Mentorship for Students at UC Berkeley

The Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA) is the University of California’s premiere center for research on global development. We are focused on improving the results of large-scale social and economic programs throughout the world. We seek to train the next generation of development innovators who will conduct and apply rigorous research to improve development outcomes. As part of this effort, CEGA has launched an Undergraduate & Master’s Advising Program to support students from all departments interested in working in international development.

Determine your career path in development

Function: Where do you want to work in the development space?

RESEARCH. A position in office-based research is likely to be relatively quantitative and require a substantial amount of data work. Universities and think tanks are good places to begin your search for research-based positions, and you might find relevant jobs for Bachelor’s and Master’s graduates at the Brookings Institution or the World Bank. There are also Research Assistant positions available with professors at universities. While you’re here at Berkeley, think about which professors are working on the type of research in which you’d like to be engaged. Get to know their research, and reach out to them. They may have opportunities if you’re proactive. Another option is a domestic research position with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) or the Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). Primary responsibilities for these positions include working with data sets, cleaning and running checks to spot errors, and generally preparing data for analysis. Other responsibilities may include writing survey questions, liaising with the field staff running the evaluation, writing grant proposals, and any other number of tasks. These positions are ideal for those who are seeking research experience before going on to graduate studies.

ADVOCACY. A job in advocacy may require you to write publications that “translate” research into policy lessons, give presentations on research findings, and meet and build relationships with key partners in governments, NGOs, foundations, and multilateral aid agencies. These types of jobs are often with groups such as Human Rights Watch, and will focus primarily on promoting the adoption of certain policies and programs by country governments and other major decision-makers.

FIELDWORK. These positions will require you to live in a developing country, oftentimes in rural areas, in which you will coordinate with and supervise local field staff, collect data through survey administration, and communicate with government officials, donors, and other NGOs. Job openings for field positions in research implementation can be found on CEGA’s website. You should also check out employment opportunities with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), the Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), and the Centre for Micro Finance (CMF).

IMPLEMENTATION. If you’re more interested in management than research, and want to be involved in scaling up and developing successful poverty alleviation programs, you may want to work directly for an NGO or a developing country government. Note that ‘implementation’ can mean any of the following: managing the scale-up of a single intervention (i.e. school-based deworming, chlorine dispensers) in a developing country; working on a portfolio of programs (i.e. in education, gender) for a US or field-based organization; or fundraising and writing grant proposals.

Quick Tip #1

Write your own job description. To help us help you find what you’re looking for, do a bit of brainstorming and web-browsing. Check out job postings and see which interest you – and which don’t. Also, take a look at the bios of people who have your “dream job.” Figure out what you’re good at, what you’d like to be better at, and take those strengths to help you solidify your ideal position.
Location, Location, Location: Where in the world (literally) do you want to work?

It’s important that you have some idea of where you are willing to go for an internship or full-time position. If you want to stay in the U.S., do you have a preference for either coast? In impact evaluation, specifically, domestic jobs with J-PAL are likely to be located at their headquarters in Boston, and those with IPA will be in New Haven, CT or Washington D.C. Positions at CEGA will be located in our office on the UC Berkeley campus. If you want to work in a developing country, then your options expand widely, but you should still think about your comfort zone. Some positions working in impact evaluation, or specifically on RCTs, will be based in the capital city of a country or another large urban center, while others may be based in rural or semi-rural areas. What type of living conditions do you need to be productive?

Sector: What area of development are you most interested in?

Some jobs will be broadly directed within international development and others may be focused on one particular sector of the field. To qualify for a more specific position, it will likely be important to have prior knowledge of or work history within the relevant sector. What focus area are you interested in? Is it education, health, microfinance, or empowering women and girls? What about technology, agriculture, or the environment? Are you interested in multiple sectors? All sectors? Why? Be prepared to answer these questions.

Prepare a Cover Letter and Résumé

Remember when we asked you to write your own job description? Now apply for it. It might be difficult to draft a cover letter and revamp your resume without a specific position in mind, but it will help you and your CEGA advisor identify and highlight your relevant skills and past experiences – and set you on the right path. The process will also help you determine why you are interested in international development. It’s time to go back and do more research: browse employment opportunities at organizations you might like to work for and note the skills and qualifications listed in each job description. You will find that certain qualifications are often required by positions in this field: strict attention to detail, a strong quantitative background, excellent communication skills, etc. Use this information to frame your sample cover letter and resume.

