



SCHOOL of INTERNATIONAL SERVICE
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • WASHINGTON, DC

International Economic Relations
International Economics

Spring Newsletter 2018

March 29, 2018

First Three International Economics Cohorts

The relatively new MA degree in International Economics (IE), offered jointly between the School of International Service and American University's Department of Economics, was launched in 2013 and has been graduating students since 2015. The program prepares students who have previously majored or minored in economics for careers as international economists, for which purpose they take a rigorous mix of courses in economic theory, international relations, global political economy, economic policymaking, and quantitative methods focused on international trade and finance.

Now that ten SIS students have successfully gone through the IE program during the past three years, we thought that current students, faculty and alumni, whether from the IER (previously IEP) or IE programs, would be interested in knowing where these graduates ended up, for which purpose we are proud to present the following list:

Ngoc Phan '15, PhD Candidate, Duke University

Eliot St. John '15, Sanctions Compliance Officer, US Dept. of Treasury

Kyle Toman '15, Policy Analyst, US Export-Import Bank

Dita Dobranja '16, Advanced Researcher, Riinvest Institute (Kosovo)

Jeff Eversman '16, International Economist, US Dept. of Commerce

Prajakta Diwan '17, Policy Fellow, US Chamber of Commerce

Albe Gjonbalaj '17, Research Analyst, International Monetary Fund

Emily Kaput '17, Database Quality Manager, World Bank

Dimitrije Tasic '17, Research Analyst, International Monetary Fund

Eric Ward '17, Anti-Money Laundering Analyst, Citibank

Spring Alumni Panel



Aaron Holm '12, Christine Shaughnessy '13, Keysha Martinez '13, Prof. Arturo Porzecanski

On Friday, March 2, IER/IE held the Spring 2018 session of its Careers in International Economic Relations series. Alumni and students joined together for a panel

discussion, question-and-answer, and networking opportunity over dinner. Jovianus Alden Hartopo, a candidate MA in International Economic Relations, moderated the discussion. We would like to thank the following alums for their participation and insight:

Aaron Holm '13

Aaron is a Research Engineer for the Solar Energy Industries Association, the national trade association of the US solar energy industry, and as such he provides research and analysis support for SEIA's advocacy and education activities. He began as an intern with SEIA's State Affairs Department working on various issues including energy storage, PV recycling and net metering. Aaron holds BA degrees in East Asian Studies and English with a focus on Journalism from the University of Delaware. After spending a couple years living in China and Taiwan, Aaron came to DC to earn his MA in International Economic Relations at AU. In his spare time, he enjoys tinkering with electronics, kickboxing, and most things soccer-related.

Keysha Martinez '13

Keysha is an International Trade Analyst at the US International Trade Commission, an independent Federal agency with broad investigative responsibilities in matters of international trade, including determining whether US industries are materially injured or threatened by reason of the imports under investigation. She is responsible for conducting antidumping and countervailing duty investigations and five-year (sunset) reviews under Title VII of the Tariff Act of 1930. As investigator, she has handled cases in a broad range of industries, including agriculture, chemicals, steel, plastic, and other manufactured products. In addition, Keysha served as the Director of the Generalized System of Preferences at the Office of the US Trade Representative during 2013-14. She is a graduate of AU's BA/MA program, with a BA in international studies and an MA in International Economic Relations.

Christine Shaughnessy '13

Christine is a Senior Consultant with Summit Consulting, a specialized analytics advisory firm that guides federal agencies, financial institutions, and litigators as they decode their most complex analytical challenges. She is currently part of a team tasked to design and develop Federal Credit cash-flow models for the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). Her responsibilities require intensive data analysis that includes streamlining and consolidating large datasets from various interfaces. Before joining Summit in 2011, Christine worked at the non-profit World Vision, where she gained knowledge of financial data analysis. She has a strong financial and quantitative background and experience in data management, statistical and econometric analysis, and economic research from client and academic work at Boston College (BA, International Studies and Economics) and AU's IER Program (MA).

