

# School of International Service – American University

International Economics Relations | International Economics

Fall Newsletter 2017 - November 27, 2017

## Fall Welcome Reception



Shivani Vakharia, Alexis Cherry, Carmen Zena, Gabriela Chamartin, Michael Lucci  
Dr. and Mrs. Porzecanski once again hosted the IER/IE Fall Welcome Party for students and faculty at their home. Food and conversation were thoroughly enjoyed, and no one could have asked for a more beautiful Washington evening to get to know one another!



Sam Evans, Andrew Lepczyk, and Ben Lundin



Prof. Porzecanski and Tim Zhou

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## SIS Scholar in Residence: Prof. Rodica Crudu



The IER/IE Programs in SIS/AU are delighted to be the hosts of a Fulbright Visiting Researcher during Fall 2017, and she is Dr. Rodica Crudu, an Associate Professor in the International Economic Relations Department of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM). When at home in Chişinău, the capital and largest city in Moldova, Crudu teaches courses in European Economic Integration, EU Institutions and Policies, Techniques of Foreign Trade, and Risks in International Economic Affairs.

The first objective of her stay at AU/SIS is for Crudu to improve and enhance her teaching skills and class syllabi, based on personal observation of our educational practices and learning experiences. For this purpose, she has been attending teaching, research and technology workshops; visiting classes at SIS and the Kogod School of Business; taking advantage of the library and other resources, on and off campus; and meeting with a variety of faculty members around campus to exchange pedagogical ideas.

Her second objective is to gather materials for a textbook for her class on Techniques of Foreign Trade, for which purpose she has been collecting a variety of books and other materials published in the United States, on practical topics such as trade finance and customs facilitation. Upon her return home in January, Crudu plans to design and introduce a variety of curricular reforms in her school's International Economic Relations program, by integrating the lessons learned and materials obtained during her stay in Washington DC.

Dr. Crudu says: "I am taking good advantage of the opportunity that the Fulbright Program and American University have provided me, and I am very happy to be part of this program. I have met wonderful teachers at AU, with whom we have discussed teaching techniques and experiences, and I have learned a great deal about syllabi development, pedagogical techniques, research methods, and American culture. I am most grateful to my faculty advisor, Prof. Arturo Porzecanski, who has been supportive of all the activities carried out during my fellowship."

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## Alumni Profiles

Deni Koenhensi '14



[Deni is a senior economist for the Pricing and Purchasing Service at IHS Markit, a world leader in critical information, analytics and expertise in forging solutions for the major industries and markets that drive economies worldwide. The company delivers next-generation information, analytics and solutions to customers in business, finance and government, improving their operational efficiency. IHS Markit has more than 50,000 key business and government customers, including 85 percent of the Fortune Global 500 and the world's leading financial institutions. Prior to joining the company three years ago, Deni worked part-time at the insurance giant \[AIG\]\(#\) in New York and interned at the \[Albright Stonebridge Group\]\(#\) in Washington, and previously was a research assistant at the \[Center for Strategic and International Studies\]\(#\) \(CSIS\), focusing on economics and politics in Turkey.](#)

She is based in Washington DC and is part of a relatively small team within IHS Markit that tracks and forecasts 4,000-plus prices of commodities, intermediate and finished goods, as well as wages and indirect costs. Deni's personal focus is on building materials such as cement, lumber, glass and asphalt, among others. Private companies and public institutions subscribe to her company's services, which include not only forecasts but written analyses, webcasts, and one-on-one consultations.

The purpose of her tracking and forecasting input prices is to provide clients with analytical tools to better negotiate contract escalations, help them determine the best time for their procurement activities, evaluate their purchasing performance, and assist in

preparing budgets for the year ahead. “When we are not in quarterly forecasting mode,” Deni explains, “I usually begin the day by reading relevant news materials, looking through data releases, and drafting analytical comments. I have client correspondence or calls to attend, where I provide insight on the building input in question, or I explain the forecasting model we use, or I demonstrate the tools on our website that can help clients with their procurement decisions. I also spend time estimating or re-estimating forecasting models in Eviews, with the goal of increasing our coverage every quarter.”

Asked about what skills, background and experiences have turned out useful in her career path, Deni states that “quantitative skills – experience with Stata, SPPS and R, in particular – have really proved useful to me. When I started this position, I was unfamiliar with Eviews, the worldwide leader in Windows-based econometric software, but knowing other programs made it a lot easier to learn one more. And we use Eviews not only to create our time-series models, but we also write programs to create our deliverables in an efficient manner.”

