

Certificate in International Learning (CIL) Program
Capstone Project

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Throughout my journey in the Certificate in International Learning (CIL) program, I have gained invaluable insights into different cultures and languages, particularly Japanese and Chinese. The CIL courses have broadened my understanding of how diverse cultures interpret the same issues, offering me a deeper appreciation of societal differences and perspectives. This experience has enriched my academic life and profoundly impacted my personal growth and worldview.

One captivating topic from the orientation course was the concept of consideration, highlighting how cultural context and background knowledge can significantly affect the interpretation of a situation. For example, a gesture considered polite in one culture might be perceived as rude in another. This lesson underscored the importance of cultural awareness in communication and interaction. To truly understand and respect another culture, one must look beyond surface-level behaviors and delve into the underlying values and beliefs that shape those behaviors.

The orientation also covered unconscious bias and unconscious incompetence, concepts I found intriguing. Unconscious incompetence refers to a state where individuals are unaware of their lack of knowledge or skills in a particular area. This concept was eye-opening because it highlighted the blind spots we all have, often without realizing it. For example, I learned that I might have been unaware of certain cultural norms or social cues that are second nature to people from different backgrounds. When I first started interacting with some of my now friends who are initially from other countries and are international students, the topic of weight and plastic surgery procedures they wanted to do was something casually mentioned. Comments about weights and considerations on plastic surgery such as rhinoplasty and eyelid changes were something foreign to me, so I had a talk with them afterward to tell them it could be insensitive

to others to mention these topics as they are more taboo here in the western cultural settings. They then responded by first apologizing but also mentioning that it is normal where they come from to talk about these things as it then takes the stigma away and also shows people you are more open to discuss various topics that could be deemed controversial. Understanding that everyone has unconscious biases has made me more empathetic and patient in my interactions with others. It has also motivated me to continuously educate myself and challenge my assumptions.

One surprising aspect of this program was discovering the number of classes at the University of Alberta that offer extensive content on global issues. This discovery encouraged me to seek out more interdisciplinary courses that incorporate global themes, further enhancing my academic experience. Another pleasant surprise was discovering how willing people are to help with language practice. For example, while climbing one day, I overheard a woman speaking Japanese to her children. I mustered the courage to approach her and mention that I was learning Japanese. She offered to exchange contact information, and now we regularly communicate in Japanese. This encounter taught me that taking the initiative and reaching out to others can lead to meaningful connections and unexpected support.

Reflecting on my personal experience, I realize that the CIL program has significantly shaped my identity and aspirations. The various components of the program, including coursework, experiential learning, and intercultural training, have collectively contributed to my growth. For instance, the language courses in Japanese and Chinese were not just about learning vocabulary and grammar; they were windows into the cultures, histories, and ways of thinking of the people who speak these languages. Through these courses, I developed a deeper appreciation for the nuances and richness of these cultures.

Co-curricular activities also played a crucial role in my CIL journey. Despite starting the certificate program later in my university career, I discovered that I had already met many of the requirements through my extracurricular activities and efforts to connect with my culture. As the Vice President of Chinese Studies in the KGK: East Asian Studies Undergraduate Students' Association, I learned how diverse individuals approach Chinese culture. Many members of our club were second-generation immigrants seeking to reconnect with their heritage and learn the language of their parents. This role allowed me to facilitate a space where members could share their experiences and support each other in their cultural journeys. Helping these individuals regain their cultural connection was profoundly fulfilling. Additionally, facilitating interactions between international Chinese students and local students created a supportive environment where language and cultural exchanges flourished. This experience emphasized the power of cultural reconnection and mutual support. It also taught me the importance of community and the role it plays in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. As an active member of various cultural clubs and organizations, I engaged in numerous events and initiatives that promoted cultural exchange and understanding. These activities enriched my university experience and helped me develop valuable skills such as leadership, teamwork, and cross-cultural communication. For instance, organizing cultural festivals and language exchange programs required careful planning, coordination, and collaboration with people from diverse backgrounds. These experiences taught me the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in creating successful and impactful events.

One of the most powerful aspects of the CIL program was the opportunity to connect with others who are also passionate about intercultural learning. Building relationships with fellow students, faculty members, and community partners who share similar interests and goals

has been incredibly inspiring and motivating. These connections have provided me with a supportive network and opened up new opportunities for collaboration and learning.

The CIL program has been a powerful catalyst for my personal growth, expanding my cultural awareness and global perspective. It has equipped me with the skills and confidence to engage with diverse cultures, fostering a more inclusive and interconnected worldview. I have become more open-minded, empathetic, and proactive in my interactions with others. The program has also helped me recognize the value of cultural diversity and the importance of working towards a more just and equitable world. It has not only deepened my connection with my culture but also exposed me to other cultures I might not have explored otherwise. This journey has broadened my worldview and made it more approachable. I now see myself as a global citizen, more open-minded and confident in taking the initiative in various aspects of my life. The program has given me the tools to navigate and appreciate the complexities of a multicultural world. Through the CIL courses and orientation, I became aware of my unconscious biases and ignorance and learned strategies to mitigate them. This self-awareness has been crucial in my personal and professional growth. I have learned to approach situations with a more critical and reflective mindset, considering multiple perspectives before forming an opinion. This skill has been particularly useful in my academic work, where analyzing global issues from different cultural viewpoints has enriched my understanding and analysis.

Looking back, I am grateful for the opportunities and experiences that the CIL program has provided. It has been a transformative journey that has not only enriched my academic and professional life but also profoundly shaped my identity and aspirations. As I move forward, I am committed to continuing my intercultural learning and contributing to the promotion of cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. The CIL program has laid a strong foundation for

my future endeavors, and I am excited to build upon this foundation as I navigate the complexities and opportunities around me.