Alumni Profiles

Diana (Dimova) Gesheva '03



Diana has been an Economic Analyst for [CEEMarketWatch](#) during more than five years, and her current focus is South Africa. CEEMarketWatch is a relatively small company headquartered in Sofia, Bulgaria, where Diana is based. It provides professional macroeconomic and political analysis, on a subscription basis, to a range of clients including large investment banks, institutional investors, credit-rating agencies, central banks, and multilateral organizations. The company focuses on emerging markets and started out covering Central and Eastern Europe, but it has expanded to cover countries in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. “I belong to a core team in Sofia – seasoned analysts with very diverse backgrounds and experience,” says Diana, “and then we have local analysts in most of the countries that we cover.” And she adds: “I like that the company provides us the opportunity to do our research and come up with our own views on economic and political issues, and that there is a culture of respect for our independent points of view.”

Diana carries out extensive research on economic and political issues in South Africa. “I write daily reports on key economic indicators and political events, providing an analysis of their implications for investors and others,” she explains. “And I also prepare special reports on various topics that are of importance, such as monetary-policy decisions, economic shocks or vulnerabilities, as well as elections and other political developments – and there have plenty of those in recent months!” Diana maintains a database of economic indicators on South Africa and prepares relevant charts and other visual aids to support her opinions. She is also responsible for projections about interest-rate moves by the central bank; likely upgrades or downgrades by the credit-rating agencies; and key economic indicators, such as inflation and economic growth. “An important part of my job is to communicate my views to customers who are mostly economists, traders and money managers, helping them with their informational and decision-making needs.”

Asked about what skills and experiences from her days at SIS have proven useful in her career, Diana says: “All the knowledge I gained in my MA studies was instrumental for my subsequent career. With the benefit of hindsight, I really value, first, the written assignments that I had to complete for my classes. Writing skills are essential in my job. The reports we produce need to be on-target, succinct, organized, and interesting to read at the same time. I got to practice that in almost all the classes I took at SIS. Second, the quantitative part of the job requires thorough knowledge of Excel and an ability to work with data series, which I also greatly developed when attending AU. And third, my classes on European politics and economic integration laid the basis for my future career, because my first job out of school was doing economic reporting on Southeast Europe at ISI Emerging Markets, a business intelligence company now known as [EMIS](#), where I spent six years.”

Diana’s advice to current students is the following: “I highly recommend that students develop their quantitative skills as much as possible, because in my experience this is the most difficult aspect of the job for young employees who did not have enough exposure while in school. Also, bear in mind that it’s not all about what you pick up in the classroom. I have about 15 years of working experience already, and the three companies I have been with value most of all my willingness to keep learning and my dedication to customers and the firm, such that having a really good attitude at work counts for a lot.”

Emily Sarah Hersh '10



Emily moved to Argentina soon after graduating and has nurtured an unconventional, entrepreneurial career that involves international economic relations, because the thought of landing a desk job in a large government or corporate bureaucracy didn't appeal to her. She is one of the founders of, and now a Managing Partner in, [DCDB Group](#), an international consultancy firm with offices in Washington DC, Dublin, and Buenos Aires that provides market and due-diligence research; advises on correspondent banking, anti-money laundering and compliance issues; and arranges for custody, safekeeping and clearing services. The job provides Emily with many interesting travel opportunities – within Argentina and also elsewhere in Latin America, Australia, and China. She has also founded a digital media company called [The Bubble](#). “While I no longer have a significant day-to-day operational role, I participate in weekly strategy meetings regarding international expansion and contribute articles on economic issues when I can.”

Emily's focus at DCDB is the mining and energy industries in Argentina and elsewhere

in South America. “I spend most of my time advising investors in minerals mining, with a focus on lithium and other battery materials,” she says. “I’ve built a niche around the surprisingly vast informational chasm that exists between early-stage mining exploration companies and their investors. My clients and colleagues joke that I must be a frustrated geologist because I insist on getting onto the field and kicking the tires – figuratively and literally – when assessing potential mining projects. I get to spend a decent amount of time outdoors learning about science, which brings me both happiness and satisfaction, while being able to add real value to decisions by investors and mining companies.”

