

Certificate in International Learning: Capstone Project

By a Spring 2025 CIL Graduate

Word count: 1230 words

An assignment submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Certificate in
International Learning

University of Alberta

Reflections on My Certificate in International Learning Journey

When I began obtaining my Certificate in International Learning (CIL), I regarded it as a formal acknowledgment of my experience in the sphere of world affairs, cultural diversity, and international relations. But as I come to the end of this certificate, I realize that the experience has been more complex than I had envisioned. It has not only enriched my understanding of the world but also influenced my understanding of what identity is, the interconnectedness of the world, and how we arrive at them in the context of cultural interactions.

Discovering Global Systems and Interconnectedness

Through coursework and experiential learning, I have gained a deeper appreciation for the intricate nature of international and global systems. Studying Middle Eastern politics within a comparative framework allowed me to see beyond regional stereotypes and critically engage with the legacies of colonialism, economic dependency, and global governance. My research on *Indigenous politics in POL S 327: Indigenous Politics in Canada* with Professor Veronica Fynn provided an essential global perspective on Indigenous self-determination, governance, and resistance. Professor Finn, having studied in various parts of the world, introduced fresh perspectives that reshaped how I approach the study of Indigenous issues beyond national borders.

One of the most shocking realizations was how everything is interconnected on the global and local levels. At Model UN, I represented countries and debated international policy that affects domestic politics. I understood how global challenges demand local solutions, and how local problems need global solutions in issues like climate change policies or refugee rights. My experiences working with Women in Political Science and Campus UNICEF also reminded me of this idea – human rights are not some far away issue, they are real and they affect people in our communities.

Cultural Awareness and Self-Reflection

This has been one of the most significant aspects of my CIL experience: a prolonged consideration of foreign cultures and a prolonged consideration of my own. As a person who has lived in Iraq and has traveled a lot, I thought that I was well-prepared to handle cultural diversity. Nevertheless, the CIL program encouraged me to move beyond my own experience and examine the viewpoints that challenged my perceptions.

This process was also further supported by language learning. Although I am already bilingual in Arabic and English, I tried to enhance my understanding of language variants and cultural signs from academic sources and intercultural training. Language is not just a tool of communication; it is a tool of understanding perceptions. This idea caught my attention when studying Islamic hermeneutics in my Islam, Modernity and Democracy course. The way that scholars interpret religious texts is intertwined with their linguistic and cultural context and results in political ideologies and social movements.

However, I also became more aware of how my own cultural identity forms my vision. In the discussions about Middle Eastern politics, I found myself in the position to mediate between the Western academic discourse and the local experience of my region. This duality of living in between two cultures became an advantage rather than a disadvantage which enabled me to modulate appropriate conversations that could incorporate two or more perspectives.

Applying Cultural Awareness in Diverse Settings

Apart from the academic context, I was lucky to practice my cultural intelligence in real-life scenarios. Despite the fact that I was working at Best Buy, which apparently has nothing to do with international learning, I was able to gain practical insight into intercultural communication. Working in a diverse environment I had to deal with cultural, perceptual, and procedural differences and even non-verbal behaviors. My coworkers are from all over the world, some are university students, and others are parents or newcomers who are trying to juggle work and resettlement. In the course of the interactions, I gained a sharper insight into how the mutual interconnection of the world's populations manifests itself on the micro-level of societies.

In the same manner, my work with *Helping Hands for Homeless Youth* gave me insight into how the global economic system affects local poverty. Some of the youth I worked with had immigrant or refugee backgrounds and were struggling with systemic barriers that were not only Canadian. I was able to hear their stories and this made me realize the need for culturally sensitive policies that consider migration, social justice, and economic equality. Also, my activities in Campus UNICEF have made me to be more confident in my advocacy, especially when dealing with issues that affect the displaced and underprivileged populations.

Personal Growth and Unexpected Lessons

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of my experience with the CIL program has been the way in which it has changed my conception of leadership and activism. I used to think that change was brought about by big structures, such as diplomacy, policy-making, and academic publications. Although these are still important, I have learned to appreciate the role of grassroots actions, day-to-day conversations, and community engagement.

One particularly impactful moment was organizing a fundraising event for Model UN. What seemed like a simple logistical task became a lesson in coalition-building and cross-cultural negotiation. Coordinating with different peoples required a deep understanding of interpersonal dynamics, patience, and the ability to adapt to different perspectives—all essential skills in international relations. This event reinforced how diplomacy and cooperation operate at various levels, from the global stage to the local community.

Moreover, my research on Muslim critical thinkers for my POL S 477 class challenged me to rethink modernity and democracy beyond Western paradigms. Engaging with the works of thinkers like *Tariq Ramadan* and *Khaled Abou El Fadl* expanded my intellectual framework, prompting new questions about the role of religion in public life, the fluidity of tradition, and the meaning of progress. These are questions I will continue to explore long after completing this certificate.

Conclusion: A Journey, Not an Endpoint

The CIL program has been a journey of change, not just an academic exercise. It made me think critically, embrace the unfamiliar, and solve problems with wisdom and pragmatism. Most importantly, it has taught me that learning is a never-ending process, and that it requires personal development and interaction with diverse societies.

Being an international student, and a person who has lived in different countries, I have learned the importance of the way knowledge is constructed from the cultural perspective. I often find myself translating not only the language but the whole worldview, trying to find a way to link two or more cultures, political systems or ideologies. This skill has become essential in my academic writing, work, volunteering, and working with different organizations, or in my everyday communication with people.

As I keep on growing I would like to take away from this certificate the way global systems think, cultural understanding, and a desire to foster positive intercultural dialogue. This certificate is not only the proof of what I have learned but also the ground for what I am going to do in the future, in NGOs, international organizations, or any other sphere in which I am to work in.

Life is not black and white, and there is no way one can describe it all. But through CIL, I have learned to understand that the best insights are usually found in the in-between – between cultures, between disciplines, and between real-life stories. And that, to me, is the most valuable lesson to be learned.