

## From studying EC455 to a summer internship at the OECD

There is something thrilling about pressing enter on your computer keyboard and waiting that quarter-second to see whether the regression command you entered into the STATA software has produced the three coveted asterisks. The three coveted asterisks which signify whether your results are statistically significant – or in other words, meaningful. These three asterisks mean that whatever idea you had in your mind about how the world “works” could actually be supported with data. How did I come to the point to find this statistical exercise so thrilling?

It began with one of the compulsory first-year Master of Public Administration (MPA) programme courses, **EC455: Quantitative Approaches and Policy Analysis**. The objective of this course is to **teach skills related to quantitative analysis of public policies through regression based evaluation methods**. In the Lent term, we were assigned a project that deviated from the problem sets we were usually given (where data was already cleaned, the policy questions already defined and the suitable analytical technique already recommended to us).

This time we were tasked to do real world data analysis using **World Bank Enterprise Surveys** data on 125,000 firms in 139 countries. The challenge seemed simple: ask a question and use the data to see whether you could answer it using the quantitative techniques acquired over the course of the year. Yet, the assignment seemed like a daunting task. It was rather a scary feeling to stare at hundreds and thousands of numbers and try to find a way to tell a story with the available data.

I took this opportunity to ask a question I was curious to know the answer to – the role of international organisations and the effect of their policy recommendations on countries. Specifically, I analysed how membership in the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** impacted the level of corruption and the perception of corruption in Estonia, a post-Soviet Baltic country. After conducting the analysis in STATA and writing the policy memo, I wanted to further explore whether my analysis was true.



This led me to seek an internship at the OECD in the **Public Sector Integrity Division** that works on fighting corruption in the public sector mainly through preventive measures. I secured the internship by contacting the Division directly to express my interest. I also attended the **2016**

**OECD Integrity Forum** to learn more about the Division's work. In my interview, I had the opportunity to highlight my motivation for why I wanted to work with the Division and to demonstrate the relevant skills I could contribute, among them the quantitative skills I built over the year through the EC455 course.

My experience at the OECD working on integrity and anti-corruption projects has been valuable for many reasons, but there are two aspects I would particularly like to highlight.

**Firstly**, I was able to see how an international organization has an impact on its member countries when it comes to policy recommendations related to corruption issues. This goes back to the thrill I mentioned in conducting data analysis in the classroom. It prepares you for the real world. Just think – one assignment led to interning with an international organization where the importance of evidence-based policies is crucial.

**Secondly**, through working on projects focused on preventing corruption in the public sector, I have come to learn even more about public administration, in a way that is more direct and personal. The MPA programme has many strengths, one example being the EC455 econometrics course. Yet when it comes to understanding the intricacies behind public administration, real-world experience is invaluable. This is the second thrilling aspect – what we do at the MPA drives us to make our education more practical, relevant and applicable. It started with the EC455 policy memo, but it will go further.

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This blog post was written by a second year MPA student who wished to remain anonymous.

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