translator headphones. So, that, that was something that I was not expecting that I had to, I had to get used to. I had to listen to the translator in the translation booth give me the information and tune out what the actual representatives were saying just sitting in front of me. So, that was, that was an adjustment, and I think that if you want to work in the EU, if you want to work in a government abroad, that will be a reality for you. And it's just important I think to acknowledge that it's going to happen, and so, you can prepare for that. It's definitely a learning curve but you'll get used to it after a while.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay. So, you are currently pursuing a master's degree from Tufts University. You're now officially part of the Fletcher mafia, right?

Lucia Lombardo: I am. Yes, I am.

Stephanie Jackson: Yes. You're not the first Nunn School Grad, and I'm sure you won't be the last who has joined that

Lucia Lombardo: Good.

Stephanie Jackson: Institution. But so, you mentioned early on that you knew you were going to go to grad school. So, what made you decide that early on that you knew you wanted to go to grad school, and then, tell us what was the draw to the Fletcher School?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, good questions. So, at the time, this is back when I was graduating high school, looking at colleges. my plan was to go into the Foreign Service. And I had always been told that you should achieve your highest degree of education before applying to the Foreign Service, because that locks you into your pay scale. And also, obviously, it's a very long process to get into Foreign Service, and then, it's very difficult to get a degree while you're in the Foreign Service. So, that was the reason why I knew I was going to go straight to grad school. Which grad school I was interested in changed

dramatically during my time at Georgia Tech. I was not actually planning to apply to Fletcher. I applied to multiple other APSIA schools and at the last minute applied to Fletcher. I actually missed the interview window because I applied so late, so I didn't think I was gonna get in to be honest with you. But I didn't realize the interview was optional, so I ended up being fine and I got in. And then, I wasn't even going to go to the Admitted Student Day. I, I was traveling a lot from Atlanta. I was, and this was when I was a full-time, Georgia Tech Senior taking a full load of classes, and I was having to travel to DC to New York for all these Admitted Student Days. And it was taken up a lot of time. And I wasn't even going to travel to Boston because it was the only school in Boston I'd applied for, and I was pretty much set on going to a DC school. But the last minute I decided 'Okay, I'll go.' You know they have, they have an International Environment and Resource Concentration, and Fletcher, itself, has a very, very, very flexible degree. And so, what I liked about it was that I could choose more than one concentration, and the only requirements for them are that I took a certain number of classes that counted for each concentration and the rest is pretty much up to me. And the other schools that I was looking at were not like that. They were much more structured, because they wanted their graduates to have a specific skill set when they graduated. Like SAIS, for example, you know, is very, very, very economics-heavy, and they send a lot of students to the World Bank. And so, that is kind of the skill set that they want students to have. I did not necessarily want that. And so, that is a reason why I was drawn to the Fletcher School. And I went to the Admitted Student Day, fell in love with it, ended up joining, and then just completely by coincidence, the Dean had stepped down the year before and there was an Interim Dean of the Fletcher School. And coincidentally, the, the new Dean of the Fletcher School was announced my first month at school, and it was Rachel Kyte, who is a huge player in the International Climate and Environment sphere, which was just crazy to me that I chose the school because of that, then the Dean ends up being, you know.

Stephanie Jackson: A leading person.

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, completely in that field. And so, since she took the position, the number of classes within the Environment Concentration have like doubled practically. And new, new staff has been brought on, and it's been an even more incredible experience than I thought it was going to be when I initially decided to enroll.

Stephanie Jackson: So, I, as I mentioned first, when we first started talking, that clearly the minor provided a foundation for some of your choices. And so, you said your main concentration is International Environment and Resource Policy, what are the concentrations, do you have?

Lucia Lombardo: I have the International Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, and I basically have an International Law Concentration, as well, I'm just missing one class. So, I don't technically have it, but for all intents and purposes, I also have an International Law Concentration. And within that field, I did a lot of work on International Environmental Law and also based my master's thesis around that as well. So, I was able to kind of draw in, you know, what I learned in my undergrad and mix it with my concentrations at Fletcher.

Stephanie Jackson: Great.

Sydney Piwonka: And so, shifting a little bit to some of your experiences while you've been in grad school. So, last summer, you were a Sustainable Infrastructure Fellow at CDP, and so, what is CDP? What do they do?

