

Practicum Report

Foreign Policy Analysis for the Lenda Sherrell Congressional Campaign

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Introduction

This internship was not the result of careful planning.

My original intent was to finish this program with a thesis, which seemed the logical choice given my research and writing skills. Then my professors started pointing out that I wouldn't *learn* anything from doing that, so I started looking at what sort of international security-focused internships were out there. As can be imagined, there wasn't much in Tennessee, so I ended up applying to a number of think-tanks and NGOs in Washington D.C. over the spring and summer – the Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and so forth. They weren't interested.

Then I was reminded that this was an election year, and perhaps a candidate could use a foreign affairs advisor. I floated the idea to Dr. Tesi, he voiced his approval, and in one of those coincidences Mrs. Lenda Sherrell, the Democratic candidate for the local House of Representatives district, happened to be giving a speech at Walker Library at the start of the semester. We both decided to attend, and I made my proposal. In truth, Dr. Tesi did most of the talking, but the candidate and her staff seemed interested, and told me to get in touch with the campaign manager.

This led to a protracted and frustrating period of trying to get some very busy people to schedule a meeting at the campaign headquarters and get the paperwork done so I could properly begin the internship. In the meantime I was asked to write a brief piece about the United States' main foreign concerns at the moment and whether Free Trade Agreements were good for the country or not. This was followed by a directive to begin researching presidential Trade Promotion Authority and a question about Congress'

votes regarding action against ISIS. It wasn't until mid-September that I learned 1) yes, the campaign wanted me as an intern, 2) I would be doing *off-site* foreign policy research, which meant that 3) I should have been recording the hours I'd already spent working on the previous topics.

The result is that I started working on September 4th, but only started recording my hours on the 16th. I had to estimate as best I could just how long I spent working in the interval when it came to filling my timesheet.

Practicum Overview

When I approached this practicum, I was expecting a position at the campaign headquarters alongside other volunteers, where I'd do research and help formulate positions when I wasn't answering phones and providing menial labor – the stereotypical coffee-fetching intern experience, in other words. Instead I spent over two months doing what I did for my “trial” assignment: researching, writing, and submitting the results from home. As such, I barely interacted with the candidate and had limited face-to-face meetings with my superior.

My supervisor was Ms. Dia Cirillo, a woman who had worked as a policy consultant for the soon-to-be ex-governor of Illinois, humanitarian groups, and private enterprises alike, before winding up in Middle Tennessee and joining Mrs. Sherrell's campaign almost as serendipitously as I did. She knew enough about international affairs to make me feel redundant at times, and unlike me had actually left the country to work in Latin America, but Ms. Dia had no formal background in the field.

So my official position was under her, focusing on the international situation while she kept track of domestic issues. The title she recommended for me was “foreign policy analyst,” though “foreign policy advisor” is an equally accurate appellation since I both researched the United States’ current policies on various topics and made recommendations on what America should be doing.

Ms. Dia mostly worked with me via e-mail to provide instructions, feedback, and new assignments, but we tried to meet each week for an hour or two at the MTSU library, as well as before our presentations to the candidate. These face-to-face meetings were where I got my most useful feedback and constructive criticism, and I definitely needed a lot of both during the first couple of weeks of this internship.

One of the biggest challenges of this practicum was learning the “language” to use. The audience I was accustomed to writing for consisted of academics with a background in political science and knowledge of both theory and practice. I was used to writing long papers with many sources, many citations, and a variety of viewpoints offered to support my central thesis.

But in this practicum, I was writing summations and policy recommendations for people who didn’t necessarily know anything about neoliberal institutionalism or a security dilemma. I was asked to include things such as poll numbers or even regional maps that I would not consider necessary for most academic papers, and since Mrs. Sherrell had a background in finance, she often wanted to know how much policies would cost, as well as where the money would come from. I had to screen my text for technical terms and use as plain language as possible, and was asked to focus on quality over quantity, so that a seven-page briefing might be deemed overly long.

This did not mean that it was quick and simple to write those briefs and recommendations, and most of my hours were spent doing research on these issues. I hesitate to estimate how long it took to complete a given project, because in some cases I was told to keep reworking and revising them throughout the practicum – that original question about general foreign policy from the beginning of September ended up being the topic of a discussion in mid-October.

