

Huyen Le ('14)

I am a Junior Research Fellow – Quantitative Analyst. It was really exciting for me to engage in such a large and challenging project. I work on the Large-scale Land acquisitions project in Southeast Asia under the supervisor of Professor Gironde. The land grabs spree is of great urgency and importance in the region, given the high dependency of the population on agriculture. I spent the first two weeks conducting literature review, equipping myself with new materials and language in the field. I then communicated with the researchers to design a data platform for a massive survey input to be carried out in Cambodia. Most excitingly, I performed statistical analysis and data visualizations that gave a really interesting and somewhat unexpected picture of land use and land ownership in Indochina. The results suggested a loophole in the legal framework of which multinational companies had been taking advantage of to secure their estate properties.

This summer internship is a perfect chance for me to translate what I have learnt in Wesleyan classroom into a real world setting. The theoretical framework acquired at Wesleyan proved to be extremely helpful. How much government involvement in private sector, more specifically in the land deals, is desirable? How to increase the social capital in the area where people are relocated due to land clearing? The discussions in my government classes all came back to be as I integrate International law, international political economy, and civic engagement in my analysis. I was then able to incorporate quantitative methods learnt in my economics and QAC classes to answer such questions in a systematic manner. The issues raised were backed up by concrete evidence. And I can't be more grateful for my writing training at Wesleyan – I met the pressing deadlines quite easily and turned writing long reports into an exciting and pleasurable part!

This internship has helped me to re-shape my post-Wesleyan career plan. I realize a close-knit, organic connection between public and private sector. I was reaffirmed that I want to pursue a career in public policy but at the same time realized that it would be more beneficial to have some business experience before going to graduate school.

This scholarship means tremendously to me. As a student growing up in Vietnam, this project really hits close to home. I had the chance to apply the knowledge and skills gained at Wesleyan to solve a problem in my own country. I challenged myself in a very different research environment and living experience and I derived joy out of it. The summer brought to me to opportunities to talk with alumni working at the United Nations and learn so much from their experience. I was able to practice French in Geneva -- a cosmopolitan city at the heart of Europe. After countless readings about French literature and European history, I've always dreamt of travelling there. And the Wesleyan summer experience grant made it come true!