Tackling Real World Policy Issues
The Practicum Experience

The Ford Dorsey Program in International Policy Studies (IPS) trains the next generation of policy experts and leaders who will influence policy in foreign affairs, trade, security, energy, global health, and political and economic development.

At the core of IPS is Stanford’s exceptional faculty and an interdisciplinary approach through which our master’s students develop a broad range and depth of knowledge. Students work closely with scholars from Stanford’s global research centers, in particular the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI).

A key element of the IPS experience is the Practicum, a two-quarter capstone course in which students work in teams to conduct policy analyses for real-world client organizations. Students undertake the Practicum during Autumn and Winter Quarters of the second year of the program. With guidance from the client and Stanford faculty, each student team will produce an analysis of an issue faced by the client and policy options to address it.

Our students’ work on their Practicum projects has been featured in international media, like the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and CNN.

“...The chance to tackle complex, real world policy problems and propose workable solutions is invaluable for our students as they prepare for their careers. It’s one more way that our program bridges theory and practice.”

-Kathryn Stoner
IPS Director & Senior Fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

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The Client Experience

We invite potential clients to contact IPS to discuss the feasibility of turning a policy issue or problem into a formal Practicum project. Each year IPS selects approximately six projects, which are finalized during August. IPS will work with each client to develop a customized project, offering a service to the client as well as a learning experience for the students.

During the 20-week course, which begins in late September and finishes in mid-March, clients meet with their student team at regular intervals to discuss the project and provide feedback to ensure that the team’s work meets client needs. Client meetings are generally held via conference call or internet video (e.g., Skype). Additionally, each team will be guided by a Stanford faculty member, or in most cases, multiple faculty members.

Each client will receive a progress report at the mid-point as well as a final professional report and final presentation. Practicum deliverables may be published or publicized depending on subject matter, findings, and client needs. In addition to the project work, past groups of students have been invited to speak at conferences and testify before legislative bodies. In certain instances students have been hired by their project clients after graduation to continue working on the Practicum findings.

Previous IPS Practicum reports are available at http://ips.stanford.edu/node/99.

The Course

The IPS Practicum is taught during Autumn and Winter Quarters by Dr. Kathryn Stoner, IPS Faculty Director, Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and Faculty Fellow at the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law.

Practicum Timeline

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<th>Project Development</th>
<th>April - August (rolling development period)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Practicum Course Start Date</td>
<td>Last week in September</td>
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<td>Practicum Final Presentations</td>
<td>Mid-March</td>
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Every day, and all over the world, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), addresses emergencies faced by people who can no longer find protection from their home governments. In 2012, the UNHCR proposed to Stanford University the task of conceiving innovative opportunities for improving the refugee experience. Over the course of the following year, Stanford faculty and students in different disciplines worked with UNHCR to define their needs and identify key issue areas.

Through the Practicum project, our students identified refugee registration and communication, host country relations, and food security as areas where they could provide meaningful innovations to UNHCR’s operations.

As a result of their work, IPS students presented RescueSMS, an online software platform designed to address communication problems between refugees and UNHCR staff. To improve relationships with the host country community, a systematic approach to the development of mutually beneficial spaces, such as a church or market, was proposed. Lastly, the students designed a framework for implementing small-scale mobile farming that could meet the food security needs of the refugee communities.

Past Practicum Projects

2013

- Financial Effects from Natural Disasters on Sovereign Governments
- World Bank
- Philippines: Tropical Cyclones and Insurgency
- Empirical Studies of Conflict
- Airport Procurement in South Korea
- Republic of South Korea
- Bringing Solar and Motorcycle Mobile Phone Chargers to Southeast Asian
- Consumer Energy Markets
- Silicon Valley Technology Partners

2014

- Assessing the MCC Signaling Effect: Investment beyond the Compact
- Millennium Challenge Corporation
- Combating Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: An Integrated Strategy
- Six Maritime
- Overcoming Short-Term Behavior in Long-Term Institutional Investors
- OECD
- Risks in the U.S. Retail Financial Ecosystem
- Sandia National Labs
- Urban Reforms in Mexico: Implementation Challenges and Strategies
- Centric Mario Molina

2013

- Private Sector Involvement in Cross-Border Electricity Interconnections: US and Mexico
- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Energy Resources
- Rethinking and Deploying the U.S. Army in Light of the Asian “Pivot”
- United States Army
- Evaluating the Efficacy of International Aid: Rethinking Absorptive Capacity
- Center for Strategic and International Studies
- Redesigning Refugee Communities
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Redesigning Refugee Communities (2013)
The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees

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