Throughout the 2-month period of the summer internship, WIT invited a number of speakers with different academic and professional backgrounds to talk to the interns and share with them their expertise. The interns had the opportunity to discover new facts, knowledge, and interests presented by experts in various fields.

The Ecology Enquirer Speaker’s Program serves as a brief description of this learning experience. In this issue, readers will find not only summaries of the content of each speech, but also the impacts made by the speakers on our internship experience. This unique opportunity provided by WIT undoubtedly broadened our knowledge horizon and cleared up misconceptions we might have had.

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About the speaker:

Ms. Tania Valerie Raguz is the current First Secretary at the Mission of Croatia and an active participant in the Committee of Sustainable Development (CSD) discussions. Her candid responses put our nerves at ease, while churning up our ambition and intellect toward bettering our international community.

Ms. Raguz started her diplomatic career as a human rights lawyer. Once Croatia received its independence in 1991, a demand for representatives with human rights backgrounds rose at the UN. Within the independent country, the issue of ensuring peace and security was an utmost concern. With a combination of good timing and great wit, Tania made her way into the Croatian government and eventually into the realm of diplomacy.

However, she also made it clear that diplomats themselves are not experts. Rather, they project different questions to experts and scholars in dynamic areas, then compile and analyze their feedback. With all the information Ms. Raguz must gather, her workload remains heavy. Diplomatic status is an honoring title, but it comes with a price. As the only representative from the Mission of Croatia to the United Nations, her daily schedule is packed. She does not follow the typical 9-5 schedule, but rather works until she completes her country's daily mission.

Ms. Raguz found it very disappointing that a consensus could not be reached at CSD-19. However, she looks forward to RIO+20 where a focused political document will be produced. The means of implementation (MOIs) within UN policy-making resides in a gray area. For RIO+20, Ms. Raguz implores that, in order for change to occur, we must have the guts to see it through, for implementation is based on political will. The two themes of RIO+20 are the Green Economy and International Governance. There have been many discussions on the Green Economy, but the issue of International Governance has yet to be touched upon. Ms. Raguz leaves us with some food for thought, why is it that International Governance has not been previously discussed?

Our meeting with Ms. Tania Raguz was both engaging and thoughtful. Having the opportunity to ask a diplomat any question, while receiving a candid answer, put the United Nations, as an international agency, into perspective. The United Nations, after all, is a relatively new institution. Although there may be a lot of rhetoric and political jargon at formal meetings, I understand that everyone there is striving for a similar goal — to see our planet, with its numerous cultures and communities, cooperating toward a more peaceful international society.

By SHUHAN HU
About the speaker:

Ms. Daniella Burgi-Palomino graduated in 2007 from Tufts University with a Bachelor of Arts, double major in International Relations and History and a minor in Latin American Studies. While completing her undergraduate degree, Daniella interned for World Information Transfer (WIT) in the summers of 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Following her graduation from Tufts, Daniella worked at Oxfam America as US Regional Office Worker and Immigrant Rights Initiative Intern and later as a Program Associate for the Regional Office of Oxfam America in Boston. Daniella received a Fulbright scholarship for the 2010-2011 academic year to study anthropology in Mexico and to complete a project on the effects of migration on the female-led households that are left behind in migrant sending communities. Daniella now works in Mexico City for Fundación Avina as the Coordinator for an inter-foundation alliance on migration, which pursues migration-related programs in Mexico and Central America.

Daniella credits WIT internship experience as having exposed her not only to the humanitarian and development world of the United Nations (UN), but also to the dynamics of NGOs worldwide. It provided her with some invaluable experiences and memories that would last her a lifetime. Apart from gaining access to different conferences and high level meetings at the UN headquarters, Daniella had the opportunity to meet and network with a variety of people including diplomats, government officials from all over the world, other non profit organizations, and other interns. She mostly values her relationship with other interns who shared their experiences with her.

