Policy Research and Analysis

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN THINK TANKS AND ACADEMIA

Description of Field

In Washington, DC and throughout the country, many think tanks and research organizations focus on foreign policy and international issues. These organizations are often supported by contracts from the government, foundations, private businesses, and endowments. Think tanks, in the most traditional sense, are seen as non-partisan organizations that employ interdisciplinary approaches to finding long-term solutions to policy-related issues.

Research organizations vary in perspective and focus: some may be viewed more as advocacy groups which promote a particular agenda, while others may resemble private sector consulting organizations or academic institutions. In addition to their research efforts, many research institutes produce major publications or organize professional conferences, lectures, and policy forums. Think tank scholars testify before congressional committees, submit articles to major newspapers, and may serve on government task forces.

Career Paths

The types of positions available vary considerably between organizations and are very much dependent upon one’s level of education. In addition to research-related positions, which usually require an MA or PhD and specialized expertise, many organizations employ interns and individuals with BA and MA degrees for a range of administrative positions. Entry-level positions for individuals with MA degrees include:

Program Manager/Assistant – Coordinates and handles logistics for major program events, meetings, conferences, and international visits. Manages a range of program support functions, including communications and publication work.

Research Assistant – Provides research support to fellows and senior associates, drafts documents, manages database records, handles correspondence, and provides general administrative support.

Research Associate – Develops and implements research plans, prepares funding proposals, analyzes data, and synthesizes, publishes, and presents findings to various audiences.
Advancement into senior positions usually requires education at the PhD level and/or extensive specialized expertise, so it is common to see those in junior level positions leaving after two or three years to pursue higher education and professional opportunities in academia, government, private corporations, and consulting firms.

**Demand**

In response to changing world affairs, public interests, funding, and budgetary constraints, many foreign policy research organizations are re-examining their focus. Entry-level positions remain highly competitive and success in securing a post requires planning and persistence. Most think tanks and research institutes do have formal internship programs and many look first to current and former interns to fill new positions. Not only are interns in a position to hear about openings before they are advertised externally, but they also frequently have had prior occasion to demonstrate their specialized knowledge, skills, and dedication.

**Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field**

Higher education, at the masters or PhD level, and experience in the field is generally required for substantive research positions. Strong communication skills, both written and oral, are essential. One must be able to write concise briefing reports as well as longer, academic works. Presentation skills are also important, as is comfort in addressing an audience of experts. Competitive candidates will also be able to demonstrate proficiency in foreign languages and have a solid command of word processing and spreadsheet applications and the Internet. Many positions require solid quantitative skills and knowledge of statistical packages.

**Sample Group of Employers**

Brookings Institution - [http://www.brookings.edu/](http://www.brookings.edu/)


Hoover Institute, Stanford University - [http://www-hoover.stanford.edu/](http://www-hoover.stanford.edu/)

Future Challenges of the Profession

Some professionals in the field predict that the information explosion caused by the Internet is increasing the demand for expert analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of information. Others, however, express concern that limited funding sources may hinder think tanks in the fulfillment of their mission to provide objective policy-relevant knowledge. Responding to the world’s changing political and economic situations and to the interests of the public, some think tanks have already broadened their range of expertise and diversified their focus.

Resources for Additional Information

Internet Resources

National Institute for Research Advancement’s index of research organizations by country
- http://www.nira.or.jp/past/ice/index.html

Links to Research and Educational Institutes on the CATO Institute website -
http://www.cato.org/links/links.html

Index and description of a selection of think tanks on the Source Watch website

Publications


* Careers in International Affairs, Edited by Maria Pinto Carland and Candance Faber, Georgetown University Press, 2008.


CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, LOBBYING, AND CAMPAIGNING

Description of Field

Government relations, also known as lobbying, consists of individuals and organizations engaged in promoting the interests of their employers or clients to the government. Their activities involve monitoring legislative and executive activities to influence policy, legislation, regulations, or negotiations on behalf of governments, industries, specific companies, interest groups, or constituencies. In Washington, DC, lobbying is regulated by law, calling for the disclosure by lobbyists of organizations or clients that they represent. This is done through the LDA (Lobbying Disclosure Act) and FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act).

