

My experiences in the Certificate in International Learning program have been varied and greatly influential to the construction of my worldview. Through this program, I have been able to experiences studying abroad (in both Northern Ireland and Japan), as well as coursework focused on expanding my knowledge, foreign language learning, and intercultural communications training. These four aspects of the program have provided me with a learning experience that extends beyond the classroom and beyond my limited worldviews. This is an ongoing process—today I understand many aspects of life in far broader terms than I previously had. Hopefully I will continue growing as a globally-minded learner beyond my experiences here at the University of Alberta. This project allows me to take time to reflect on the meaning of these experiences, but also to reflect on the many ways I interact with my world and how these interactions continue to change and grow every day of my life.

My experiences as an international student in two separate summer semesters have been invaluable to my growth as a learner. These experiences provided me with an opportunity to take note of the underlying assumptions that I carry with me in my day to day life, as well as a meaningful venue through which to challenge these assumptions and expand my knowledge through the experience of being abroad. My first summer abroad was in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Although I understood much of Western Europe to be similar and accessible to me as a Westerner myself, my experiences in Belfast were life changing. Over the course of the summer, I learned about various aspects of identity and culture that are inextricable to an Irish sense of self. These were things that I felt that I knew, and much of the information was not new or challenging to me. The focus began to shift, however, to a discussion of Irish identity as it plays out in the contested territory of Northern Ireland. Grappling with ideas of conflict, territory, identity and self-understanding, Belfast provided me with the space to think about the implications of conflict and colonization in my own life. Colonialism is something that is engrained into every life and especially into Canadian life, but it took an outside perspective to remind me of the implications of empire and the ever-present shadow of colonization. Perhaps it was the ease of access to

the imagery of conflict and colonization: barbed wire fences, prisons, and giant concrete walls that made tangible the implications of history within the present. This experience was an important reminder to pay attention to the continuity of times and spaces linked together through colonial processes. On the other hand, however, this was a space where I had an immeasurable amount of fun: I made new friends who remain my friends even now, three years later, despite the separation by distance, and I learned not only to understand the Other, so to speak, but to understand myself a little better as well. In spite of what I had heard (and continue to hear) people say about the danger and depravity of Northern Ireland, it was important to me to think more critically about a space that is defined by conflict, but also by its solutions and answers to conflict.

This experience, and certainly my experiences as an international student in Japan, continues to shape the ways I interact with my education at home. I have become especially dedicated to thinking about the histories and contemporary circumstances of Canada and the ways in which this nation is defined by its history. Here, I have interpreted “international” perhaps somewhat differently than some or many of my peers. Canada is a state comprised of many nations which, under colonial rule, have been lumped into one category of “First Nations”. Despite the implications of this terminology, I have come to understand that many Canadians do not perceive Indigenous peoples as forming unique and sovereign nations. I have used the coursework component of my Certificate in International Learning to formulate ideas and a broader understanding of colonization all over the world, but especially within my own country. I have taken the last couple of years to grapple with huge questions that I still could not provide an answer for: how can we acknowledge a diversity of sovereignties existing within one state? How can I decolonize myself in order to allow space for multiple ontologies and worldviews within my education, but more broadly within my everyday life? This has been an extremely powerful, but also extremely difficult conversation to have with myself, and it continues to be an ongoing conversation while I move

from my undergraduate degree towards my graduate studies. These questions guide my thoughts and continue to challenge my perceptions of my own home: we too are defined by conflict.

The intercultural communications workshop proved to be another equally significant experience in the framework of my education. As someone with profound research interests that involve working with other cultures and other peoples, I need to find ways of engaging in conversations that are not only meaningful, but also safe and respectful for all parties involved. Although this sounds very simple in principal, it requires a deeper understanding of the ways in which our knowledge has been constructed by the systems of knowing with which and through which we currently engage. Even our behaviours, our language and our actions, guided by the best possible intentions, are rooted in a sense of knowing and a sense of being that is particular to a Western culture. It is important to take note of how others want to be approached and understood before acting in ways that are engrained in my own Western mentality. This requires taking a step back and allowing others to self-identify and establish a sense of safety before imposing any ideas or ascriptions onto them. This is not always easy: we believe ourselves to “know” the Other, even when we do not, and perhaps cannot.

These experiences, combined with my research and community engagement, have made me think critically about some very profound aspects of self-identity for myself. Not only is it important to me to practice my own culture in meaningful ways, it is important for me to also have access to a greater understanding of the relationships I have with various peoples. It is important for me personally to think about my relationships with history and with contemporary acts of colonization, and to continuously act in ways that seek to create stronger relationships built on mutual respect and community building, but that also constantly seek to decolonize my mentality, my assumptions, my ways of being and myself. Being given the opportunities to access various knowledges and experience has provided me with the space to consider the many ways I can engage in discussions that will help build a less oppressive world. I hope to continue these discussions well beyond my experiences here in

Miranda Leibel
CIL Capstone Project 2015
March 13, 2015

the CIL program and intend to continue practices of decolonization in all aspects of my life. What I have learned from my engagement in this program is certainly not that we are all the same, but rather that difference constructs our identity, that different epistemologies and ways of knowing exist and yet are often discredited or ignored altogether. I hope to continue engaging these various ontologies and to continue learning from them despite the ways that they challenge my present knowledge, because these challenges and these differences are perhaps the only ways to approach a more inclusive and less oppressive world.