As a recent graduate, having been exposed to International Non-Governmental Organizations and the UN, I have learned that the career options in the field are limitless; the ideas to pursue are numerous and deciding on which career path to follow can be daunting. I therefore asked Daniella if she had a career goal in mind during her time with WIT. I learned from Daniella that she developed her specific goal as she moved up the ladder in her career. Daniella answered that after having become interested in the ways in which NGOs work within the UN and in other spheres, one experience led to another to bring her to her current position. She stressed taking time to discover oneself, understanding one's strengths and interests and constantly networking to recognize available opportunities in the field.

By EVELYNE OJWANG
About the speaker:

Ambassador Yuriy Sergeyev was appointed the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations in 2007. He has previously served as an ambassador to France, Greece and Albania, and as Permanent Representative to UNESCO. Prior to that, he was the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Ukraine, during which he dealt with land border issues with Russia.

The speech started with a remark that history gives a nation the power to speak of sensitive issues. That the Chornobyl incident allowed Ukraine to voice out strongly on nuclear safety issues with states that insist on their unregulated nuclear development programs is a great example of the power of history. Nonetheless, Mr. Sergeyev recognized the positive impacts, both political and economic, that nuclear power has brought to various countries. The suggested way to safely develop nuclear power echoes with WIT’s mission – to encourage international exchange of knowledge, so as to prevent mistakes that happened in the past.

Regarding food safety, Mr. Sergeyev delved into the greater topic of sustainable development in the global context. Practicality was a major theme in his speech and sustainable development must start on pragmatic grounds, with regards to each country’s specific territorial area. For example, the energy problem in the African Sahel region cannot be solved by developing nuclear energy, but by starting from much cheaper alternatives such as solar power.

Another important principle of sustainable development is that it must be considered in terms of a system or a package. Education cannot be developed focusing only on the few disciplines required for the time being, risking a loss of talents in other fields, as seen during the early days of Ukrainian independence. The public health system is also more than a measure of doctors per capita, and includes many other factors as remote as availability of sports facilities (as a means of disease prevention). Also, without social improvement, there can be no economic development, which is in itself also a large package of issues, ranging from energy security to climate change.

On other issues, Mr. Sergeyev also noted how the G-20 presented a new way of governance, and that the coming Climate Change summit in Durban, South Africa will be an indicator of the extent to which the G-20 will play a role as a global policy-maker. He also made an observation on various factors behind regional integration, and the burden of obligations countries face when they choose to integrate. Mr Sergeyev also addressed the challenges and solutions to the AIDS problem in Ukraine, noting the progress that Ukraine has made in recent years.

Throughout the session, Mr. Sergeyev showed a great sense of practicality and logic, which could not be attained without the ample and highly relevant historical examples he gave. He truly demonstrated the power of history as a treasure chest for solving today’s problems.

By GEOFFREY YEUNG
“The key point we must bear in mind is the global order, which was primarily made up of state power based upon historical legacy before the UN came into existence. What is noteworthy today is the rising dynamics of international communities with new parties, including civil society, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations.”

As Ambassador Kuchinsky revealed, the great powers’ shared effort to avoid major conflicts, after two miserable world wars during the first half of the 20th century, gave birth to the United Nations in the post-WWII era. The formation of the UN Charter represents the human-rights-based organization’s steadfast embracing of its values and goals, which have led the world for decades. The flexibility and generality of the charter’s articles reflect the founding fathers’ attempt to reach a consensus. From 35 member states to today’s 193 country seats, the UN has undergone different challenges from its initial establishment until the Cold War world order. Today, the legitimacy and responsiveness of the UN, along with the representation and universality of the Security Council, are attributes that we need to ensure. The key point we must bear in mind is the global order, which was primarily made up of state power based upon historical legacy before the UN came into existence. What is noteworthy today is the rising dynamics of international communities with new parties, including civil society, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations.

