

What is my biggest takeaway? What was the highlight of the Certificate for me? Why was that experience/learning so powerful?

My biggest takeaway from the Certificate in International Learning program has been learning about the importance of culture in shaping communication patterns. This lesson was particularly powerful to learn throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and conducting online interactions in an increasingly globalized world while also having first-hand experience during my intercultural experience. For example, during my study abroad I travelled to numerous countries in Europe including Latvia, Estonia, Italy, Germany, and Belgium, where I studied security and defence. However, given the numerous social contexts within these different countries, I learned a lot about how to communicate sensitive topics like security and defence while adapting to the local culture. Furthermore, I learned how important it was to consider culture when communicating with those from a different culture during my study abroad program. For example, I had the opportunity to attend an international conference in Latvia and I was able to integrate my prior learning experience on intercultural communication with CIL and elevate my group conversations with people who were from different cultures. One way I accomplished this was by paying special attention to body language, and those who understood communication better when it was conveyed with more or exaggerated body language, as compared to those who didn't use body language as much to communicate. Additionally, I was able to lean on volunteer experiences I had as part of the co-curricular option to better communicate with those whose first language was not English. For example, I am better able to distinguish between when it is more appropriate to suggest words or attempt to assist the other person in their communication, and when it is best to give them space to think about the correct word or correctly formulate their sentence. Thus, I believe that my experiences in studying abroad have been essential to shaping my essential takeaways from CIL.

The highlight of the Certificate for me was having a sustained focus on international learning throughout my degree. I appreciated the opportunity to apply this focus in each different area of my degree, from my extracurriculars to my study abroad program. This made the learning experience a lot more impactful, as I was able to apply different skills and approaches that I learned in one of my courses to my experience volunteering with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. The inverse was true as well, where I was able to bring my knowledge from conversations with the conversation circle participants about Chinese culture and language to my university class as well. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of having an interdisciplinary approach to international studies, as I wasn't simply focusing on one area like politics or economy, as I would have done in a typical class environment. It was also a fantastic experience to connect with my peers with whom I share similar interests and a passion for international learning through the CIL orientation. I found this to be a very unique opportunity through which I was able to share and connect with others in a virtual environment, even during a time of isolation and at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, my learning experiences as part of the Certificate program were very impactful because of how they integrated into a cohesive experience of learning about different cultures, languages, and politics. I believe that these experiences have taught me how to be more empathetic to those who are learning how to navigate a new culture or language. This was also very useful when learning a second language, Spanish, as part of my university coursework. The CIL experience encouraged me to be patient with myself when learning another language while

also motivating me to be consistent in my learning efforts. Similarly, it formed a unique thread of consistency throughout my BA degree, as I was able to identify classes that I would be interested in taking easier as a result of their 'international component'.

As a result of the CIL, I have grown in a professional and personal manner. Professionally, I have been able to grow my network in my field of interest because of my opportunity to study abroad and attributable to the other skills I learned during my time with the CIL. Through the connections I have made at my place of study, the extracurriculars, as well as the briefings and presentations, have been essential to my professional development. Additionally, I developed more skills around networking at conferences and in an international setting, which has been beneficial for me in learning how to keep in contact with those who live in a different country. I have also been able to further my personal development as a result of experiencing the interrelated nature of global issues and challenges I faced during my study abroad. For example, my studies were largely focused on international security and regional insecurities that often occur far away from my home in Canada. However, witnessing the decision-making process behind many of the organizations that attempt to improve regional security had taught me about how interconnected the challenges of one region of the world were to another, including how issues that take place across the world affect us here in Canada. I found it surprising also to learn about how much organizational knowledge is shared between countries, especially those who share formal or informal obligations as allies. To illustrate, over the last decade the Ukrainian military has been instructed and reorganized according to knowledge and standards shared by numerous countries in Europe and also in North America. I found this surprising because it highlighted how government departments like the National Defence department are not only informed by cultural knowledge and past experience is has, but also by the experience and organizational knowledge of other countries. Furthermore, another really interesting example of knowledge sharing and interdependence in the realm of security and defence that I came across was NATO's interoperability and standard practices policies. This was incredibly interesting to witness because despite the language barrier, national policies and other cultural differences, the standarization and efforts made on behalf of each nation and their representatives enhances the diversity and interoperability of the alliance. In conclusion, through my CIL experience I learned a lot about the importance of intercultural communication and the interconnectedness of gl