I tried to get in three or four hours' work each day, but in some cases, usually after I got a new topic that Ms. Dia wanted a response for ASAP, I ended up putting in six hours or so. The worst day was September 4th, where I worked from mid-morning through midnight to finish that initial response paper. Between mid-September and the end of the practicum I only took one day off, so while I was working "part-time," I was constantly working.

Methodology

For each assignment, I started by searching the websites of think-tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations, online magazines such as Foreign Policy and Politico, as well as more mainstream media or specialized websites such as GovTrack if I was researching legislation. From these sources I would gather potentially dozens of pages of notes and hyperlinks, which I then converted into a six- to twelve-page paper, or "full" briefing on the topic. Finally, I took the most salient points and made a page-long "executive summary" that condensed an issue to a paragraph and made a policy recommendation in another few sentences.

Once I researched an issue and made a policy recommendation for it, Ms. Dia would help me polish it, and iron out any differences of opinion between the two of us before we presented it to the candidate. This was difficult to manage given how much Mrs. Sherrell was moving about while campaigning, so we were only able to meet with her twice to discuss the most relevant topics: America's general foreign policy challenges, "fast track" trade promotion authority, President Obama's war authorization against ISIS (or lack thereof), and whether Mrs. Sherrell should support proposed Free Trade Agreements like the Trans-Pacific Protocol.

As nervous as I was going into these meetings, they were some of the most rewarding experiences of the internship. I summarized my research and justified my policy recommendations, Mrs. Sherrell asked questions, Ms. Dia made comments, and I got to feel like an expert on these topics even though I was dealing with a career policy analyst and a prospective Congresswoman.

By the end of the campaign, I had done research and made suggestions about America's general foreign policy challenges, the benefits and downsides of Free Trade Agreements, Congress' actions regarding ISIS and the arming of Syrian rebels, Obama's legal authorization to go after ISIS, presidential Trade Promotion Authority, the status of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and even the Ebola outbreak. I also did some independent research into the Scottish independence referendum and what the fallout from that could be, the current immigration debate and the surge of unaccompanied minors crossing the Mexican border, and what should be done regarding Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Additionally, Ms. Dia asked me to do a variety of other projects for her. Some elaborated on previous topics, such as a fairly exhaustive Middle Eastern timeline that

emphasized the incidence of foreign intervention, and a look at the so-called Clinton Parameters for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Others confused me. She asked me to read and respond to two books: *The Brothers*, a biography and history of the Dulles brothers, and *One Palestine, Complete*, a look at mandate-era Palestine.

I initially thought that this was busywork, or perhaps a subtle attempt to convert me to her way of thinking on these topics, but she later clarified that I should be drawing policy considerations from them, as well as learning how to write journal-quality book reviews. She also asked me to look at some editorials from the *New York Times* and write a similar piece describing Senator Corker's foreign policy options since he's set to become chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. So I ended up learning how to be more than just a foreign policy advisor for a political candidate.

The internship ended on a down note, since of course the Democrats took a historic thrashing on November 4th, which made for a fairly depressing Election Night party. But I consider the practicum a rewarding experience all the same. In the end I probably did as much research and writing as I would have had I chosen to do a thesis, but I picked up some new skills, made some important networking connections, and finally have something interesting to put on my résumé.

Academic and Theoretical Connections

I would have to say that the skills I developed through my years as a student were more useful than the knowledge gained from my studies, but only because I was often given unfamiliar topics such as trade or legal matters. Fortunately, the process of researching and writing reports about these new issues was more or less the same as

writing a paper for a class, save for the formatting differences, the language used, and that executive summary step.

That said, what I learned from my classes was certainly helpful in that it gave me a wealth of background knowledge to build upon. While I was forced to spend hours researching the economic effects and legal dimensions of Free Trade Agreements to address that part of my “trial” assignment, I could answer the part about America’s international challenges off the top of my head. Similarly, when I was asked to look into the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, all I needed to do was check on its current status rather than learn what the conflict was about, and my classes on Russian politics and Middle Eastern history were particularly helpful since I was asked to recommend what to do about ISIS and the situation in Ukraine.

What I learned from my courses also helped me make sense of some situations I found myself in, and I can give one very good example of this:

As I said, Mrs. Sherrell wanted to know where the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict was at, so I did a bit of research and found that peace talks had stalled due to Israeli outrage at Fatah and Hamas forming a unity party and Palestinian outrage at the continued construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The experts commenting on the matter concluded that with neither side showing any interest in resuming the peace process, the United States should deal with ISIS, Iran, and the Middle East’s myriad other problems rather than obsessing over an enduring dispute.