Lucia Lombardo: That's a great question. So, most people don't know CDP, but you likely will know it by its previous name, which was the Carbon Disclosure Project, which was a very, very, very large, well-known organization within the climate field. They expanded beyond just environmental disclosure, and so, they rebranded themselves as an acronym-less acronym. CDP does not stand for anything. It used to be the Carbon Disclosure Project. And so, that is CDP. It's, broadly speaking, an environmental disclosure nonprofit, but they do a lot of work in, with cities and regions worldwide to help them further their climate and sustainability goals. So, that was the, that was the area that I worked in. I did not work on the disclosure side. I worked on the sustainability side. I worked for the Cities Team, which meant I worked with cities, not regions. And I obviously worked in the North America branch, so I worked with cities in Canada and the US. And as the Sustainable Infrastructure Fellow, specifically, I worked on a very small team--the Sustainable Infrastructure Team. It was three of us within the Cities Team. And we operated CDP Matchmaker, which is a service, a free service that CDP provides to cities to help match their proposed sustainable infrastructure projects with investors. So, the majority of my time was spent communicating directly with cities through webinars, video calls, phone calls, and then also updating the Matchmaker platform.

Sydney Piwonka: That's awesome. That's so interesting. And obviously, you have a very big focus in this in environmental science and EAS. Did you also see your International Affairs degree overlap with this, or was it more specific to what you learned through your EAS Minor and through your current master's degree?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah. So, this fellowship was, was not as internationally focused as my other experiences have been. I did work with cities in Canada, but the context in which I worked with them was not an international affairs context. It was very much, you know, sustainable infrastructure focused. There were differences in laws, so like US policies and subsidies and taxes and things of that nature towards sustainable infrastructure projects are going to be different than Canadian policies on the same thing. But they are similar, which is why they're grouped into the same region. Mexico is in the Latin America region because its policies are much more similar to other Latin American countries. So, I wouldn't say that I used my major degree, that much, but I did heavily rely on my EAS Minor, because a lot of my work was in climate finance and climate business and a lot of that is very technical. And thankfully, I had a very technical minor that I could lean back on, so I knew, you know, different types of solar panels, you know, how much energy they could generate, things of that nature, like very, very technical pieces of information that I learned from my, my minor. So, just for example, you know, I took an Oceanography course at Georgia Tech. And in the Oceanography course, we briefly discussed offshore wind, because, you know, it impacts the ocean environment. And so, some of the work that I did while, while at CDP was on offshore wind, and so, I was able to use that experience directly to help me understand, you know, what that meant, like what those projects looked like, what the amount of work and effort and infrastructure was going to look like to implement the offshore wind projects. That's just one example. There are others, but suffice to say that, that the technical side of that minor, really helped me in my Fellowship.

Stephanie Jackson: Yeah, so we're gonna wrap up with our last few questions about your minor and your career aspirations. The first question is about advice that you might have for students who are studying international affairs as you were. Any advice you would have for them as they might pursue a Minor in Environmental Science or even in another STEM related field?

Lucia Lombardo: Yeah, I would say just do it. For me, it was very difficult to take that plunge. I was very concerned that being in a class with only CS majors and engineering majors would mean that I would be significantly, you know, behind in the course material because I didn't have that technical background in, in the form of those intro level courses at Tech. So, that was definitely something that gave me pause, and I wish that I hadn't had that pause, because once I actually stepped into that minor and started taking classes, I had a great experience. And I think that a lot of students, INTA students, might be a little bit wary of, of making that choice because of the same or similar factors. And I completely understand that sentiment. But I would say if you're thinking about doing it, do it, because I can pretty much guarantee you that it's going to be better than you thought it was going to be. And the professors are so accessible, and they want you to succeed. And they'll work with you if you don't have that technical, you know, or that math background for certain classes, so I never felt behind my, you know, my peers in the classroom. And that, that, for me, was a major reason why I was considering not minoring in the first place.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay. Alright. And so, what's next for you after you complete your graduate degree?

Lucia Lombardo: That's a great question. So, so I graduate at the end of May. And I am currently wrapping up my thesis right now. And then, after I wrapped that up this month, I'll turn to the job search. I might be staying at Fletcher for the summer for a research position within the environment field, but I might not be. We'll see what happens. But I am currently, I, I am currently job hunting and will be job hunting more once my thesis is submitted at the end of the month. And my hope is that I'll end up in a field like the one I've described, you know, climate policy, environment policy, whether domestic or internationally focused. I feel as though I have the skills that I've learned both in Georgia Tech and from Fletcher to do, to, you know, to have a career in either of those fields.

Stephanie Jackson: Okay. Well, thank you for joining us today, Lucia.

Lucia Lombardo: Thank you so much for having me.

Stephanie Jackson: It was really great to hear about your experiences, you know, and the foundation that that Minor in Environmental Science has, has provided for you. So, we hope you're staying safe and healthy, and we are excited to hear about your future successes.

Lucia Lombardo: Thank you so much, and I hope that you all are staying healthy and safe as well.

Stephanie Jackson: Thank you.

Sydney Piwonka: Thank you.

Lucia Lombardo: Bye.

OUTRO

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