Bustling Summer Research Program at START

College Park, MD – Stipends. Academic credit. Research. Internships. The 2008 START Summer Research Program has begun. 22 students from the University of Maryland (UMD) and 12 other universities have begun their summer internships at The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).

The majority of students are completing research as part of two long-term projects, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the Terrorism and Ethnic Political Violence: Minorities at Risk for Organizational Behavior (MAROB) project. Interns for both projects have the opportunity to be part of a large, multi-year social science research project. With their work on the project, they have the opportunity to be part of research teams, including both graduate and undergraduate researchers, as well as faculty members.

GTD interns research terrorist attacks to verify existing data on terrorist incidents dating back to 1970, and gather new information to supplement the existing data. This summer, students will also be working to improve the geo-coding of the locations of terrorist events to facilitate geo-spatial analysis. Dr. Gary LaFree and Dr. Laura Dugan, faculty members in the UMD Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, lead the project.

GTD interns include:

Yesenia Balay – University or Puerto Rico at Ponce (MSI Leadership Program)
Jason Belcher – University of Maryland (DHS Scholars and Fellows)
Rocky Cole – University of Georgia (START For-Credit Internships)
Allison Gowallis – University of Maryland (START For-Credit Internships)
Samantha Holcombe - University of Maryland (START For-Credit Internships)
Claudio Perez – University of Miami (BSOS Summer Research Initiative)
Amalia Paladino – John Jay College (MSI Leadership Program)

“I am looking forward to discovering and unveiling the reasons and territory where most violent and terrorist attacks have been committed in El Salvador and to learning how to work with statistical and empirical data which will help me with future research to understand the psychology of terrorism.”

– Yesenia Balay
MAROB interns research and analyze politically active ethnic minority groups throughout the world and explore the methods these groups use to try to bring about political change—methods ranging from inclusion in electoral politics to peaceful protest to support for or engagement in terrorism. The project is led by Dr. Jonathan Wilkenfeld, principal investigator and faculty member in the UMD Department of Government and Politics, and Dr. Amy Pate, MAROB Research Director.

MAROB interns include:

Ashley Anderson – Stanford University (DHS Scholars and Fellows)
Drew Burton – University of Maryland (UMD Senior Summer Scholars)
Samantha DiFilippa – University of Maryland (START For-Credit Internships)
Elizabeth Gass – North Carolina State University (DHS Scholars and Fellows)
Verleen Holds – University of Montana (BSOS Summer Research Initiative)
Balquees Janahi – Lake Forest College (START For-Credit Internships)
Mariana Macedo – University of Maryland (START For-Credit Internships)
Jose Monge – John Jay College (DHS Scholars and Fellows)
Peter Vining – Pennsylvania State University (DHS Scholars and Fellows)
Matt Wagner – University of Maryland (UMD Senior Summer Scholars)

“I am excited about the opportunity to learn more about ethnic groups in Southeast Asia through the MAROB project, and also to see firsthand the kind of research that informs policy decisions at a Federal level. I'm also enjoying the chance to explore the D.C. area and spend time on the beautiful UMD campus.”

– Elizabeth Gass

Independent Projects

A handful of other students are working on independent project with support from START:

~ Islamic Radicalization in Europe and North America: Parallels and Divergence
Erik Iverson - Tufts University – DHS Scholars and Fellows – mentored by Dr. Gary Ackerman

~ Support for Terrorism as a Function of Individualistic Versus Collectivist Goals
Jo Sasota – Ohio State University – DHS Scholars and Fellows – mentored by Dr. Arie Kruglanski

~ Terrorism and Homeland Security Curricula and Education
Amber Stoesser – University of Maryland – DHS Scholars and Fellows – mentored by Dr. Katherine Worboys

~ Terrorism and State Fragility/Hijackings
Scott Wilson – University of Maryland – START For-Credit Internships – mentored by Susan Fahey

~ Community Field Studies and Analysis of Preparedness Networks
Edgar Villarreal - University of Colorado – mentored by Dr. Kathleen Tierney, START Researcher at the University of Colorado
The START summer research program is one element of START’s strong educational program helping to prepare students for careers in the homeland security arena. According to START Assistant Director for Education, Dr. Katherine Worboys, “We consider the summer research program to be an integral part of START’s education programs. We structure the summer so that our visiting students are able to receive one-on-one mentoring from faculty members renowned for their work on terrorism and responses to terrorism, as well as intensive training in both social and behavioral science research methods and professional development skills. We also work to maintain contact with all summer researchers so that they remain integrated into START’s network of nearly 400 students.”

Summer interns come together at START from five different programs. These include the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Scholars and Fellows Program, the DHS Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) Leadership Program, the UMD Senior Summer Scholars Program, the UMD College of Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSOS) Summer Research Initiative (SRI), and START For-Credit Internships. All five programs select top participants through competitive application processes.

- The DHS Scholars and Fellows Program (http://www.orau.gov/dhsed/2008pages/scholarship.html) awards students with stipends and summer internships. Supported by the Office of University Programs in the DHS Science & Technology Directorate, this program provides these opportunities to ensure a highly talented science and technology community to support the DHS mission and objectives. While not required to conduct an independent research project for this program, many 2008 interns have decided to do so.

- The DHS MSI Leadership Program provides investigators in the science and technology fields of homeland security with grants, early in their careers, to assist with the development of research programs, curricula, and student participation (http://www.dhsnetwork.com/about_us.html). MSI Leadership students at START this year come from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York and the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce.

- The UMD Senior Summer Scholars Program, sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Studies, provides scholarships and summer internships to its participants, totaling about 40 students in 2008. This prestigious program provides high-achieving seniors with an experience needed for them to succeed when applying to graduate schools, fellowships, and other future opportunities (http://www.ugresearch.umd.edu/programs/sss.html).

- The BSOS SRI program reaches out to populations traditionally underrepresented in the behavioral and social sciences. As a combined effort by the Office of the Provost, the Graduate School, the Office of the Vice President for Research and BSOS, as well as the National Science Foundation, it seeks to provide its participants with career development opportunities (http://www.bsos.umd.edu/dean/summer.html).

- START For-Credit internships are open to students in all majors at the University of Maryland. Students earn BSOS credit for their START internship through the BSOS 386 Experiential Learning Course. In order to fulfill course requirements, students are required to work a pre-approved number of hours and keep an experiential learning journal throughout the summer.

The START summer research program is one element of START’s strong educational program helping to prepare students for careers in the homeland security arena. According to START Assistant Director for Education, Dr. Katherine Worboys, “We consider the summer research program to be an integral part of START’s education programs. We structure the summer so that our visiting students are able to receive one-on-one mentoring from faculty members renowned for their work on terrorism and responses to terrorism, as well as intensive training in both social and behavioral science research methods and professional development skills. We also work to maintain contact with all summer researchers so that they remain integrated into START’s network of nearly 400 students.”

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The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence based at the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods, and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics, and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information on START, please visit www.start.umd.edu.