In addition, lobbying may also be carried out by PACs (Political Action Committees) that represent specific constituencies. People may simply represent themselves on stated issues as well. Last, there is a subdivision within the Executive Branch Legislative Offices that represents various departments and agencies of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government, responsible for influencing the Congressional Branch on legislative affairs.

Career Paths

Most of those seeking careers in lobbying begin with volunteer work on political campaigns for elected public officials, or in legislative staffs on Capitol Hill, State Houses, or governmental agencies. After
acquiring such experience, graduates can often move into the mid-level of organizations; without such experience, graduates will typically begin in the research area or in roles that support more senior staff.

Moving in and out of government, sometimes known as the “revolving door,” usually increases a person’s marketability in both the public and private sector. There are few permanently established career paths in lobbying, as these positions are influenced by the ebb and flow of politics and the current opportunities available in the government. One possible career path may include starting as a research assistant, with that person eventually becoming an analyst or manager within a lobbying organization, and then moving to work for the staff of an elected official or government agency.

Typical entry-level job titles include issues analyst, research analyst, and research assistant or associate. Salaries vary based on experience and professional contacts, keeping in mind that private sector companies typically pay more than non-profit and public interest organizations.

**Demand**

The lobbying industry is highly competitive; without experience or contacts graduates must be willing to start at the entry level. There is a wide range of issues, both international and domestic, that draws people to the field. A foreign government, a company with international trade concerns, or an advocacy group working on human rights may all call for representation by a lobbyist. Vacancies are rarely posted since many positions are filled by networking and referral.

**Qualifications Necessary to Enter Field**

Government experience is a highly regarded qualification. Strong communications skills, both written and oral, are essential as well. Those seeking to work in government relations must also have a comprehensive understanding of organizational structure and legislative procedures. In addition, excellent people skills, high energy, flexibility, and a willingness to work long hours are also important, as is the ability to compromise.

Students interested in lobbying careers must network and should consider volunteering on political campaigns or interning with a government agency. The contacts developed through volunteer work, internships, and experience in analyzing issues and understanding government processes can be invaluable. A graduate degree in law or in public affairs/public policy is often helpful for advancement in the field.

**Sample Group of Employers**
According to the Washington Post, the number of registered lobbyists in Washington has more than doubled since 2000 to more than 34,750. Employers consist of public relations consultants, law firms, corporate lobbying agents, public interest organizations, trade and professional associations, political action committees, and political parties. A sample listing follows:

**Public Relations Consultants**


**Law Firms**


**Public Interest Organizations**


The Brady Campaign - [http://www.bradycampaign.org/](http://www.bradycampaign.org/)


**Trade & Professional Organizations**


**Political Parties**

Democratic National Committee - [http://www.democrats.org/](http://www.democrats.org/)


**Future Challenges of the Profession**
As issues facing government become more numerous and complicated, lobbyists increasingly become more important and prevalent. While lobbyists serve as advocates for the interests of their employers or clients, they also provide information to elected officials and staff that may be useful in the decision process.

Lobbying in Washington, DC is the most visible, but lobbying at the state level as well as lobbying foreign governments and agencies is growing. It should be noted that currently regulations restrict the lobbying activities of former US government officials.

**Resources for Additional Information**

**Associations**

American League of Lobbyists (ALL) - [http://www.alldc.org](http://www.alldc.org)

**Internet Resources**


Center for Policy Alternatives - [http://www.stateaction.org](http://www.stateaction.org)

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest - [http://www.clpi.org/](http://www.clpi.org/)


**Publications**


CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS

Description of the Field

The term “political risk” refers to the possibility that investors will lose money or make less money than expected due to political decisions, conditions, or events occurring in the country or emerging market in which they have invested. Specific problems include government instability, currency inconvertibility, nationalization, and expropriation. In addition, political risk analysis examines social conditions such as crime levels – the number of recent kidnappings, for example – and land rights issues when evaluating the level of risk associated with any investment.
Typically, political risk analysts gather information on an area or a country, determine the causes and sources of any related risks, and forward their findings to those making investment decisions. Analysts may also be asked to prescribe risk management solutions and offer recommendations to clients hoping to invest in a specific area of the world. Although political risk analysis has been developing as a field since the 17th century, it has seen a dramatic increase in importance only in the past 25 years.

