

Final report

Internship abroad

Personal data and general information on the internship

Subject of studies: Economics

Bachelor/Master/State Exam: Bachelor

Time of internship: August 25 – Jan 25

Place of internship: Brazil

Internship institution: Boston Consulting Group (BCG)

Guidelines:

- The report should have a length of at least **4 DIN A4 pages** (Times New Roman, 12pt, 1.5 line spacing)
- If you want to give names, please do not give the full name of the person. Use only the first name or abbreviations such as "L."
- When integrating photos, please note that your report requires the consent of the person(s) photographed when published and distributed.
- Please save your report as a word document (max. file size: 8 MB) and upload it to MoveON.
- If you are looking for a little inspiration for your own report or would like to compare your experiences with those of other students, please feel free to have a look at our [website](#).

1. Planning and preparation (e.g. application process, finding accommodation, language course)

As widely known, the application process at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) is long and challenging. For the Data Scientist role in Brazil, it consisted of seven rounds in total: three exams and four case studies. It all starts with a written exam on statistics and machine learning in which time management is crucial. It is 120 minutes long and contains both theoretical questions as well as a coding one in Kaggle fashion, such as cleaning data and building a pipeline for regressions. Knowing which questions to solve first based on their point worth is crucial. While at BCG, I asked around and no one managed to solve all the questions on the exam. The second exam is a multiple-choice exam similar to the GMAT.

After the first two exams are successfully completed, the first round of case interviews begins. The first of them contains a short live-coding session, in which the participant has to identify what is wrong with a machine learning pipeline, followed by an analytics business case.

The analytics business case is the most unique part of the BCG recruiting process compared to other consulting firms. It starts with the interviewer presenting a high-level challenge usually faced during a past client engagement, like market entry. The candidate is expected to ask many probing questions and request data while remaining structured. A first step is to apply a framework to the case, decomposing the problem statement into bite-sized components that can be tested as hypotheses. Once the framework is presented to the interviewer and the first data exhibits are circulated, the second part begins. In the analytical part, the candidate is asked to draft the architecture of a potential solution to the client's problem. It is usually a combination of optimization with some inputs being fed from a machine learning model. This is where I found my background in economics to be most useful, especially when formulating the optimization problem with its decision variables, objective function, and constraints. There are two batches of two interviews. Between the first and decision rounds, there is another written exam – an online business case evaluated by AI, where the questions are similar to the framework part of the case study.

After roughly six weeks of tests and interviews, I finally received an offer and started to look for accommodations in Brazil. Since I was aware of BCG's reputation for an intensive, long-hours culture, I made sure to get a room as close as possible to the office, which proved to be surprisingly tough. BCG is located at Faria Lima, the Brazilian financial district. Most Airbnbs in the region would have cost me 400 to 600 euros a month. After some searching, I

found a niche Brazilian platform that offered a maid's room for 200 euros a month, which I promptly took. This provided my first glance at the glaring social inequality in the country; "maid rooms" (quartos de empregada), as they are called, are common in several Brazilian homes. They are usually reserved as sleeping quarters for domestic staff who perform multiple functions such as cleaning, cooking, taking care of the kids, and driving the families around. These workers usually stem from lower-income regions on the outskirts of the cities and sleep a few days a week in the patron's home in tiny rooms. Mine, for example, had roughly 7m², but at least it was only an 8-minute walk from the office.

2. Internship (tasks, typical workday, workload)

A typical day would last from 9 am to 9 pm. Although officially interns were limited to 8 hours a day (after a former intern sued the firm and computers were set to lock after 8 hours), I was encouraged to work more and bypass the software used by HR to control the interns' workload. Since the firm operates as a professional services firm, there was a flat hierarchy in which teams of consultants are gathered for each client engagement, meaning a few senior consultants and data scientists working together. Consequently, there is no single boss. Feedback happens only by request, although a formal evaluation sheet is always circulated at the end of every case.