I wrote a report making a recommendation to that effect, submitted it, and was told by my supervisor to go back and reread an op-ed piece to look for ways to encourage peace talks. I did so, and revised my paper to talk about possible diplomatic options that

could encourage the Israelis to come back to the table, even though my strategies seemed unrealistic and I didn't agree with the new position I was "recommending."

Or in other words, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was insufficiently "ripe" for a negotiated settlement. Both sides were expecting too much from the other, and both thought they were winning the conflict, and therefore neither saw a point to a negotiated solution, a situation straight out of the Peace and Conflict Resolution literature (Zartman 2003). The experts all saw this and recommended that America not waste its time struggling with this situation. However, telling voters that America can't solve a problem, and that things have to get worse before they can get better, probably wouldn't go over well on the campaign trail. So the course of action that I ended up endorsing wasn't satisfactory, but sufficient for the needs of the political campaign, a process Foreign Policy literature calls "satisficing" (Wittkopf, Jones and Kegley 2008).

This decision, to do exactly what the experts were warning against, may seem irrational, but it made sense for a Congressional campaign trying to win office by emphasizing soft power foreign policy options over hard power, which ties into the cognitive approach to examining foreign policy actions, the "two-level game" of international and domestic politics, and certainly other models of decision-making (Rosati 2000, Putnam 1988). Or maybe Mrs. Sherrell would have agreed with the experts had she heard their recommendations, so the campaign's stance towards Israel really came from its policy-making organization – i.e. me and Ms. Dia – which fits into organizational or bureaucratic models of decision-making (Allison 1969).

Again, this theoretical background and knowledge of international affairs literature was more useful to me than the candidate herself. While I could have spent

time explaining why Russia's history may lead it to react so strongly to perceived Western encroachment within its sphere of influence/buffer states, it was more important that I tell Mrs. Sherrell what I thought the United States should do rather than describe every step in the process that led to that recommendation. The knowledge gained from my years as a graduate student informed my decisions, but was not necessarily shared.

Challenges

I mentioned the learning curve of figuring out how to write for my new, non-academic audience, but with a little trial-and-error, and after seeing some examples of Ms. Dia's work, I was able to catch on and figure out the proper way to present my findings. Beyond that period of adjustment, I was faced with three enduring challenges over the course of this practicum.

Working from Home

In some ways, this practicum was almost embarrassingly easy. Since I was doing remote research I had no commute, no obnoxious early morning hours to deal with, no dress code to worry about. I didn't have to go further into debt or pick up a part-time job just to afford housing in the nation's capital. My "office" was nothing more than my desktop. The downside of this approach is that if you're living in your office, it's much harder to escape it when you need to take a break. This helped me get my hours in, but as time went on and the weeks piled up, it started to wear on me and I found myself making excuses to go outside.

Another consequence is that since I never got that desk at the campaign headquarters, I never really felt like part of Mrs. Sherrell's campaign. When I arrived at the building early one morning for a meeting with the candidate, the first woman who arrived had no idea who I was, and told me that she wasn't allowed to let me in. I didn't have anyone to talk to at the election night party, at least until my supervisor came in an hour later. I was so focused on my research, in fact, that I never had a good idea of how the campaign was actually doing, or what issues mattered to the local voters. The only names I knew in the organization were Mrs. Sherrell herself, Mrs. Thompson her campaign manager, and Ms. Dia. As a result, some of my journal entries, particularly the ones in which I was waiting for a reply or assignment, turned out pretty morose.

Working Alone

It is telling that I only met with my "supervisor" in person just a handful of times this entire practicum. E-mail and phones allowed us to communicate, of course, but only when the other person was able to respond. There were extended periods in which I was waiting on someone to reply to my submitted work and give me a new assignment.

This meant that I not only had to operate without feedback for days at a time, but there was nobody breathing down my neck to make sure I was working. The result was a test of my self-discipline and honesty. No one would know if I spent all day playing computer games but put down six hours on my timesheet, and nobody would be around to tell me to get to work if I was feeling lazy. On the bright side, this experience allows me to put "self-motivated" and "doesn't require constant supervision" on my résumé.