Quick Tip #2

Working on your cover letter? Rather than addressing the letter to “Sir or Madam” or “Hiring Manager,” do a little research and try to find the name of the actual person who will be reviewing your materials, or at least a high level individual you know is working on the project or in the organization. Also, be wary of using “Find and Replace” when sending the same cover letter to multiple employers. You will be surprised at how many times cover letters contain other organizations’ name or obvious non-pertinent information. Nothing turns off employers more than seeing your shortcut methods and lack of attention to detail.

Résumé DOs and DON’Ts

- **DO** highlight your GPA and any honors or awards you’ve received.
- **DO** emphasize past experiences in which you performed tasks similar to those required by your desire position.
- **DO** convert your documents to a PDF before submission.
- **DO** include an “Interests” section at the bottom. They are great conversation starters.
- **DON’T** go over 1-page. Most people with 5 years of significant relevant experience keep it to 1 page.
- **DON’T** include accomplishments from high school. Let them go - you’ve gone on to do bigger and better things.
- **DON’T** send it in without having at least 2 other people review it. New eyes catch old mistakes.
- **DON’T** forget to leave ample white space. Font sizes less than 10 or margins smaller than .5” are eyesight killers.
Quick Tip #3

It’s never too early to start thinking about recommendation letters. Is there a class you find absolutely engaging? Are you doing well in that class? Who is the professor, and can you meet with him/her? Are there opportunities to work with him/her? How about your internship experiences? Is there a manager who can really vouch for you in your past endeavors? Now is the time to think about the answers to these questions, and consider whom you might ask for recommendation letters or who can serve as references.

Chris Blattman, an Assistant Professor of Political Science & International and Public Affairs at Columbia who received his PhD from UC Berkeley, has great advice about recommendation letters at ChrisBlattman.com.

Helpful Links

- Cal Career Center: https://career.berkeley.edu/
- J-PAL: http://www.povertyactionlab.org/
- IPA: http://www.poverty-action.org/
- Young Nonprofit Professionals Network: http://ynpn.org/sfba/
- DevJobs: http://www.devjobsmail.com/
- Idealist: http://www.idealist.org/info/Careers/
- Peace Corps: http://www.peacecorps.gov/
- Center for Global Development: http://www.cgdev.org/
- Brookings Institution: http://www.brookings.edu/

Sign-off Tip

Don’t write off the private sector. You would be surprised by how many people currently working in development have previous experience in the private sector. For-profit companies, on average, have more-developed training programs that allow recent graduates to build and solidify their skills toolkit. Give it some thought - a good public sector or non-profit organization will welcome you back with open arms.

Ready to Meet with CEGA Staff?

Once you have completed all of the above, you are ready to speak with a CEGA staff member! Sign up for a 20-minute advising appointment with any of the following staff members during their designated office hours. In order to meet with one of us whose interests and experiences line up with your own, we recommend that you view staff bios on our website at cega.berkeley.edu.

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<tr>
<th>Staff Member</th>
<th>Office Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maryam Janani</td>
<td>Wednesdays 3 pm to 4 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:mjanani@berkeley.edu">mjanani@berkeley.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Chupein</td>
<td>Mondays 10 am to 11 am</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:thomaschupein@berkeley.edu">thomaschupein@berkeley.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Carson Christiano</td>
<td>Thursdays 2 pm to 3 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:christiano@berkeley.edu">christiano@berkeley.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Chen</td>
<td>Thursdays 1 pm to 2 pm</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:lisafchen@berkeley.edu">lisafchen@berkeley.edu</a></td>
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To sign up for an appointment, email the staff member with your request. You will hear back soon about whether your appointment has been confirmed. If you do not get a reply within 5 working days, please follow up.

If you are a MA or MBA student with 5+ years of relevant work experience and would like to speak to our Executive Director, Temina Madon, please email her directly at tmadon@berkeley.edu. Meeting requests should be scheduled at least one week in advance.