I found it most impressive when Ambassador Kuchinsky’s first-hand experience was presented with vivid details from a perspective of historical sequence that reflected the UN’s growth. He showed us the rationale and path-dependence of this huge international organization and emphasized that everything contributing to the United Nations’ existence makes it an irreplaceable world organization.

By YINGCI SUN
Ms. Federica Pietracci is a Sustainable Development Officer in the Division for Sustainable Development within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA). Currently, UN-DESA is responsible for leading inter-agency coordination for the planning and implementation of preparatory meetings for RIO+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

“As a WIT Intern, I was able to attend the Conference on Sustainable Development 19, the predecessor to next year’s Rio+20 Conference. Although the conference takes place for approximately two full weeks, this is not nearly enough time to create, discuss, and implement strategies for sustainable development and the implementation of a global Green Economy.”

Besides taking a leading role in the preliminary discussions surrounding Rio+20, the Division for Sustainable Development also monitors and provides expert advice and personnel for existing sustainable development programs through cooperation with Member States. By providing voluntary oversight, UN-DESA can foster the use of new technology, thus increasing the capacity of the program. UN-DESA also aids in the ability of civil society to participate in the Rio+20 discussions by encouraging dialogues with NGOs and major global stakeholders.

As a WIT Intern, I was able to attend the Conference on Sustainable Development 19, the predecessor to next year’s Rio+20 Conference. Although the conference takes place for approximately two full weeks, this is not nearly enough time to create, discuss, and implement strategies for sustainable development and the implementation of a global Green Economy. The Secretariat members within the Division for Sustainable Development in UN-DESA prepare a “Draft Zero” nearly a year in advance of the actual conference. It is this draft document that is debated on an informal weekly basis by the diplomats that will ultimately provide the final edits to a conference document in June of 2012. This preparatory work allows for governments to discuss and debate the items of most importance to them, while keeping in mind that these agreements should be implemented at a national level. I understood that a substantial amount of work went into preparing draft documents, but Ms. Pietracci illustrated just how important this foundational step really is.

By CHRISTOPHER LONGMAN
“There are positive contributions sunlight makes to society, such as warmth, photosynthesis, the killing of pathogens, sight, mood elevation and vitamin D. However, these advantages of sunlight were also compared with the extreme negative events they cause: skin damage, skin cancer and cataracts.”

Dr. Myskowski’s lesson included a presentation of the different types of radiation humans are exposed to. These consisted of recreational, therapeutic and natural (solar) Ultraviolet radiation, as well as therapeutic and accidental Ionizing radiation. There are positive contributions sunlight makes to society, such as warmth, photosynthesis, the killing of pathogens, sight, mood elevation and vitamin D. However, these advantages of sunlight were also compared with the extreme negative events they cause: skin damage, skin cancer and cataracts. Dr. Myskowski briefly discussed the dynamic types of UV rays and their chronic consequences when exposed to the skin, including photo-aging and skin cancer. Their acute effects are sunburn, immediate pigment darkening and tan. Pertaining to skin cancer, Dr. Patricia Myskowski helped us discover that there were 114,900 Malignant Melanoma, 300,000 Squamous Cell Carcinoma and 1,000,000 Basal Cell Carcinoma cases in 2009. These numbers are significantly astonishing.

I found it particularly interesting to learn about the shared misconception that wrinkles depend on the amount of oils in one’s skin. The actual truth, which Dr. Myskowski pointed out, is that wrinkles are almost directly connected to the sun and the protection of one’s pigment. I was also intrigued when I found out that there is “no such thing as a healthy tan”. It is crucial to apply and reapply sunscreen on reoccurring intervals. Another new, important piece of advice is to not go out into the sun between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. As an individual who spends a lot of time by the pool and at the beach in the summer, I’ve promised myself to be much more careful after meeting Dr. Patricia Myskowski.