My first case was on operational excellence for a steel mill utilizing machine learning. The day-to-day was incredibly diverse but was usually spent brainstorming with the team, drafting slides, interviewing the client's workers, and coding. Little to no guidance was given, making it a "sink or swim" environment. While the technical content in the first weeks was on par with my econometrics classes, we were soon operating at a level far beyond my bachelor's coursework. I had to spend several nights brushing up on interpretable machine learning concepts which, to my surprise, led me straight back to the LMU, since one of the leading researchers in this field belongs to the LMU statistics faculty.

In terms of the overall experience, I was shocked to learn about the limitations of the data science career track at BCG. During the interviews, I was told that it mirrors the traditional consulting track, but I soon realized that is not the case. Even though the compensation packages offered are similar, there are glaring differences in the perks. For example, there was no way to get an MBA sponsored. A typical case for data science consultants is neither

strategic nor varied across sectors, but heavily concentrated in operations for clients in either fuel distribution or natural resources.

On the bright side, the office was an amazing place to work, filled with plants, large windows, and pantries filled to the brim with snacks that are free to employees. Of course, those perks are not the fruit of a burst of empathy but rather meticulously crafted policies. There is breakfast, but it is only served in the early morning, encouraging employees to arrive early. Similarly, no corporate phone is given to employees; instead, they receive a reimbursement every two years, encouraging employees to use their own devices.

One remarkable day was August 28th. As I arrived at the office on foot, I encountered more than four police cars stationed at the building entrance. I was later informed that they were performing a raid on three different fintechs located in the same building as BCG's offices, which of course scared me. Later that day, the Brazilian press shared that it was a huge operation against money laundering for the Brazilian *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC), a criminal organization that was using the fintechs to launder dirty money coming from their drug-dealing operations. It was a stark reminder of the complex security landscape in South America and how deeply criminal enterprises can be entrenched in society.

3. Social contacts / 4. Everyday life and leisure

Since I was spending on average 12 hours a day in the office, little time was left for social activities. An exception to that was on New Year's Eve, when I traveled to Trancoso Bahia with a few friends that I met years ago when I attended school for a year in Brazil. The experience was wonderful.

During my internship experience in Brazil, I was fortunate enough to spend time exploring the enchanting coastal enclave of Trancoso, a destination that offers a profound glimpse into the historical and cultural tapestry of southern Bahia. Originally established by Jesuit priests in 1586 as a mission settlement, the heart of the village has remarkably preserved its colonial authenticity and charm. This historical epicenter, famously known as the Quadrado, is a sprawling, car-free rectangular lawn fringed by a vibrant array of low-slung, brightly painted colonial cottages that have since been thoughtfully repurposed into artisan workshops and boutique galleries. Anchoring this picturesque tableau at the far end of the green is the Igreja de São João Batista, a pristine, white-washed church that stands with its back to the ocean, serving as a timeless monument to the area's rich, centuries-old heritage. Wandering through

this historic square, one can easily perceive the seamless evolution of Trancoso from a tranquil, secluded fishing village into a sophisticated cultural hub, all while retaining an atmosphere of profound tranquility and historical reverence.

Beyond the captivating architecture of the upper town, the natural landscape and world-class culinary offerings of Trancoso provided an equally compelling dimension to my time in Bahia. Just a short, scenic descent from the cliffs of the Quadrado reveals a spectacular stretch of coastline, where pristine, palm-fringed beaches such as Praia dos Coqueiros and Praia dos Nativos are framed by dramatic, rust-colored bluffs and the lush, untamed greenery of the Atlantic rainforest. The striking contrast between the brilliant white sands and the warm, turquoise waters creates a truly breathtaking environment. Complementing this natural beauty is a sophisticated and deeply traditional gastronomic scene that anchors the local economy. Evenings in Trancoso were defined by exploring restaurants that masterfully blend refined coastal cooking with indigenous Bahian ingredients. Dining beneath the canopy of ancient trees strung with warm lanterns, I experienced the rich, complex flavors of traditional moqueca – a fragrant, slow-cooked seafood stew enriched with fresh coconut milk and vivid dendê palm oil – which perfectly encapsulated the vibrant, sensory-rich culture of the region.