Working 240 Hours

This infrequent contact with the people giving me assignments meant that one of the greatest challenges of this practicum was simply filling the timesheet and getting in the required number of hours. Even with my independent research work, when Election Day rolled around on November 4th I still hadn't gotten my full hours in, so I had to spend another week doing projects for Ms. Dia until I finally had my 240 hours on November 9th.

The advantage of coming in to work at an office or somewhere is that it's very easy to use up time. You come in at one hour, leave at another, and in between you are assumed to have been "at work" even if you were browsing the internet, chatting with coworkers, or getting up to grab some coffee at various points during the day. With my hours, I only started recording them when I started researching or writing, and ended when I stopped.

This interacted with the previous challenges as well. First, there was the question of honesty: *was* I really working every minute of the hours I logged? Of course not, I had to stop and think, take brief breaks to stretch my legs, and I got lost in plenty of tabs while browsing news sites and online journals. But I considered myself "on the clock" during those times, focusing on matters of foreign policy even if I had to get up to grab a drink. And when I was working, I was working *only* on foreign policy. I never had to fetch my boss a coffee, file some paperwork, or schedule a meeting like I would have in some of the think-tank internships I applied for. I probably did more actual foreign affairs work per hour with this practicum than I would have in Washington – some of the

internships I considered would have made me a part-time event coordinator as well as a research assistant.

Second was the matter of finding things to do. Since I could go days without hearing from my supervisor, I had to find ways to stay busy and keep accumulating hours between assignments. The solution drew from that “self-motivation” skill, and I came up with independent research topics to work on and submit. Two were handed in to the campaign and never went any further, and another paper was submitted to my supervisor after the election. They were busywork, but I put just as much care and effort into them as I did my conventional assignments, so if nothing else I can add them to my portfolio.

Big Concepts

Since I was working from home, I didn’t have many interesting developments or stories to record in my practicum journal. But putting my thoughts down at the end of the day helped me uncover what I felt were some important aspects of my work, notions that surprised and in some cases troubled me.

The Power Behind the Throne?

One of the downsides of our system of government is that the qualities that make for a good political candidate are not necessarily the qualities of a good policymaker. Running for office requires people skills, an ability to convince strangers to give you money, and the vigor to travel around a district while promoting oneself. The scholarly, analytical skills and knowledge developed by an International Affairs degree are totally different.

As such, while Mrs. Sherrell was better-informed than the average voter due to taking the time to research the issues she would be expected to make decisions about, she admitted that her background was finance, not international affairs, and she was focusing mainly on the domestic issues that would matter to the people of Middle Tennessee. So she trusted her foreign affairs advisor to give her guidance regarding what positions she should support on international issues.

When I took this internship, I thought I would be the explainer, and the candidate would be the decider. I imagined myself researching an issue and presenting the various viewpoints on it, the different steps that could be taken to deal with it, and the costs and benefits of each, after which the candidate would make an informed decision. I would be a neutral party, in other words, while she would bear the burden and responsibility of the actual decision-making.

Instead, Ms. Dia made it clear to me that I was writing policy *recommendations*. I was the one working on a master's in international affairs, so as the best-informed member of the team, ultimately I would be the one crafting policy. I would have to explain and justify these positions in front of the candidate, and to her credit Mrs. Sherrell had plenty of questions to ask during our meetings, but she never ended up rejecting my recommendations outright and doing something different.

In short, I was telling a would-be Congresswoman what to do. It's a situation that seems ripe for abuse before reality sets in. As seen in my story about "satisficing," just because an advisor recommends a course of action doesn't mean that the politician will be able to take it, and had my personal politics greatly differed from Mrs. Sherrell's, I'm sure she would have been less accepting of my policy suggestions.

Confidential Policy

Something that surprised me was that I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement with the campaign before my supervisor would share her work with me, an agreement I have hopefully not violated in the course of writing this report. This is also why I won't be submitting copies of the final versions of any of my policy recommendations or briefings to the university, and have been instructed to make minor alterations to campaign work I may use in a portfolio.

I can understand this restriction to some extent: during an election season, you don't want your opponent stealing your brilliant ideas. But I have trouble accepting the notion of "secret" foreign policy, that what a candidate really thinks should be done – or has merely been advised to do – needs to be kept hidden and separate from what he or she talks about doing on the campaign trail. Doesn't that do voters a disservice? And more to the point, wouldn't they find out eventually when you made a foreign policy decision that was different from what you campaigned on?

