

Capstone Project
Mariana Lozano Retana

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My time at this university has been incredibly rewarding, mainly because of the CIL program and the abroad experiences it led me to. In two sections, Personal and World Lessons, I will recount how this certificate has benefited my education.

Personal:

My first year of university began with a degree in Nutrition I was never quite convinced of. In my second year, I switched to Political Science for a fresh start. To further engage with the faculty's topics, I enrolled in the 2023 e3 Human Rights class in Grenoble, France. Such experience was pivotal as it not only solidified my trajectory in my new degree but also inspired me to pursue similar experiences.

Academically, this class was the beginning of my participation in the political science program. As an immigrant from a developing country, exploring issues of immigration, displacement, and cultural debates around human rights allowed me to connect with the material in a way I never could in nutrition. I found myself actively participating in discussions and discovering purpose in my studies.

Visiting the United Nations in Geneva allowed me to understand the role representatives play in shaping international relations. This exposure motivated me to shift my studies towards justice and advocacy. It also encouraged me to pursue related courses and join targeted extracurriculars such as Model UN and the Alberta Youth Parliament Student Group (AYP). Eventually, I became President of AYP, and through Model UN, I travelled to New York and Toronto to represent UofA at the international conferences. I am grateful for the motivation my time in France provided, as it inspired me to deepen my involvement in my program and invest in my personal growth.

In the summer of 2024, I was selected for an internship at the Faculty of Law in Bielefeld, Germany. I did two-week rotations with four different professors on specialties such as Civil Law, Criminal Law, Public Law, and European Law. I conducted research and delivered two presentations to a European Law PhD panel. Despite lacking a formal legal education, I successfully applied a comparative perspective in my work and was able to contribute to discussions with PhD students. Working directly with law professors exposed me to the law's multifaceted applications. It solidified my ambition to pursue law school by revealing the global relevance beyond attorney positions.

Beyond academics, my experiences abroad gave me a rich cultural education and lifelong friendships. My roommate in France, whom I met during CIL orientation, became my best friend and biggest mentor. Many of the friends I made in France are now in law school, and their encouragement has motivated me to follow a similar path. In Germany, I met two interns

coincidentally from McEwan. One of them became my marathon buddy, and until today, we do weekly brunches.

I consider CIL's language requirement extremely beneficial. Already fluent in French and Spanish, I chose to learn Italian. Its simplicity motivated me to pursue it further than the requirements and inspired me to add Italian Studies as my double minor. Ultimately, I completed all language levels, achieving a B2-equivalent fluency. I am grateful for my commitment to CIL language pathway, as it inspired me to take additional history Italian courses that broadened my perspective of the culture.

World Lessons:

Living in France and Germany, along with the small travels I did while abroad made me a more well-rounded person as it significantly reshaped how I perceive different cultures. Interacting with their bureaucratic systems and societies allowed me to understand their histories that influence their way of thinking and operating. It allowed me to look beyond stereotypes.

In France, learning about French history and its monarchy through museum visits helped me sympathize with France's strong secularism. While the French are stereotyped as cold, I came to see that their preference for privacy fosters relationships grounded in loyalty rather than superficiality (something quite different than North America). It is a realization I have reflected on and applied in my own life.

Conversations with my coworkers in Germany helped me understand why the country is now one of the leading democratic powers in the world. I was surprised by how deeply the Nazi reputation still affects everyday attitudes. Something so natural to me, such as pride in my nationality, was unfamiliar to many colleagues, as they see pride in being German as taboo. Their sensitivity to nationalism helped me understand the intensity of Germany's commitment to democracy.

My coworkers also shared how the war had impacted their families. One colleague explained that his Polish great-grandfather's liberation from a concentration camp was followed by generational trauma that eventually affected his father's upbringing. To break the cycle, his father cut ties with the family, which is why my coworker only identifies with his German mother's side.

Listening to their stories allowed me to take on a comparative analysis of Canadian history. The instability of families affected by concentration camps reminded me of the indigenous families affected by residential schools. I was able to see how different historical events can produce parallel consequences for their targeted populations. As a political science student, this realization broadened my understanding of how current wars and genocides may impact future

generations. It inspired me to strive for a career in which I can use the lessons I have learned in these experiences to create a change or prevent those effects.

Living abroad also deepened my understanding of migration. While Canada is often described as a mosaic, I was fascinated to see how other nations have their own (less varied) forms of cultural diversity. I was astonished to see how unlike the US, the majority of France's black population could trace their country of origin. I was able to connect my academic lessons on imperialism to real-life contexts. The few reparations France has provided, along with its ongoing governance of certain territories, have helped me understand why the African population is the dominant minority group in France.

Learning about the history of Turkish "guest workers" that were brought over to fill labour shortages after the war helped me understand the strong Turkish cultural presence in Germany today. As a Latina with a similar complexion to many Turks, this explained why I was always asked whether I had just immigrated from Turkey whenever I mentioned I did not speak German.

Understanding the integration of these communities also helped me see how they paved the way for newer waves of Middle Eastern migration. While many locals were unsure why this shift was happening, my knowledge of Canadian history helped me recognize these movements as part of a natural pattern. In Canada, for example, French settlement was followed by the arrival of Irish immigrants. Initially controversial and resented, upon their integration, Chinese rail workers began to settle. Each group's integration created space for the next wave. With this perspective, I realized that much of the backlash towards new immigrants comes from a lack of understanding of the natural process of migration as a result of the host country's needs.

I also came to realize that not all racism stems from malice, but rather naivety and lack of exposure. When I told Germans I was Mexican, their questions about my food or traditional clothing were sometimes phrased in ways that felt racist. However, considering their population, I realized they simply had no exposure to Mexican culture aside from the stereotypes portrayed by Hollywood. I was surprised by how many Germans had never left Germany, making me technically the first Mexican they had ever met. This understanding allowed me to take an educational approach rather than take the racism personally.

Unlike Canada, where the abundance of cultures naturally reduces cultural shock, Europeans are familiar only with the specific immigrant groups historically present in their region. Therefore, such limited exposure to alternative cultures can unintentionally result in insensitive comments. When I explained parts of my culture, including appropriate ways to talk about traditions like The Day of the Dead, people immediately apologized and shifted to genuine curiosity and respect. With this, I was able to develop a very personal, but holistic opinion towards racism that I can extrapolate to other individuals and cultures.

Conclusion:

The lessons I gained through the CIL will greatly benefit me personally and academically. The language requirement deepened my cultural understanding, and my experiences abroad enriched my personal and career growth. Overall, with the help of CIL, I became a well-rounded individual with a strong understanding of processes, behaviours, and changes brought by the inevitable aspects of globalization. I am confident that the lessons I have taken from this program will allow me to be a meaningful contributor in my future endeavours.