5. Financing (cost of living, shopping tips, relevance of the Grant)

The scholarship certainly played a huge and convincing role in embarking in the journey to Brazil, as the travel tickets alone cost me more than 1000 euros in the summer. The biggest culprit is a severe lack of **market competition**; the region's airspace is heavily dominated by a few legacy carriers, while steep government taxes, high airport fees, and limited infrastructure create massive barriers to entry for the low-cost airlines that usually drive prices down. On top of that, airlines face huge **opportunity costs** due to route scheduling: flights from the U.S. or Europe to deep South America almost always run overnight, meaning expensive widebody jets often sit completely idle on foreign tarmacs all day waiting for the return trip—and carriers bake the cost of that wasted, non-revenue-generating time directly into your fare. Throw in vast geographical distances, high regional fuel prices, and a total lack of **substitute goods** (like the high-speed rail networks you'd find competing with airlines in Europe), and carriers know they have a captive audience with no choice but to pay a premium tariff.

Surprisingly, the living costs in São Paulo were quite high as well, especially regarding food. A meal in the restaurants within the financial center cost on average 100 reais, or about 16 euros. Luckily, some of them operated on a buffet style where you could eat as much as you wished for a flat fee, which is a great tip for managing daily lunch expenses.

6. Internship and studies (Were you able to apply what you learned during your studies, how has the internship changed your motivation to study and/or your attitude towards your future profession)

During my Data Science internship at BCG, I was genuinely glad to have the opportunity to apply several core concepts I had acquired during my economics bachelor. Specifically, the statistical foundations from my econometrics courses and the practical coding skills from my introduction to programming classes proved invaluable when tackling initial data analysis and modeling tasks. It was highly rewarding to see theoretical academic concepts translate into real-world applications. However, as the scope of the projects expanded, I frequently found myself overwhelmed when the requirements shifted toward highly advanced machine learning and complex data engineering. This steep technical learning curve made me realize that while I appreciate having a solid quantitative foundation, I do not necessarily want to pursue a career purely focused on deep, specialized technical execution.

Navigating these technical challenges ultimately helped clarify my long-term career motivations. Through extensive conversations with colleagues on the traditional management consulting path, it became clear to me that I am far more drawn to higher-impact, abstract strategy work. I realized I prefer the broader, business-oriented problem-solving and conceptual thinking that drives high-level executive decisions over granular data science tasks. This insight fundamentally shifted my attitude toward my future career; I decided to give consulting another go, but with a deliberate pivot away from specialized analytics and toward pure strategy. I wanted to transition to a boutique known for strategy advisory, which is exactly why I have decided that my next professional step will be joining Oliver Wyman.

7. Conclusion (were your expectations met, challenges, particularly defining experiences, tips for future interns)

In retrospect, my internship experience in Brazil profoundly exceeded my expectations, albeit in ways I had not initially anticipated. While I arrived with the goal of deepening my technical data science expertise, the most valuable takeaway was the absolute clarity it provided regarding my long-term career trajectory. The primary challenges I faced were adapting to the steep technical learning curve of advanced machine learning models and navigating the unexpectedly high cost of living in São Paulo's financial district. However, overcoming these hurdles—coupled with the profoundly formative cultural experiences of exploring breathtaking regions like Trancoso—made this journey incredibly rewarding. For future interns embarking on a similar path, my biggest tip is to remain open-minded about your career goals. Use the opportunity not just to apply what you know, but to discover what truly motivates you; I highly recommend networking extensively with colleagues across different departments, as those cross-functional conversations were instrumental in my pivot to strategy consulting. Additionally, future students should budget generously for their time in São Paulo and take advantage of the local buffet-style or "por quilo" restaurants to manage daily expenses. Ultimately, this internship was a transformative chapter that seamlessly bridged my academic studies with my future professional endeavors.