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SAIIA-KAS Careers Evening 2011

Report

The 2011 South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)-Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Careers Evening took place on 28 September 2011 at Jan Smuts House, on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand. The annual SAIIA-KAS careers evening was organised by the interns participating in the SAIIA-KAS Masters Internship Programme. This is an initiative which allows suitable candidates the opportunity to undertake a master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, while simultaneously serving an internship at SAIIA.

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The purpose of this event was to provide a platform for postgraduate university students in the studies of International Relations, Economics, Law and Journalism to gain a better understanding of the career opportunities available to them. The event

included a careers exhibition, where a variety of organisations were able to present their internship, scholarship and travel abroad opportunities, followed by a panel of speakers from the selected sectors, who discussed their individual career paths and provided useful advice. Approximately a hundred and twenty students attended the event; these students came from universities around Gauteng including Wits, University of Johannesburg, the University of Pretoria and Monash University. Please find the evening's programme attached as Appendix I.

Exhibitors in the first part of the evening included the German Academic Exchange Service, the Institute for Security Studies, the Japanese Embassy's JET study programme, the US Embassy's Fulbright Scholarship Programme, the French Embassy's SAFE Think Programme, the United Nations Information Centre, and SAIIA and KAS.

Following the exhibition, the students were invited to attend a series of short talks by relevant speakers. The first speaker of the evening was Mr Chris Maroleng, the Africa Editor and head of department of the eNews Africa Channel as well as the presenter of the Africa 360 programme. He began his presentation by thanking both SAIIA and KAS and by interacting with the students and asking them about their studies and career plans. This began an interactive session in which students felt they could air

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their opinions and concerns and it really set the tone for the rest of the evening.

His presentation was filled with crucial pieces of advice not only for students wishing to pursue a similar career path but for all students from humanities and commerce alike. The audience was encouraged to pursue new opportunities that present themselves. Students were also reminded that the pursuit of one's dreams can often be a lengthy process but that the journey of reaching that goal is often as significant as the destination itself. Mr Maroleng emphasised that his studies had not just provided him with valuable information, but that it opened his mind to critical thinking and he quoted a university professor's crucial advice, "don't let books get in the way of your education." He argued that the analytical skills gained by students during their university years are the most important and that they must be fostered and improved if students intend to pursue a career in International Affairs. Chris outlined his own career path, from an undergraduate degree in law, politics and international relations, to being a researcher at the ISS until his current position and he encouraged the students to follow their passion and not be distracted by money or prestige. Chris' final piece of advice to the students was that they should develop their skills and learn new abilities to equip them for a career in an ever-changing marketplace.

Following Mr Maroleng was Ms Lerato Mataboge, the Chief Director of Africa Bilateral Economic Relations in the International Trade and Economic Division at the Department of Trade and Industry. Ms Mataboge began by highlighting that in 2001, she had been sitting in the same room, listening to the same presentations and had the same concerns. She had, in fact, been a KAS-SAIIA intern herself and said that the careers evening was thus a "full-circle moment." Lerato urged the students to be

positive about the future, especially as they live in a country with a vibrant democracy which is full of new possibilities. She shared a number of lessons that she had learned early in her career and emphasised the need to show commitment and perseverance. She advised the students to take on internship opportunities, as they provide students with an edge over their competitors. In her time at SAIIA, she had learned teamwork, healthy professional competition, the ability and necessity of quality-checking her work, good asset management, the value of hard work and optimism as well as the great worth of having a professional advisor and mentor. She said that beginning to look for and value these qualities would stand the students in good stead for their futures. Ms Mataboge ended her presentation by reminding students that in whichever career path they chose, they would likely be confronted by prejudice and preconceptions but that dedication, hard work and a commitment to quality would see them through all challenges.

This was a lesson that was reiterated by the evening's third speaker, Mr Haiko Alfeld, who is currently the General Manager of group stakeholder relations at Sasol. Mr Alfeld's career had followed a rather winding path and he began his presentation by discussing this to encourage students to seek out unexpected opportunities and to be flexible with regards to their careers. He showed students that there will likely be a difference between their intended career paths and the route that they will actually follow but that this should not discourage them, instead they should seek to gain a wide range of skills to make them increasingly marketable. Haiko emphasised the value of internships and mentorships and dedication. Whilst the humanities may be the most difficult degree from which to find a career path, he suggested that it is possibly the most rewarding as it forces individuals to really know who they are and what

SÜDAFRIKA

NICOLE BEARDSWORTH

ALECIA NDLOVU

October 2011www.kas.de/suedafrikawww.kas.de

they want to achieve and that the rewards from a career in this field are substantial and diverse. Mr Alfeld concluded by saying that the three lessons that he could provide was that students should always keep the right attitude, that they should be flexible and responsive to trends and that they should never forget the value of networking.

Speaking on a career in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Ray Medhurst, from the office of the minister, was the final speaker on the panel. He emphasised the value of communication as being one of the core skills that a Foreign Service Officer should have. He mentioned adaptability as being a key to success in this career field as it involves a lot of travelling to various countries and exposure to different cultures. This for him was not just an assumption, but based on a true life story since he married a Singaporean wife in Malaysia and his children were born in Japan. His final piece of advice was a quote from the bible which states that "from suffering comes perseverance, from perseverance comes character and from character comes hope". He thought it was really important for students to internalise this because it determines the passion and dedication that one puts into their work. Ray was in fact the only speaker who demonstrated the applicability of passion in the professional and academic worlds through his love for sports (Rugby). He explained that even though he has a hectic schedule, he still finds time to coach young aspiring rugby players at a school because this has always been his passion. This meant that students should not be weary when they don't get their ideal jobs, but they should instead persevere and keep their focus until they get to where they want to be.

The students were very attentive throughout the presentations and only a few could afford to leave their seats. They responded positively to the speakers and actively en-

gaged with them during the question and answer session. One of the interesting questions posed by the students was: how should students master the art of networking without coming across as a nuisance to these busy individuals? Students were then advised to remain persistent and keep straight to the point. They should always be prepared and know exactly what they want to get out of these once in a life time conversations.

In conclusion, the event was very successful and received a "thumbs up" from the KAS resident representative Dr Werner Böhler, the Director of Marketing and Communications Mr Jonathan Stead as well as the Director of Studies Ms Neuma Grobbelaar. We would like to thank the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for making the event possible as well as the events team and the staff at SAIIA for assisting and supporting us in our endeavour. We are delighted and grateful to have been given the opportunity to organise an event that has the potential to change someone's life and we hope that all the students found it worthwhile.