

Host: Welcome to career talks a podcast service of the Academic Services Office of the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs. Today we're joined by Sara Morrell a fourth-year student studying international affairs. Sara is completing a research thesis as an undergraduate student. This allows her to get an in-depth research opportunity working under the guidance of faculty mentor. Sarah is joined by her mentor Associate Professor Margaret Kosal. Professor Kosal, some of the questions are directed at Sara but still free to chime in when necessary. So let's get started, Sara why did you decide to pursue a research option that is offered by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP)? feel free. To move it closer far where.

Sara: Well I did an essay competition in high school and I really like doing research for that. So when I came to college I wanted to do undergraduate research and that turned into pursuing the research option. And more generally I think that doing research could provide valuable experience with having to move forward with incomplete information and also being okay with maybe being wrong and having to start again a different direction. And then more specifically you can get methodological and subject matter experience in a very particular area that you're interested in that might not really be available in any other program.

Host: Sarah for those who don't know about UROP, what does this thesis entail?

Sara: So to do the research option, it's nine credit hours of undergraduate research and six have to be on the same project and then you also complete LMC 4701 and 4702, which are an undergraduate research proposal writing course and an undergraduate research thesis writing and then finally you upload your thesis to Georgia Tech's online database.

Host: Professor Kosal So is there anything you like to add?

Kosal: Thanks Jessica! Yes, the research option is one that a number of our students could take advantage of and really don't seem to. So I hope to see more students take advantage of this opportunity because as Sara articulated, it enables you to show to employers that you can complete a project on your own.

Host: Sara, so what are you currently researching?

Sara: So right now I'm looking at to what extent the credibility of a disinformation campaign might increase when it's carried out by people who are acting within a hierarchical culture. The idea behind that is information travels differently among people who operate in different cultures. So in a hierarchical culture information travels well from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom and the credibility of a disinformation campaign in large part depends on how cohesive it is. So if there are holes in the false story you're trying to tell, then people are less likely to believe you. So my hypothesis is that people operating in a hierarchal culture are less likely to have holes in their story because it's easier to transfer information from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom. So because everyone is getting information from the top of the hierarchy it's easier for them to see on the same page and avoid holes opening up in their story

because two people are saying different things and looking at case studies from Soviet Russian military history to test that hypothesis.

Host: Professor Kosal, what is your role as Sara's mentor?

Kosal: So as a research mentor, faculty does a lot of different things. Some things that are seen some things that are less seen. So it can be different with different faculty members so I like to meet with my mentee and depending on where in her or his progress she or he is it will be different times you know. So at this point Sarah's been working with me for four years she knows how to do research we don't need to meet every week but when we started out we met more often and you know. As a research mentor, important things that you bring to it are a broader knowledge of the field so that you can direct the student to things that are going to be more useful. For example, with Sarah, it was getting her to look into the realm of an area called strategic culture which ties together the cultural aspects that she was really interested in quite directly to this Eastern European and Russian cultural piece. So bringing that knowledge and then currently we're working on finishing up a manuscript to be submitted to the Journal of Political Communications. So that's a peer reviewed research journal. So there are the pieces that are involved in putting that together and sending it off presents.

Host: So Sara how do you think researching will help you with your academic and career goals?

Sara: I think the biggest thing is learning to think in terms of specific relationships between defined variables and then being able to communicate that relationship. And I also hope to keep doing research at a think tank when I graduate so that would directly transfer to what I hope to do and in doing research has also exposed me to more information about security issues in Eastern Europe, which is something I hope to continue focusing on. And more currently with academic goals, one of my classes has just been going through different types of methodology in social science research. So having run into some of the problems of those methodologies are trying to account for helps me to have a deeper understanding of what we're doing in class. And then moving forward I also plan on doing the five-year master's program. So the experience gained in doing undergraduate research will I hope prepare me for work on a master's thesis

Host: Professor Kosal, from your experience how does performing extensive research help students?

Kosal: So looking back at the ten years or so that I've been mentoring students here at the Nunn School, the single thing that seems to be of most value is that this translates well to future employers. As I mentioned before they see this as evidence of you being able to complete a project on your own which is a lot more what the real world looks like. In terms of other aspects though so depending on the time in the student at times it means part of a larger group of students who are independently doing research. It helps to keep a student sort of focused and build a thematic area or a thematic theme throughout their undergrad which again

translates well to employers especially if you're wanting to show or demarcate some specialization.

Host: Sara What advice do you have for students who are interested but don't know where to start?

Sara: I would recommend they ask their professors if there are any opportunities to do undergraduate research and see where they can go from there. They also don't have to be in the professor's class to ask about research. I think a lot of professors have their research interests posted on their school's website. So if they just reach out to someone with them similar interests and see where they can go from there.

Host: Very great advice! Professor Kosal, do you have any advice or closing remarks?

Kosal: So the number one thing I would say is go for it and do it. Sara has been an amazing student to mentor and she came to me in her freshman year. So your freshman year is not too early especially if you want to be able to get to the point where you are publishing. Start early, start talking with faculty members, recognize that it entails a whole lot of faculty's time to be committed to mentoring you. So we want to see you know how interested you are and how you're going to on the research portfolio that we're doing. Ultimately it adds to your career here in the Nunn School and at Georgia Tech and hopefully it also is a fair bit of fun.

Host: Thank you Sarah and Professor Cole So for this interview and that concludes today's podcast.

Outro: This has been career talks a podcast of the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech brought to you by the Nunn School academic services this and other podcast can be found on our website at www.inta.gatech.edu. Thank you for listening.