2014 Civil Society Graduate Fellowship: Anti-Corruption Action Centre (AntAC)

The Anti-Corruption Action Centre (AntAC) is a Ukrainian civil society organization that fights corruption as an obstacle to the country’s economic and political development. It conducts research on politically exposed persons (PEPs) and corruption schemes, serves as a watchdog for corruption in state tenders, and conducts advocacy domestically and internationally to improve Ukraine's governance. I worked with AntAC from late May until mid-August, during which time I maintained English-language social media pages, drafted grant proposals to EU agencies, and conducted preliminary research on international asset recovery models that could be used in Ukraine to take back billions of dollars in funds that were funneled by former president Yanukovych and his associates. I also maintained a database of Ukraine-related sanctions. While working with AntAC, I gained a strong sense of the challenges facing Ukraine as it consolidates its new government and tries to adopt new reforms. I learned basic information about common corruption schemes in Ukraine and became familiar with major political and economic figures in the country. From investigating recent case studies, I also gained a tremendous amount of insight into how countries with deposed autocrats (e.g., Nigeria, Peru, Philippines) have obtained funds that had been stolen by the head of state. Now that I am back at Columbia, I plan to apply the knowledge I gained this summer toward my Certificate thesis on Ukraine’s asset recovery campaign.

One of the ancillary highlights of the summer was traveling to Lithuania for one week in July to attend Transparency International’s School on Integrity, which provides anti-corruption and accountability training for future leaders. During this training program, I met young anti-corruption advocates from around the world and built a network of colleagues that I hope to work with in the future. In fact, together with another participant from Latvia, I helped develop the concept for a project to combat informal payments in the Latvian healthcare system. The project is being submitted to the International Anti-Corruption Conference in 2015 for a seed grant competition.
I would certainly recommend that future Harriman students consider an internship with AntAC, and more broadly to consider spending their summer in Ukraine. The country has an active network of NGOs that have been successful in advocating a wide range of governance reforms. These efforts have accelerated after the Euromaidan revolution. The civil society sector is dominated by young Ukrainians in their 20s and 30s who are seeking to make a difference, and I believe that the country is on the leading edge of a generational shift in which more young Ukrainians are willing to sacrifice high-paying private sector jobs and for the opportunity to change their country for the better.