LACIS Internship Report

As part of a fall 2007 Internship program, I am doing research at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in their Washington, D.C. office. Located in the business district, just a few blocks from the World Bank and IMF, this office is small with only eight full-time employees. There are three other interns – one from Germany, one from Peru, and the other from the Netherlands. We are each paired with someone in the office, working on different topics: corporate social responsibility, trade relationships, energy and climate change, and capital flows.

The concentration to my research has been on capital flows, analyzing the relationship between the U.S. economy and Latin America. I am focusing on private finance in emerging markets, analyzing debt issuances, volatility in bond markets, and economic forecasts. The experiences of data collection and analysis have been very valuable. I am creating and manipulating spreadsheets, tables, and figures with economic data as well as maintaining statistical databases on capital flows. Some of the documents I worked on were the Quarterly Capital Flows Report that the office publishes, a special report called “Confusion and Uncertainty in the Credit Markets” in August 2007, and quarterly reports on the U.S. economic outlook.

I have also been providing support to senior staff through research, editing, and Spanish-English translation. The United Nations ECLAC has a specific format for all documents that are published within their organization and so part of my job was to make sure that the documents our office was working on followed the general guidelines. The office operates in Spanish, as the majority of ECLAC’s offices are located in Latin America. I have had to translate presentations, papers, and charts from both Spanish to English and vice-versus. Since all of the full time staff is from Latin America, another unofficial duty has been to provide native English-language grammatical help.

One of the highlights of the fall was a video conference with Ban Ki-Moon, Michelle Bachelet of Chile, and Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapata of Spain. It was broadcasted to our office
from the Santiago, Chile office and they discussed globalization and development in the region. After the official roundtable discussion, Ban Ki-Moon addressed those of us at ECLAC offices about his plans to internally restructure the United Nations and provide more accountability at the highest levels of the organization. I also had the privilege of attending the International Forum on Remittances, held by the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. This was a great two-day conference held at the IDB where they released a comprehensive world map of remittance flows. I had done a senior project on remittances and capital flows in Nicaragua and found the conference very interesting. There was a lot of discussion about technological innovation (like banking via cell phones in developing countries).

My training from the Latin American Studies program at the UW was essential to the success of my internship. Having an interdisciplinary approach to my undergraduate studies prepared me for the ‘real world’. The fact that I have studied Latin American history, politics, economics, social issues, and the Spanish language all together place me in a good position to be aware of the many dimensions of development issues. The only area that I wish I had more training in is Spanish, but only because many of the language classes offered at the UW don’t have a strong conversational or speaking component. As a triple major (in Economics and International Studies as well) I can honestly say that the Latin American studies program is a great success. It was the program where I felt I got the most comprehensive education and felt a part of a smaller community on the UW Campus. I am very grateful for the opportunity to intern at ECLAC and it would not have been economically feasible for me without the help of the LACIS Internship Grant.