

Capstone Project

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My journey toward completing the Certificate of International Learning (CIL) did not follow the path of traveling abroad and experiencing a new culture firsthand. Instead, it was rooted deeply in being the person that people who have traveled from far places can rely on to help ease their struggle of adjusting. Choosing to stay in Edmonton to complete my 100 hours of volunteer experience rather than traveling abroad allowed me to view my city through a global lens, transforming my understanding of community, culture, and my own professional calling. This experience was a profound exercise in meaning-making, shifting my perspective from a local volunteer to a global citizen capable of navigating the complex nuances of intercultural communication.

While many of my fellow peers had the opportunity to go abroad during their undergrad and experience multiculturalism first hand, I found it within Edmonton through the people I met and the experiences they shared with me. My path involved completing over 100 hours of working with multicultural kids, academic courses, language learning, and a deeply impactful intercultural communication training workshop. While these activities started out as checkboxes for a certificate that I was somewhat interested in completing, there began to be a shift in my worldview. The highlight of this journey was undoubtedly the invaluable time I spent volunteering with children from various backgrounds.

This experience allowed me to teach English to students who were new to Canada through a tutoring centre run by immigrants. Doing this brought me closer to the students and their worldview. To see how they adjusted to the new environment they were placed in, coming to Canada from all around the world showed me the resilience that children so much younger than me had. Interacting with these children outside of the lessons allowed me to become closer to them despite the language barrier. One child I am reminded of is a seven year old girl from

Cuba that I worked with. She had next to no English language skills besides the alphabet and needed to be taught from the beginning how to read and speak the language. Her mother would bring her to the classes but because she also did not speak English, her son would translate for us to communicate. This stood out to me because it was like when I was a child and would need to translate for my father when he could not understand what was being said to him in English. With my help, the girl was able to make progress in her English learning, even the smallest accomplishments were worth celebrating. Through my two and a half years of work as a tutor, I felt a fulfillment in watching the students I had worked with succeed and move on to work independently on their language learning. My work as a tutor helped me navigate the space between my own upbringing and the lived realities of the families I served. What most surprised me during this reflection was the profound comfort I felt interacting with cultures different from my own. What had started off as just a job I had applied to on a whim turned into something that brought me pride in my work knowing that I was helping kids adjust to a new environment, not only through language, but through being a friendly face for them to rely on.

Although I chose to use my tutoring experience to fulfill this requirement, I researched other volunteering opportunities within the city. This revealed the sheer volume of opportunities available to support newcomers to Canada, a realization that was both empowering and humbling. One such opportunity I looked into was with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. While learning more about what they do, I also discovered that my father had gone to the Newcomers Centre to learn English when he first came to Canada. This revelation made me feel closer to him knowing that I was now helping people like him, which motivated me to keep in touch with the Centre for future opportunities to work for their organization and

represent what it stands for. I was a member of a community that thrives on mutual support despite vastly different origins.

A pivotal moment in my theoretical understanding occurred during the intercultural communications workshop. Here, I met peers who were following the same CIL path but through entirely different life experiences. This diversity of perspective taught me that there are many different paths that lead to the same understanding: multiculturalism was something to be celebrated and respected. By internalizing different worldviews, I have increased my capacity to see the world with greater complexity. This workshop required us to reflect deeply on our personal experiences to understand what that meant for us. Whether it was going abroad or volunteering, we were all faced with the same questions and we were all more rounded human beings after our experiences. Although it was a relatively short workshop, I became quite close with some of the other participants. We were able to stay in touch and continue to do so. This community gave me the confidence that I needed to be more open to the idea of living abroad and continuing the work I did as a tutor in a new environment.

The process of completing the CIL has fundamentally changed me. I discovered a passion for community service that I want to take global. I now know that I want to travel to different countries to help communities with English learning, mirroring the work I did in Edmonton. The opportunity to go abroad came up for me recently and despite my own worries, I am willing to take the leap and go. This was never something I saw possible for myself, but by completing this certificate I feel as if I am ready to put the theories that I learned from the modules and the experience I gained to work. Despite my decision to go abroad, I have become far more appreciative of the unique multiculturalism of Canada, recognizing it as a vibrant tapestry of shared meanings. My biggest takeaway is the fulfillment found in a community that helps one

another regardless of background. This certificate taught me how to be more reflective and to treat every interaction as a learning opportunity.