Internship Reflection Paper

During the summer, I started an internship at the Côte d’Ivoire’s Embassy in Washington D.C. from June 13th to July 13th, 2018. In concordance with this internship, I have completed a 1 hour-credit with the department of Political Science – History – Philosophy at Longwood University. I have had the great chance to meet with important diplomatic decision makers of my home country working hands in hands with their partners in the US including the State Department. This report will serve as a detailed description of my experience during this internship.

Since its Independence in 1960, Côte d’Ivoire has always held good diplomatic relations with the United States based on trade and mutual development. My internship period coincided with several panel and forums themed on commerce where the presence of a delegation from the Embassy was constantly required. I started the internship a little earlier but, because of these forums, the delegation was on constant movement, and I officially started the internship on June 13th. At first, I did not receive a lot of tasks to do. Just a couple of translation briefings of various document and basic errands inside the building. I was a little disappointed by this inactivity period and I signaled it to the head of student department. I was then sent to the economics department where I served as a quasi-personal assistant for Mr. Assi. He introduced me to the Embassy workforce and detailed his workload. I only spent roughly a week with him as he was going back to Côte d’Ivoire to assist the minister of economy there. However, while working with him, I got to know the broad diplomatic agenda of my country. He told me that part of their mission was one, to reassure all the friends of Côte d'Ivoire about the willingness of the new Ivorian authorities to renew and revive cooperation relations with them. Secondly, Ivorian diplomats wanted to raise awareness among private and public investors about the flourishing business opportunities and, above all, about Côte d'Ivoire's ability to rebound sustainably especially after the terrible crisis of 2011. It is with this latter vision that I briefed him about several companies and interest groups that wanted to meet with the Embassy. One of them was The BSA Alliance, they were planning to introduce their Cybersecurity policy framework to Embassy with the intent of lobbying for those policies to be implemented in Ivory Coast. I was charged to make a thorough research of the topic and deliver a briefing to Mr. Assi.

When Mr. Assi travelled, I got reassign to be under the responsibility of Mr. Tadet (still in the economics department). At first, he didn’t delegate me a lot of tasks. So, I was only left with minor tasks like translating documents and various errands inside the office. I took this opportunity to officially introduce myself to the rest of the staff working at the embassy and to offer them my services if they needed it. It is during this time that I did some work for Mr. Mahan Paul. What started off as simple computer fix, became the beginning of several mini researches I accomplished for him. Among others, I did an intensive research on Blue Star Strategy, an international interest group invested (in this case) in lobbying our government in regard to the next WHO convention on Tobacco this fall. Indeed, they wanted to meet with the embassy to, I believe, evaluate our engagement (Cote d’Ivoire’s) to continue reforms on this matter like we promised through our signature of the 2003 WHO FCTC treaty. I really did enjoy my interaction with Mr. Mahan because he spoke English and also because he seemed to have been working there longer than most. He also asked me to conduct a comparative report on the US and Ivory Coast’s agricultural output. This latter research allowed me to discover much more about economic aspects of both countries.

Then, came the period when Mr. Tadet requested my assistance. At the time, I was still doing errands for him, but as he realized my fluency in English, I became his full-time assistant. From setting up his meetings to making brief reports (*Compte rendu*) of the few board meetings I attended. He asked me to prepare oral briefings of the news headlines every day to assess my speaking abilities, be informed of any major news coming from the current U.S. administration, and describing the current geopolitical environment. This was probably the most difficult thing for me to do as I had to translate and explain, on real time in front of him, the information I gathered the night before (Except for weekends where I could write it down before). It is also then that I realized my French speaking skills were getting eclipsed by English expressions and syntaxes. With Mr. Tadet, everything seemed unpredictable (I couldn’t if it was done purposefully) and I had to always to be ready to adequately conduct various tasks. However, during what I have coined “AGOA Week”, I experienced real time diplomatic interactions and planning. Indeed, every two years the U.S. hosts delegations of African countries to discuss economic issues as stated by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of 2000. This year our delegation was invited to Co-chair a panel about Maximizing Trade through Improved Workforce Development and Labor Rights. At that time, Mr. Assi was back from his trip. So, he joined Mr. Tadet and two other officials to represent the Country. I did various researches and even suggested some proposals (CSR policies from model U.N.); I also raised attention on an ongoing FART Act introduced in Congress by the President in order to hold full authority over trade policies. I could even hear them arguing about the priority of some proposals over others from my office. Despite being my last week with them, I enjoyed it the most since I then felt more integrated into “important” tasks of the Embassy; even newer interns thought I worked there permanently.

Overall, my internship at the Embassy was a great and enriching learning experience for me as I gained the practical skills prerequisite for a diplomatic career. I do believe this relatively short period has helped improve my knowledge of the diplomatic world even more. While I will continue to learn and progress, the experienced learned and the connections I made during this internship will serve me as a stepping stone for the rest of my career.