Iliria Camaj Public Statement

Location: Tirana, Albania

Duration: May 27-August 18

Internship Description: US Department of State Internship Program, Regional Security Office at US Embassy Tirana

Going into this experience, I did not know exactly what to expect, but I did know that I would make the most of the amazing opportunity to intern for the US Department of State and use my time in Albania to grow academically and professionally. Originally I was an intern for the Management section of the Embassy as I reported in my proposal, but after consulting with the Management Officer and sharing my academic interests with him, he recommended that I move to the Regional Security Office. I was extremely appreciative of this consideration and advice, and it was clear that the personnel at post wanted to provide me with the best experience possible that catered to my academic pursuits and potential career paths.

I worked in the Regional Security Office (RSO) of the Embassy, so my section actually belonged to the US Diplomatic Security Service rather than strictly the Foreign Service such as the Consular, Public Affairs, Management, Political and Economic personnel. The RSO Administrative Assistant left Post around the time I arrived in Albania, and her replacement was not able to begin work yet so I was able to fill the role of RSO Administrative Assistant during my time, which left me with a lot of procedures, responsibilities, rules, office politics and names to learn quickly. My bosses, the Regional Security Officer (RSO) and Assistant Regional Security Officer (ARSO), oftentimes requested that I do something with the assumption that I already knew how, which was difficult at first because I felt a bit like a child asking to be walked through procedures. In hindsight however, I am happy that I did ask because instead of just telling them I could not do the task, I learned the steps to complete that given task in a proper and professional manner. The RSO and ARSO were phenomenal mentors, and they trusted me with responsibilities beyond those of an intern. I believe that our work relationships transcended that of “boss-student intern” into the realm of a respectful and enjoyable coworker dynamic. Because of the function of the RSO, I was able to see how the law enforcement side of a post collaborates and merges with bureaucratic side. On a daily basis I interacted with personnel in our section, which consisted of the US Marine Security Guards, the Local Guard Force, vetting investigators, and others. I was held to a high standard of maturity and professionalism especially for intra/inter office communication and information. Due to the nature of my internship, I cannot disclose all details of my experience, but below is a brief summary of what I did at post:

- Approved access and after-hours access requests to Embassy and housing compounds
- Actively observed and participated in various training and a Crisis Management Exercise for Post personnel
- Logged weekly radio check roster and travel locators for personnel on leave or vacation
• Greeted visitors and Temporary Duty staff and directed or addressed questions appropriately
• Facilitated the completion of administrative and vetting tasks
• Filed/e-filed Badge Applications, Security Briefings, Country Clearances
• Created security badges for Embassy personnel, prepared Security briefing information for direct hires
• Updated Post’s Emergency Action Plan (learned to use CEPA system) especially in regards to Mission Security
• Drafted and revised Security Notices, Directives, Announcements, Cables and Memorandums for distribution to Post personnel and updated to RSO’s site

In addition to working for RSO, I was able to “sample” other career paths at the Embassy. Because I developed relationships with personnel in other offices, I was offered to work in their offices for a short bit of time or sit in on their activities. By simply building rapport and showing interest, I was given the opportunity to work in the Public Affairs Office for one week, participate in a goat donation event with USAID, and assist in organizing then attending a three-day conference on human trafficking in the Balkans with the Department of Justice.

The Barger Leadership Institute Global Internship Award and CRIF Program Grant through Weiser funded my leadership experience overseas, which I would not have been able to cover myself whatsoever, as this internship was unpaid and overseas. I am grateful beyond words to the Barger Leadership Institute and WCEE for investing in my academic aspirations beyond the classroom this summer, and I am confident in saying that my internship at the US Embassy in Albania opened my eyes to likely future career options. I will be declaring on September 12th because this internship solidified my interest in security, law, crime and service in a global community.