By SUZY HALLAK
Ms. Sayagh shared her working experience in different fields, including private firms and commissions for which she has worked in the United Nations (UN). She talked about the challenges she encountered throughout her 25-year career in the UN. She emphasized that the working culture of the UN has followed the spirit of democracy, despite occasional shortcomings. Adhering to the advocacy of human rights, the UN has established strict procedures to ensure that individual voice and opinions of smaller countries are heard and acknowledged. This, however, may result in a bureaucratic working manner. In conclusion, Ms. Sayagh encouraged us to participate in the Young Professionals Program as a way to start our career at the UN. The Young Professionals Program would definitely contribute to our competence and passion to serve the world.

By sharing her experience, Ms. Sayagh greatly broadened my knowledge of the UN's work and her views on the difficulties that the UN is now facing. The structure of the UN makes it possible for every country to raise their voice and participate in different issues. At the same time, the diverse cultural and political backgrounds of the member countries might also cause the discussed resolutions to become mere words. As a result, implementation is still an issue that requires a substantial amount of the UN's effort. However, Ms. Sayagh has stressed that the UN has played an important role in solving many disputes and problems around the world. In fact, there are many specialized agencies that have devoted themselves to helping people in need. The UN also encourages cooperation among agencies by providing a more flexible organizational structure, which results in better outcomes. Ms. Sayagh's talk gave me an optimistic view of the UN and encouraged me to contribute to the UN's mission of building a better world.

By EDDIE NG HON FAI
Dr. Mark Robson is currently the Dean of Agricultural Program and Urban Programs at Rutgers University — School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. Having an expertise in entomology and environmental and occupational health, Dr. Robson has done a number of research projects in South East Asia to help raise awareness about health risks and how to avoid them. At World Information Transfer, he is a member of the Board of Science Advisors.

“As an individual with a great sense of humor, Dr. Robson ‘tickled’ our ‘laughing nerves’ by sharing his experiences working in Thailand, from ‘special’ cuisines to cultural clashes. I was amazed at Dr. Robson’s ability to relate to each of the interns despite our diverse cultural backgrounds, whether it be Vietnam, China, Kenya or the United States.”

Dr. Robson’s presentation introduced us to some of his projects conducted in Thailand. The population living in the rural areas of Thailand face regular contact with toxicity from working on their farmland or using water not adequately inspected. Pesticide residues, for example, when in close contact with the skin, can cause serious health risks such as melanoma, a fatal type of skin cancer. Another example is Arsenic, a poisonous element found in drinking water from shallow wells in rural Thailand. Dr. Robson’s projects took a step further than simply looking at the numbers of individuals negatively affected by pesticides. They were designed in such a way that examined factors that led to the high exposure to pesticide residues. Once they found the root of the problems, Dr. Robson, along with his fellow scientists, could find prevention methods and provide consultation to the population at risk.

Dr Robson was one of the best speakers I have ever encountered. Informational as it was, his hour-long presentation still captivated 100% of my attention. As an individual with a great sense of humor, Dr. Robson “tickled” our “laughing nerves” by sharing his experiences working in Thailand, from “special” cuisines to cultural clashes. I was amazed at Dr. Robson’s ability to relate to each of the interns despite our diverse cultural backgrounds, whether it be Vietnam, China, Kenya or the United States. At the end of his talk, Dr. Robson encouraged us to reach out to communities such as those in Central Thailand to help young people like us better their living conditions.

By MINH CAO
Gallery

With Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Nations Yuriy Sergeyev

With Former Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Nations Valeriy Kuchinsky
With Ms. Federica Pietracci and her colleague

With Dr. Patricia Myskowski
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Bottom left to right: Dr. Claudia Strauss, Former Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Nations Valeriy Kuchinsky, Dr. Christine Durbak.

Editors: Minh Cao Suzy Hallak
Contributors: Eddie Ng Hon Fai Shuhan Hu Hamdia Ibrahim Christopher Longman Evelyne Ojwang Yingci Sun Geoffrey Yeung

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