So this policy didn't make sense to me, and I objected to it because I support transparent government. But I also needed the internship, so I signed the agreement anyway.

Your Own Voice

If you are an opinionated person and like to speak your mind, you may want to stay out of politics, ironically enough. As the election season went on, my disgust with the opposing candidate grew until I had to write a letter to the editor to vent my spleen. I

wrote it, double-checked it, and then submitted it to Ms. Dia like it was another assignment.

I had talked to Mrs. Sherrell and Ms. Dia about this during one of our meetings, whether I would be allowed to make my own politically-charged public statements while working for the campaign. They assured me that there was no gag order on speech, but also that I needed to be careful to specify that I was not speaking on the campaign's behalf. Additionally, they wanted to look over my submission to make sure I wasn't misrepresenting the candidate or crossing any lines.

So my initial letter got trimmed down by half after Ms. Dia made some recommendations, and then Mrs. Sherrell had me switch out a few words. In the end it was submitted to the *Daily News Journal* and eventually printed, but by then I wasn't enthused about it, since it didn't really feel like my words anymore.

Big Questions

Some of the most surprising things to come out of this practicum emerged during my face-to-face meetings with Ms. Dia. She would ask me what I thought about topics, or how my background as an international affairs graduate student informed these positions, but in the process she asked a few questions that I didn't have immediate answers to.

What Do I Believe?

I wound up working for a Democratic political campaign, so by the standards of the American political system I must be liberal to some extent, and I never found myself

greatly disagreeing with the candidate I was working for. But something both Ms. Dia and I noticed was that I didn't seem as fervent or straightforward with my beliefs as others working for the campaign.

Perhaps I was trying to remain an "unbiased" or "professional" policy consultant, but I looked back on my policy recommendations and found that they didn't seem very, for lack of a better term, dogmatic. I had no quick, theory-based recommendation for any of them, and preferred to research the topics and see what various experts said about them before making my suggestion.

So when Ms. Dia bluntly asked what my political beliefs were, I could only stammer without finding an answer. Surely, after all those years studying political science or international affairs, I could say with confidence that I was a realist or neoliberal institutionalist or something? But I had nothing, no label I was willing to adopt.

This may just be a personal issue, but I would advise anyone going into a position like this to figure out your personal politics beforehand, to avoid the awkwardness of suddenly finding yourself a political/theoretical agnostic. Or perhaps it's related to my next points.

Where Does Policy Come From?

This was perhaps the most intriguing issue Ms. Dia raised at our meetings. Over the course of my internship, I read and evaluated many experts' positions on an issue. I summarized them, compared them, and ultimately picked one to endorse in my position paper. But how?

As mentioned before, I didn't have a default political theory or -ism to work by. I was inconsistent: I ended up backing regional international organizations such as NATO or ASEAN as a way to counter Russian and Chinese aggression in one document, only to reject regional trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Protocol in another. I also not-entirely-jokingly suggested solving certain issues with targeted drone strikes, which may be why Ms. Dia had me read a book about the sordid history of the CIA.

At any rate, this question is probably related to the concept of satisficing. Even if you adopt a political theory like neorealism, the extent to which you are able to act on it is dictated by the situation. It was the dubious economic benefits and some specific provisions of the TPP that I objected to more than the concept of it, and even though I was in favor of a peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine question, circumstances indicated that now was not a good time to work toward it.

So policy, I think, comes from the process of bridging the divide between textbook political theory and the real world, a combination of the policymaker's values and pragmatism. Our theories only model the world, after all, and even if they tell us what to do to get the result we want, we may not always have the capacity to take those actions. This may lead to the question of why we need theory in the first place, which brings me to my next point.

What is the Difference between an International Affairs Grad Student and a History Major?

This is a question that Ms. Dia asked me directly. My answer was that while both the political science student and the history student may look to the past for inspiration,

the former also attempts to build theoretical lenses with which to view the world and inform their decisions. The history major can guess how the future will unfold based on the past, while the international affairs student can try to steer events toward a specified end. After all, realism and neoliberalism and Marxism aren't just ways we use to explain history, they lay out assumptions of how states and other actors behave, and tell us how to alter that behavior.

