



# UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## FACULTY OF NATIVE STUDIES

### **Kristy's Project at the Waitangi Tribunal, Wellington, NZ**

I am currently in the second year of a JD Law degree at the Osgoode Hall Law School at York University in Toronto. As a part of my law degree, I was admitted into Osgoode Hall's Intensive Program in Aboriginal Lands, Resources and Government. This one semester program sends 12 law students throughout Canada and around the world to work with Aboriginal communities, governments and environmental agencies on indigenous legal issues. In addition to earning a semester of credits, presentation, and writing skills, I have gained an experience of a lifetime.



I was placed at the Waitangi Tribunal in New Zealand to work under the supervision of Judge Coxhead. The Waitangi Tribunal is a permanent commission of inquiry that considers Maori claims against the Crown for breaches of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. There are two versions of the Treaty of Waitangi – one written in English and one in Maori. These two versions differ significantly, necessitating a reliance on the Treaty principles rather than the express terms of the Treaty. My project at the Tribunal is to review the Waitangi Tribunal reports published since 2001 to consider what the Tribunal has said about the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Through this research, I am writing a report on the evolution of the Treaty principles over the last decade.

While working at the Waitangi Tribunal, I have had the opportunity to take Maori language and song classes, visit a Marae, speak to Maori law students at Victoria University about indigenous legal issues in Canada, and attend Treaty debates over controversial Foreshore and Seabed legislation and power sharing issues in New Zealand. The opportunity to learn about the Maori culture and the way that Maori legal issues are approached in New Zealand has been indescribable. I am gaining knowledge and a deeper understanding of ways to solve powerfully rooted legal conflicts that face indigenous communities. My undergraduate education at the Faculty of Native Studies gave me a strong foundation upon which to learn more about many of these difficult issues. The conflict between the government and Maori people over lands, resources, and opportunities in New Zealand is reminiscent of many of the issues that Aboriginal people in Canada face. Learning about these challenges at the Faculty of Native Studies gave me the basis I needed to be able to take everything from my opportunity at the Waitangi Tribunal.