

# THE DIALOGUE

Leadership for the Americas

## CHRIS COTE

### Featured Alumnus

*Current location: Somerville, MA*

*Dialogue Role: Program assistant for economics, energy, and Brazil and the Southern Cone*



#### **What is your occupation or most recent work experience?**

I work at MSCI, a financial services company with the goal of helping clients “build better portfolios for a better world.” We provide indexes, ESG ratings of companies, and research, among other things. In my role in ESG Research – ESG stands for Environment, Social, and Governance and is a framework for assessing financial risks outside of the more traditional factors – I help explain how energy companies are managing risks associated with climate change. It’s an interesting and fast growing field. I’m always learning. For the prior four years, I worked as an energy markets analyst, mostly focused on Latin America.

#### **What has surprised you most about your career?**

I’m surprised that I can draw a somewhat straight line from my time at the Dialogue to today. I became extraordinarily interested by the dramatic and exciting world of energy, thanks to Peter, Genaro, and Joan, and I also realized that I wanted a much deeper understanding of Brazil. At the same time, I began to understand that politics and policy are distinct but related things (more on this below). Pursuit of these interests and ideas led me to Brazil, graduate school, and to my previous and current roles. The emphasis has shifted among security, politics, markets, or finance, but I continue to focus on the same big areas.

#### **What advice would you give to a young professional?**

Learn to write, learn to work with data. Of the two, spend more time on writing. Good writing follows clear thinking, so it’s not an easy task. Peter quickly showed me how awful my writing was. I had so many ideas but struggled to organize them. He helped as much as he could, having me read Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language” and covering my page with ink or rewriting my papers in all capital letters. I was embarrassed by my shortcomings but motivated to improve, and I’ve taken writing seriously since. Data literacy is useful because numbers are everywhere and the tools become more accessible each year. Don’t forget: the tools are the easy part. As with writing, clear thinking is the hard part when using numbers to make a point, build a model, or, more generally, look for truth.

#### **What was your most impactful Dialogue moment/experience?**

I was only at the Dialogue a short time but could write five pages here. But, in brief: being exposed to so many people. A third point of advice for the prior question would be “learn to listen.” Whether I was running to fill up more coffee or presenting at the Energy Working Group, I was always considering the ideas invited speakers were sharing. I learned so much about the distinction and overlap between politics and policy. I remember right when I started, I joined Peter and Michael at a small talk with a former president. Later, Michael asked what I thought, and I just said “it was cool.” Michael teased me, rightly. In part it did feel cool – there was an awe in the room as he (the former president) walked through and shook every person’s hand – but also the talk had felt so unspecific to me and I didn’t want to reveal my disappointment. Of course, I had missed the point. This person had done the hard political work of helping a country transition to and maintain democracy. He understood more about people and politics than I can hope to. On the policy side, other guests at the Dialogue had brilliant ideas and frameworks that have improved the world in their own way. I still think about some of Santiago Levy’s talks on informality in Mexico, ten years on.