CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN THINK TANKS AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES

Description of Field:
In Washington, D.C. 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 and Entry Salaries:
The types of positions available vary considerably among organizations and are dependent upon one’s level of education. Some organizations require a Ph.D. for all research-related positions, relying on interns to provide administrative support. Others hire individuals with Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees for a range of positions, including research positions. Some entry-level positions for individuals with Master’s degrees include:

- **Program Manager/Assistant** – Coordinates and handles logistics for major program events, meetings, conferences, and international visits, and manages a range of program support functions, including communications and publication work. Starting salaries can range from high $20’s to mid $30’s, depending on the organization and level of responsibility.

- **Research Assistant** – Provides research support to Fellows and Senior Associates, drafts documents, manages database records, handles correspondence and provides general administrative support. Salaries average in the high $20’s to mid $30’s, depending on the size and funding base of the institute.

- **Research Associate** - Develops and implements research plans, prepares funding proposals, analyzes data and synthesizes findings, publishes and presents findings to various audiences. Starting salaries can range from mid $30’s to $40’s, again depending on experience and the organization.

Advancement into senior positions usually requires education at the Ph.D. level and/or extensive specialized expertise, so it is common to see those in junior level positions leaving after 2-3 years to pursue higher education and professional opportunities in academia, government, private corporations, and consulting firms. Some organizations do have a more traditional career path, with staff moving into Senior/Principal Research Associate, Senior Fellows, Associate Program Director and Director positions. Salaries are based on merit and contributions, including publications, grants and contracts. They range from $40,000 to $50,000 for mid-career positions and $60,000 to $90,000 for senior posts.

Recommended Qualifications to Enter the Field:
- Experience in the field
- Strong communication skills, both written and oral
- Ability to write concise briefing reports and longer academic works
- Excellent presentation skills
- Comfort in addressing an audience of experts
- Ability to demonstrate proficiency in foreign languages
- Solid command of word processing, spreadsheet applications, and the Internet
- Good quantitative skills
- Knowledge of statistical packages
Sample Employers and Resources for More Information:

Employers:
- The Atlantic Council of the United States – http://www.acus.org
- Cato Institute – http://www.cato.org
- Center for Strategic and International Studies – http://www.csis.org
- Greenberg Quinlan Research – http://www.greenbergresearch.com
- Heritage Foundation – http://www.heritage.org
- Institute for Defense Analyses – https://www.ida.org
- The International Institute for Strategic Studies – http://www.iiss.org
- The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation – http://mansfieldfdn.org
- Center for the National Interest – http://cftni.org/index.html
- Project on Government Oversight – http://www.pogo.org
- RAND Corporation – http://www.rand.org
- Social Science Research Council – http://www.ssrc.org

Career Resources & Membership Organizations:
- Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management - http://www.appam.org
- Elliott School Career Connection – http://elliottschoollcc.com
- Foreign Policy Association - http://www.fpa.org
- Harvard Kennedy School Think Tanks site - http://guides.library.harvard.edu/hks/think_tank_search
- Public Affairs Council - http://www.pac.org
Course Suggestions for Careers in Think Tanks and Research Institutes

The following list represents a sampling of different courses offered throughout The George Washington University that would be appropriate for this career field. As academic departments continually update their bulletin, these courses might not be available on a regular schedule. This list does not include required courses in the Core or Regional Fields and does not correspond to, though it closely follows, the curriculum for graduation. Students should consult their academic advisors to see if taking some of the courses below fits into their academic plan.

### International Affairs:
- Environmental Policy
- Defense Policy/Program Analysis I
- Defense Policy/Program Analysis II
- Quantitative Analysis for Intl Policymakers
- Transnational Security Issues
- Homeland Security
- Reinventing the United Nations

### Economics
- Economics of Technological Change
- Economy of Japan
- Microeconomic Theory I & II
- Macroeconomic Theory I & II
- Regional Economics

### Political Science:
- Introduction to Political Analysis
- Approaches to Public Policy Analysis
- American Political Process
- State & Urban Policy Problems

### Sociology:
- Qualitative Methods: Doing Field Research

### Geography:
- Political Geography
- Military Geography

### Media & Public Affairs:
- Media & Globalization
- Media & Public Affairs

### Professional Skills Courses:
- Writing for International Affairs Professionals
- Alternative Analysis: Red Team
- International Crisis Diplomacy
- Intro to Gaming and Simulations
- Introduction to Editing
- Local Governance Development Decentralization
- U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East
- Regional Security in the Middle East
- Conflict and Conflict Resolution
- Space and National Security
- Other Regional Studies courses
- Survey of International Trade Theory & Policy
- Survey of International Macroeconomics and Finance Theory & Policy
- Topics in International Development
- Politics of International Law
- International Security Politics
- Comparative Politics of the Middle East
- Comparative Post-Communist Systems
- Public Policy Research
- Policy Writing
- Social Media
- Formal Briefing
- Political Analysis
- Public Speaking
- Op-Ed Writing Skills
- Speechwriting