Emily frequently participates in panel discussions related to the lithium, battery, and renewable energy. “I’ve found the best way to get new clients or make new connections is to share knowledge in an interesting, engaging manner in forums like these. I take this responsibility seriously and put a great deal of preparation into every opportunity to engage industry leaders in conversation. I bring up topics like transitioning to electric mobility and new sources of energy, finding angles that are edgy and controversial.”

When asked what factors proved useful in her unusual career path, Emily says: “tenacity and math. I moved to Argentina speaking very little Spanish, and as I got my start in the mining and resources sector, I had to tolerate a lot of established players’ questioning whether I even had a right to speak up. That said, there are basic abilities that have helped me achieve success and compete where I lacked experience. First, attention to good form, as in nice-looking formatting and a clear writing style. No one likes to receive a report with sloppy margins, no page numbers, or unclear headings. Second, being succinct, because in the private sector nobody wants to read long-winded reports. Third, attention to detail, from creating meaningful presentations to actually reading contracts in their entirety. Fourth and most importantly, my technical

and mathematical skills, which allow me to go through mining and energy reports, and other dense materials, to then apply what I've learned to create valuable business opportunities or provide real-world context for clients.”

Asked for her advice to those about to begin their careers in international economics, Emily says: “Life doesn't move in a straight line and is often unfair. It's important to have a plan but also remain open to opportunities that present themselves along the way. You will never regret learning extra math, quantitative skills generally, or new software programs, so look for these courses and for these kinds of internship opportunities. Learning to manage failure and move forward from disappointment with a positive attitude is a massive part of personal success.” About networking, she advises as follows: “It's quality and not quantity that is important. Most interesting people, whether important or not, are open to speaking with an interested student about career opportunities, so be forward and ask to meet for a quick coffee or a chat. When you do meet someone new, avoid name dropping, dress appropriately, show curiosity, and invest time and effort into the relationship. Remember that networking goes both ways, so make time to connect with younger students or other people who look up to you. They may have some great insights for you.”

Joshua (Josh) Emmanuel Lagos '05



Joshua started working for the US Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service in 2005, right after finishing the IER Program. His postings have included Beijing, New Delhi, and currently Dakar, Senegal. His title is Counselor for Agricultural Affairs, and one of his responsibilities is to gather and analyze agricultural market information in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger and The Gambia. Josh travels throughout the assigned region to understand agricultural production, consumption, stocks, and trade, as well as report on economic and policy developments and create forecasts to help US farmers, exporters and the USDA understand what is happening in these markets.

He also contributes to the promotion and marketing of US agricultural exports by building bridges between local buyers and US agricultural businesses and farmers, and by organizing in-store promotions, reverse trade missions, and chef trainings. In addition, Josh works on agricultural trade-policy, such as tariffs and sanitary and phytosanitary issues. Finally, he helps organize agricultural-development activities ranging from scientist exchanges, food-aid programming, trade capacity building, and

other training to improve food security and trade.

“The greatest enjoyment of working abroad,” says Joshua, who grew up in San Antonio, “is learning about the countries where I am posted, which includes not only their current political, economic and agricultural situation, but also their history, religion, culture, food preferences and, most importantly, their people. I have found that it is nearly impossible to understand a foreign government’s political or economic decisions if you do not take the time to understand the country context. With this knowledge, you are able to tackle challenges both large and small, as well as bridge interests, diplomatically resolve impasses, and foster tangible results.”

Asked about recollections of his time at SIS more than a dozen years ago, Joshua explains: “I remember enjoying being a student – being an avid reader, learning new subject matter, and having unending opportunities to discuss international issues with my classmates. Ultimately, those interactions helped build my knowledge and perspective of the world, which proved invaluable as I progressed throughout my career. Influential also was my decision to write a 6-credit Master’s Thesis as my capstone. It was a lot of work, but it gave me the opportunity to use all the skills I had acquired to produce a serious body of work. Ultimately, the rigor that was required left me with the notion that hard work does pay off, and it brought home to me the importance of following one’s goals to completion.”