Now, the difference between an international affairs grad student and a history major as they relate to a political campaign is less clear-cut. As I've said, there were limits to how much I could incorporate political theory into my policy recommendations, due to my non-academic audience and the reality of the situations I studied. Ultimately my research and writing skills were more important than what I'd memorized from my textbooks, and if a history major had those similar skills, I'm not sure how different his or her policy recommendations would have been.

Ms. Dia and I did revisit this question in our final meeting, and she had some ideas to add: while some of the things we learn from studying history may defy a particular political theory, a background in political science may lead a policymaker to consider things that a historian wouldn't, such as personal relationships, economic factors, and so forth. So while theory itself may be of limited use in this situation, political science can give the policymaker a larger toolbox to work with, in addition to a broader theoretical framework.

What I Learned From This Practicum

The main thing I learned from this practicum was how to write more than academic papers, but also reports that could be understood by laymen, and how to summarize pages of research into a succinct policy suggestion. I also dabbled in writing professional book reviews and op-ed pieces, more ways to use my researching skills.

Beyond new skills, I also learned more about a wide range of subjects. I'm in the International Security track of our program, and had consciously been avoiding economic subjects when choosing classes, yet one of the first things I was asked about was Free Trade Agreements. So I had to do a great deal of reading to become familiar enough with these topics to make recommendations about them, and can now say far more about NAFTA or the Trans-Pacific Protocol than I could going into this internship. Beyond that, I've deepened my knowledge of the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, learned more about how our government works by studying Trade Promotion Authority and what war authorization President Obama is using against ISIS, and even learned about Ebola and the spread of epidemics.

I also learned how a political campaign works, even if I wasn't closely involved with it. Since my position differed so much from what I was expecting, after the practicum ended I asked Ms. Dia how typical my experience was. She explained that policy advisors for an institution such as a think-tank would certainly have more face-to-face encounters with their coworkers and less off-site research, but for a political campaign that requires candidates to move around from fundraiser to fundraiser, there are obviously fewer chances for this. But this campaign *was* atypical in that it even *had* a foreign policy advisor position for me to fill – Ms. Dia said that in many cases, political

campaigns consist of a candidate, logistical support, and a communications expert. In such campaigns, policy positions come from opinion polls, and the interest is more in getting the candidate (re)elected than producing sound, feasible solutions to problems.

Finally, I learned plenty of things about myself during this practicum, most of which I've touched upon in the "challenges" or "big questions" sections. I've learned that I may need to take some time to figure out just what I believe when it comes to politics or political theory, and that I may not want to work from home, even if it is temptingly easy and convenient. But I also learned what challenges I'm capable of overcoming, and that I have the skills and knowledge to help prospective leaders of our country make the right decisions.

The Future

The downside of this internship compared to one at a think-tank somewhere is that I am not leaving it "in" with an organization that will subsequently hire me. If my candidate had won there would at least be the chance that she'd want to bring her favorite foreign policy analyst along with her to Washington, but she did not. If I choose to define myself as a career campaign advisor, I'll have to wait two years to work again.

But one of the points Ms. Dia made to me was that "policy advisor" isn't necessarily a career so much as it is a skillset. She herself has worked for a variety of agencies both private and public, and stressed the value of networking and being flexible enough to drop into an area and find a way to use those skills. My knowledge and background in international affairs may influence where I apply my research and writing talents, but the good news is that those skills are valued in more fields than political

science. Ms. Dia said I could work for politicians, government agencies or think-tanks, or write grant proposals for private interests, or op-ed pieces and columns for newspapers. I may not have a career path laid out for me, but I have some interesting options.

So I definitely consider this practicum a good experience for me, even if it didn't go the way I expected, and even if my candidate lost. I could be gloomy and talk about how all my work was for nothing, but I remember when Mrs. Sherrell mentioned that she was at a campaign stop talking about Israel, and was able to encourage someone that peace was still possible since both sides had officially agreed to a two-state solution – a fact that came directly out of my research. So at the very least I worked to make the world a little less ignorant and a little better-informed.

One Final Note to Grad Students

I asked Ms. Dia if she had any advice for graduate students who might be interested in working as a policy advisor. Her immediate recommendation was to get an internship, in a position related to a topic you feel interested in or passionate about, and find what is expected from that position. She said a good policy advisor is able to demonstrate a methodology behind his or her craft, and evaluate the positions related to an issue and find what is feasible and advisable. Finally, students should keep in mind that the roles they find themselves in may differ from their expectations, but are also subject to change.

I have nothing to add to this but my agreement.

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