

SUMMARY

Will Coggins, Class of 2013

Description of Project:

The official title of the SRO project I worked on was “Economics of Charitable Fundraising”, with Professor Dean Karlan, but my experience this summer was much broader than the title would suggest. I did spend time working with Professor Karlan on an effort to determine the correlation between two major sources of information about charitable organizations that are accessible to donors: the administrative/fundraising fraction (overhead) and the reports of third party rating organizations such as GiveWell (see: <http://www.freakonomics.com/2011/06/09/why-ranking-charities-by-administrative-expenses-is-a-bad-idea/>). However, I was also involved with several of Professor Karlan’s other projects. The project apart from the charitable giving work with which I was most involved was an effort to determine the effect of the availability of rainfall insurance on agricultural investment in northern Ghana. This ongoing project involves not only Professor Karlan, but also Professor Chris Udry and the nonprofit Innovations for Poverty Action, and I plan to continue working on this project during the coming school year.

Responsibilities:

Due to the varied nature of the projects I worked on this summer, I had a wide range of responsibilities. For the charitable giving project I did preliminary research, collected administrative and fundraising expense ratios, performed basic statistical analysis on the data using Stata, and wrote a basic draft of our findings. My work on the Ghana project involved primarily Stata programming. Alongside professor Udry and Rachel Cao (an extremely helpful fellow SRO student) I helped to write and revise many of the programs in the extensive web of data-cleaning and analysis do-files that made up the technical portion of the Ghana analysis.

Overall Experience:

My experience this summer was overwhelmingly positive. I was fascinated by the questions that the research projects sought to answer, and enjoyed becoming more familiar with some of the most important debates in development economics today. Through the technical work, I became much more comfortable with Stata and econometrics as a whole, and working with Professors Karlan and Udry afforded valuable insight into how an economist conducts research. The experience was genuinely enjoyable as well, as Profs. Karlan and Udry were friendly, helpful and available, despite their incredibly busy schedules. I am grateful to have been offered the opportunity to work with them this summer, and am eager to continue that work during the coming year.