Prompted for some words of wisdom for IER/IE students who are about to begin their careers, Joshua says: “Take as many internships as you can. I landed several, including abroad to check whether living as an expat suited my lifestyle. For example, I interned at the FAS office in Guangzhou, China, to learn about working at a US Embassy – and I realized that I liked it! Also, network as much as you can; go to events, listen to speakers, talk to people, get business cards. Keep an open mind and be curious: even if you think you know what job makes sense for you, consider

learning about several of the career paths available, and try to envision yourself in them. Talk about them with people you meet who are working in different roles. And my final piece of advice is to explore opportunities that make sense for you while holding onto who you are and what you are passionate about.”

Bogdan “Bobby” Mihoc ’08



Bobby’s contribution to international economic relations is to have founded Medics Europe and [Castella Vacations](#), two start-ups which market travel to his native Romania to the American public. In the case of Medics Europe, the travel is for what might be called medical tourism – finding less expensive medical care in Romania for American patients needing to undergo procedures that are very costly in the United States. In the case of Castella Vacations, the goal is sightseeing and historical tours in

Transylvania – because “Transylvania is mysterious, Gothic and romantic! Come see its ancient castles, lush forests, green alpine meadows, chic cities and beautiful people” claims Castella’s website, and “your vacation in romantic Transylvanian castles will be half the price of a Caribbean vacation.”

Both projects include marketing and promotion efforts, as well as maintaining relationships with partners in Romania – from medical clinics to bus operators. Bobby is himself sometimes the tour guide for trips organized by Castella, and others are hosted by a brother of his who lives in Romania.

Becoming an entrepreneur has been a difficult road to take, says Bobby, who has made New Orleans his base of operations. “For example, structuring and running the tours to Romania has been relatively easy, but marketing Transylvania as a tourist destination has been extremely challenging. And yet, I don’t miss the days after I graduated from the IER program and had comfortable office jobs such as my first one at the [Centre for Development and Population Activities](#) (CEDPA), a sub-contractor of USAID. Yet the CEDPA job, and especially my job afterwards with [Medics USA](#), a company providing both urgent and primary care in the DC Metro region, shaped and inspired me profoundly, because they planted in me the idea of pursuing entrepreneurial ventures.” Starting a business – never mind two – has been hard work, but “If I had the choice to do it all over again,” says Bobby, “I would do it without a doubt. I would always choose an entrepreneurial path for myself. I get a lot of mental and emotional satisfaction from knowing that I am the brains behind a service or product, and that to a large extent I am responsible for my own success – or failure.”

Asked whether anything he encountered in the IER program helped to prepare him for this unusual career path, Bobby recalls that “there were some finance and marketing classes I took at the Kogod Business School which came in handy, and also there was a class on “International Finance and the Emerging Markets” taught by Professor

Porzecanski which inspired me a great deal, and also delivered useful knowledge about how the real world actually works.” Asked whether he has any regrets about his time in SIS and whether he would have done things differently, Bobby says: “I wouldn’t do anything differently. I am very happy with the educational choices I made and with the IER program, specifically. My focus became foreign direct investment (FDI), and it helped me to start thinking about whether one day I too could become a cross-border investor. My SRP also inspired me, because the research question was: What are the lessons of European Union-inspired economic reforms as implemented in Ireland, Portugal and Romania, especially in terms of attracting FDI? Those lessons spoke to me.”

Asked about what advice he would you give to current IER/IE students, Bobby says: “Soak up all the knowledge you possibly can while you’re in school. Go to lots of events at different venues in DC, and particularly the think-tanks which host such interesting discussions – and best of all, they are free of charge! Mingle with the people who attend and put yourself out there. Dress the part, as if you were going for an interview – because hey, you never know! And persevere, because one of the great things about America is that when one door closes, another one usually opens up.”

Sarah Nerette, Program Coordinator

International Economic Relations
International Economics

School of International Service

American University
4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016

202-885-6713 | ier@american.edu