

Daniel Weitz  
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Research and Policy: How a Summer Research Fellowship Contributed to my Academic Experience and Postgraduate Ambitions

University students typically spend their summer pursuing a variety of opportunities not afforded to them throughout the school year. Oftentimes, academics and serious topics are shunned in exchange for relaxation, jobs, and traveling opportunities. This past summer, a unique opportunity presented itself when I received a Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities Summer Fellowship. Combining this scholarship with an internship at the Center for International Trade and Security office in Washington, D.C. set the stage for my first true research experience, and although I was unaware of it at the time, this experience was one that fundamentally changed my perspective on both my academic and postgraduate ambitions.

I chose to research a narrow policy topic, yet one of great personal interest. After studying security related topics extensively in the spring of 2006, I was well aware of the myriad opportunities for research in the field and the practicality of security-related research to current policy. Upon choosing to research illicit trade, I was unaware as to both the extent of this phenomenon and the consequences it posed upon the international community. However, after conducting original research on the illicit transfer of dual-use goods within the European Union, I was exposed to an intense yet rewarding experience of extensively researching a topic of international concern, gaining much knowledge on the topic, and proposing original policy with the hopes of benefiting others. I have recently finished a rough draft for what I hope to be the first of many policy papers that I will write throughout my lifetime in which I can positively influence the world around me.

The research I performed entailed creating a database of illicit trade cases meeting very specific parameters, and only after spending close to a month performing extensive open-source research did I complete this task. I then performed a literature review to gain insight as to whether other, more seasoned researchers proposed policy or conducted research in a related field. After finding very few related publications, I studied export control and border security mechanisms in the European Union to determine their legislation and potential loopholes that illicit traffickers could exploit in transiting and transshipping sensitive nuclear dual-use equipment and technology throughout the region to proliferators around the world. To this end, I navigated the University of Georgia Libraries website on many occasions to search articles through the Galileo Database, to research in foreign policy journals, and to ascertain the general level of public attention given to illicit trade.

Once the summer had ended, I had become an expert on illicit trade in nuclear dual-use equipment and technology within the European Union, and as such I continued with my research and policy-writing endeavors into the fall of 2006. I purposefully molded my academic schedule to include a directed reading class wherein I maintained weekly contact with my academic advisor in Athens and my internship coordinator in Washington, D.C. with the hopes of producing publication-worthy research and policy. I have only recently finished the policy paper, and it will undergo an extensive editing process before being submitted to journals for potential publication.

Reflecting upon the research experience has provided me with insight into a life that I had never imagined leading, with a focus on influencing policy at the local, state, national, and international level in an area of personal interest. The research process was demanding and arduous, although looking back upon my experience, I truly feel that I have produced a

meaningful paper that will hopefully influence export controls. This in turn, may deter illicit traffickers from smuggling nuclear dual-use items that would have otherwise been used for harmful purposes. Even if this scenario never materializes, and my policy is never used, I have established a precedent for creating public policy that may one day have a significant impact on the world.

This experience would never have come about had it not been for the Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities and the University of Georgia Libraries, both of which provided opportunities for me to further my research that contributed significantly to my paper. Before this process, I had never acquired extensive research experience, although I am now confident in my ability to pursue other areas of academic and policy-related research. Furthermore, the University of Georgia Libraries has been more than helpful on a number of occasions, as I have attended presentations by several knowledgeable and helpful librarians concerning the research tools offered by the University to aspiring researchers.

I sincerely hope that other University of Georgia students will benefit from the same opportunities presented to me throughout the course of my research, as I feel that I have both personally and professionally benefited from these experiences. Furthermore, I held no previous knowledge of the research skills that proved essential to my success on this project, and these tools will undoubtedly be essential to my future research endeavors. Not only will I continue to utilize the research tools throughout my academic career, but I will continue to use them throughout my professional endeavors wherever they will lead me, and I am fully confident that a solid research background is a universally applicable skill.