“As a general rule,” says Deni, “any programming experience and attention to detail are very helpful. In addition to quantitative skills, this job requires strong communication skills, specifically the ability to explain complex ideas in a clear and concise manner. If we can’t communicate our methodology to those who are not trained in economics, our product becomes meaningless. Finally, given that we produce a lot of written content, we are required to have strong writing skills. These skill sets are not specific to IHS Markit or this position; they were useful during my prior internships and jobs.”

Questioned about other ways that the IER program proved useful to her, Deni explains: “The inputs we track are mostly traded across borders, so we must pay attention to trade-related conflicts involving the imposition of countervailing and antidumping duties because they affect domestic prices. Lumber is one of the commodities that I cover, and our clients are keen to learn to effects of such duties on softwood lumber prices – ironically, a topic on which I presented, as part of a group, in Professor Bernhofen’s SIS-665 class! The uncertainty surrounding the future of the softwood lumber agreement between U.S. and Canada has created a lot of volatility in the markets recently and has caused great concern for our clients. Given the specter of increased protectionism involving steel, solar panels, and manufacturing within NAFTA, much of what I learned about international economic relations at AU/SIS is directly relevant to my work.”

## Nick Perkins '12



Nick recently accepted a position as Senior Consultant with Booz Allen Hamilton to further develop his capabilities in data science. He explains: “My long-term goal is to make a more prominent impact on national and international policies through data-driven policy formulation, and this job will allow me to build stronger technical skills that will help to inform policy development and tackle some of the biggest economic challenges that we face. The great thing about working for such a large and well-established consulting firm is the ability to perform effective and relevant work on projects across the federal government that touch on a diverse set of skills and abilities. Another great thing that I like about Booz Allen is that they are really at the forefront of data science and implementing technologies in artificial intelligence and machine learning. My new projects include utilizing machine learning for extracting specific information from government data sets, as well as working to build systems models and simulations of government programs to identify inefficiencies and potential policy improvements.”

Prior to this career move into the private sector, Nick spent four years at the U.S. Commerce Department. His main function there was to build relationships with financial providers, both banks and investor groups – including with foreign direct investors – to increase the amount of capital flowing into American companies owned or operated by entrepreneurs from minority groups. As Nick points out, “the U.S. minority population is trending towards becoming a majority-minority as early as 2043 but, sadly, the economies of our minority communities are far from attaining parity. By working at Commerce, I feel that I made a contribution to reducing the gap, and it was an amazing and humbling experience to have a hand in shaping the current and future state of the American economy.”

As concerns of the routine of his former position, Nick says: “On a daily basis, I would help to monitor and guide a national network of 40-plus Minority [Business Development Agency business centers](#). [By identifying new sources of](#) affordable capital and connecting these sources with our business centers, I facilitated the matching of affordable capital with minority-owned businesses across the country. Other functions of my job included performing data analytics of agency performance, as well as coordinating with sister agencies such as the U.S. [International Trade Administration](#) for FDI and export promotion, and with the U.S. [Treasury Department](#) in connection with the distribution of community development funding.

Asked about what skills, background and experiences have proven useful, Nick explains: “For my work at the Commerce Department, an understanding of macroeconomics, international relations and business finance were all key skill sets, and my undergraduate major in Economics plus my studies in IER were key for that. Most helpful also were my work with the Japanese-American community while hired by the [Consulate General of Japan](#) in Portland, Oregon; an internship with the State of Oregon’s business development team; my experience running a small project-finance company while I was a student at AU; and an internship at the U.S. [State Department](#) while in the IER program.”

“For my new job at Booz Allen,” says Nick, “I am going to be leaning more heavily on the quantitative skills that I learned at SIS, including regression analysis with SPSS software and system-dynamics modeling, though I also recently taught myself some computer programming and coding using Python, a widely used language. But formative also was my building a close friendship, and working relationship, with an SIS quantitative-methods professor, the now retired John Richardson. He was able to help me develop new skills in system- dynamics modeling, and we would “nerd out” together at industry conferences. Ultimately, I think that by developing one-on-one relationships with professors you click with, one can really gain expertise beyond the textbooks and develop that extra edge that is often needed when going into the job market.”

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