While the political risk divisions of large consulting and insurance companies have traditionally been most involved with this field, today’s analysts may find employment with international organizations, smaller financial companies, rating services, energy firms, and online sites specializing in the sale of political risk information. Three departments within most large banks perform political risk analysis: credit, fixed income, and equities. The equity department supports equity research analysts by forecasting key economic variables and may require advanced economic skills, often at a doctoral level.

Those employed in rating agencies, lending institutions, and organizations such as the State Department may be required to make in-depth economic analysis and would be classified as specialists. Analysts with more general knowledge about countries, legal systems, and business practices may find employment with smaller consulting companies that gather and analyze information and then sell their findings to others.

**Career Paths**

Internships are strongly recommended, especially if they will strengthen one’s accounting and financial skills or offer some insight into the political process. Moreover, prior experience is becoming increasingly important in finding employment in certain organizations, such as the World Bank. Requirements appear to be more flexible for employment with smaller companies, particularly those that are Internet-based.

With expanding markets and levels of foreign direct investment increasing, forecasts for jobs in this field seem strong. Additionally, the increasing number and types of firms practicing political risk analysis ensure that this field will be attractive to many different types of people.

**Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field**

Political risk analysts typically hold degrees in business, international relations, political science, economics or related areas but may also have backgrounds in law, intelligence, journalism, or law enforcement. Representation of investigative journalists and former intelligence agents is particularly high in online companies specializing in political risk information. Banking experience is always beneficial.
and may be required for those students hoping to work in a financial company. Although concentrating in an area study will certainly be useful, many analyst positions will focus on more than one area of the world. Successful analysts excel at adapting their knowledge to new and uncertain situations. Excellent research, analysis, and decision making abilities as well as good communicative and writing skills are necessary to succeed in this field. Companies look for well-informed people who may be described as intelligent risk takers.

The ability to decipher a balance sheet, understand a country’s balance of payments, or offer insight into the politics of a particular region will be very useful. Therefore, it is recommended that students interested in pursuing a career in political risk analysis take classes in finance, monetary economics, trade and political science. The latter will be most useful for entry-level positions, while business-related classes will help those pursuing a more specialized track. Specific classes include the following: accounting, corporate finance, private sector project finance, international monetary system, and country risk analysis.

**Sample Group of Employers**

**International/Governmental Organizations**


OPIC - The Overseas Private Investment Corporation - [www.opic.gov/Insurance](http://www.opic.gov/Insurance)

**Private Sector**


Aon Corporation - [http://www.aon.com/default.jsp](http://www.aon.com/default.jsp)


BP Amoco - [www.bpamoco.com](http://www.bpamoco.com)

Business Monitor International - [http://www.businessmonitor.com](http://www.businessmonitor.com)

Chubb - [http://www.chubb.com](http://www.chubb.com)


Control Risks Group - [www.crg.com](http://www.crg.com)

Eurasia Group – www.eurasiagroup.net

Fitch Ratings - http://www.fitchratings.com/index_fitchratings.cfm

J.P. Morgan - www.jpmorgan.com/careers


Maplecroft - http://maplecroft.com/

Marsh – http://marsh.com

Medley Global Advisors - www.medleyadvisors.com

Moody's Investors Services - www.moodyskmv.com

Morgan Stanley Dean Witter - http://www.morganstanley.com/


Profound Online Business Services - http://www.profound.com/

S. J. Rundt & Associates - www.rundtsintelligence.com

Smith Brandon International - www.smithbrandon.com


Stratfor - http://www.stratfor.com/

Zurich - http://www.zurich.com

Resources for Additional Information

Books


Professional Associations

Berneunion - http://www.berneunion.org.uk/

Global Association of Risk Professionals - http://www.garp.org/

Society for Risk Analysis - http://www.sra.org/

**Internet Resources**

Global Risk Affairs - http://www.globalriskaffairs.com/

Marvin Zonis - http://www.marvinzonis.com

PRS Group - http://www.prsgroup.com/

Risk World – http://riskworld.com