

My Winter 2019 CIC Internship: More Than Foreign Policy

By: Neala Hayratiyan

In January 2019, I had the privilege of working with the Canadian International Council (CIC) as their first “Junior Fellow.” I was first introduced to the CIC when I attended the Waterloo branch’s viewing of the film, “The Merger” followed by a panel talk. Looking around the room, there were people from all backgrounds and all corners of our region. I was inspired to see my own community come together to address international issues such as immigration. So much so, that when my multiculturalism class told us to find a placement, I immediately reached out to the CIC. Being a human rights major, I thought it would be a perfect fit. That it was, the months I spent with the CIC taught me more than I could have imagined!

My new role came with a few responsibilities. My primary duty was to create an agenda for a future CIC talk on immigration and multiculturalism in the Waterloo region. This meant I needed to research and reach out to all the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) associated with multiculturalism in our area. Before my internship, I didn’t have much experience interviewing people. Not to mention, the thought of calling strangers always made me nervous. However, the CIC offered me full support and assistance whenever obstacles arose. I learned to formulate interview questions, the fine art of writing structured, but not too formal, emails, as well as how to be persistent but not overly persistent. By the end of my internship, I had so much confidence in making phone call interviews I would have considered myself a professional!

As someone who aspires to work in human rights internationally, I felt incredibly privileged to work alongside a strong executive team. Many of them are immigration lawyers, ex-diplomats, veterans, foreign affairs ministers, professors who study international relations etc. Everyone was so warm and welcoming, my ideas and opinions were always encouraged, and I knew I could always go to them for anything. They even went out of their way to connect me with other professionals in my field of interest. Observing their dedication taught me that no matter how old or how busy there is always time to contribute to one’s community. This learning is one I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

In addition, the CIC gave me full liberty in who I wanted to interview and how I wanted to conduct my interviews. This autonomy allowed me to really connect with the services offered in the community. I feel like this gave me a well-rounded perspective of multiculturalism in the Waterloo region. On the one hand, I got to learn about the challenges NGOs face in the area, particularly in terms of funding. On the other hand, I was inspired by how in tuned the NGOs are to the needs of the population they serve. Each organization told me about the countless programs they offer. I even got an inside scoop on many programs in the making and how that process works. Overall, I grew a deep appreciation for various actors who work to encourage multiculturalism in Canada. Also, I felt like my interviews made me reflect more deeply on the material I was learning at school.

When I approached the CIC in January, I had no idea just how much I would learn. The CIC not only taught me practical skills that I can carry into the future but more importantly, the

CIC introduced me to vast networks across the Waterloo region. What I learned is that the CIC is far more than a foreign policy think tank, it's a space that brings together a community. I ended my term truly feeling like a member of my community. Moving forward, I look forward to continuing my participation at CIC events. I can't thank the team enough for all their support over the past few months! I feel incredibly blessed to have met such incredible and inspiring people. I look forward to seeing everyone soon.