

Capstone Project

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Word Count: 1128

Traditional smudging, rooted in Indigenous cultures across North America, is a sacred ceremonial practice to cleanse the body, mind, and spirit. This ceremonial practice involves burning herbs such as sage, cedar, and sweetgrass to purify the energy of an individual or space. I first learnt about smudging at the Water Innovation Lab 2024, a fast-track knowledge sharing conference focused on developing leaders with a connection to water. I had the opportunity to participate in smudging everyday during my five day stay in Exshaw, Alberta, an experience shared with me by members of the Siksika Nation, while also learning about water relations from various perspectives and engaging in discussions on social innovation. These five days were extremely transformative, teaching me the importance of intentionality. This experience, although significant, is only a fraction of the overall impact the Certificate in International Learning (CIL) has had on my personal growth. From my experience participating in various courses and seminars to participation in Multicultural Learning Pods (MLP), I will be graduating with much more than just a certificate.

I had my first global encounter during the 2019 Engineering Orientation at the Engineering Teaching and Learning Centre (ETLC), a building where I would spend a majority of my on-campus university experience. While waiting in line to pick up a calculator, a group of people in front of me turned around and asked me where I'm from. I've lived in Alberta since I was a young child and come from a second-generation home. Born to a Canadian Lebanese mother and a Lebanese father, I grew up in various areas in what is now known as Calgary and Edmonton. "I'm from Alberta," I replied. "Cool! We're from Kenya," they said. Although I was aware of international students in university, I was fascinated by the fact that so many students had travelled across the world to this particular city. This would be my first lesson in learning just how important it is to be able to communicate across cultures effectively and became the foundation of my excitement for participating in intercultural communication training two years later. During my participation in the CIL-provided training, I gained technical knowledge on communication. I was exposed to various types of learning – described as hula hoops grouped together by one of my peers – involved in creating an international perspective. Being able to hear, resonate, and synthesize everyone's unique identity through this program allowed me to gain a skill I value, implement, and share in any leadership position I hold.

A few weeks after Engineering Orientation, I stumbled upon a poster advertising CIL, which promised an expanded understanding of worldviews. I was always curious to learn about the world and those within it – be it culture or otherwise – but my busy first year engineering schedule would halt my decision to sign up. I didn't register until my fourth term, but I was thrilled to finally have the opportunity to explore courses beyond mathematics and dynamics. One course that particularly captivated me was LING 224 – Endangered Languages, because languages, after all, are the window to truly understanding others. I engaged heavily in class, and absorbed as much information as I could from the content provided but also the experiences of my classmates. I pondered questions such as the risks of losing languages and how this loss of communication affects our understanding of the world. We discussed the impact of attitudes on language loss, both within and outside communities, which gave me a deeper understanding of my own relationship with my mother tongue. I speak little of it, but I hope to learn more someday.

Through additional CIL-approved courses, I gained insights that expanded beyond language change to environmental change. One of the most impactful courses I took was EAS 208 – Introduction to Global Change. I learnt about modes of climate variability and feedback mechanisms. I was exposed to the complex relationships connecting environment and human activity to the changes the world has undergone and continues to undergo. It was during these moments of learning that I realized the extent of our planet's challenges, how little we truly understood, and the urgency for sustainable solutions. This realization ignited a passion within me for extreme climate science research and compelled me to pursue a minor in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. I've since taken courses on the ocean, the atmosphere, and the technologies we utilize to study them and everything in between. Combining this newfound knowledge with my engineering background, I aim to better understand the world's needs and contribute to advancements in engineering to make a meaningful impact.

One of the most profound experiences during my completion of CIL was the MLP. I was paired with two students from different regions in Japan, both on exchange at the University of Alberta. While I had understood the importance of intercultural communication since my first global encounter, my interactions with my new peers truly deepened my appreciation for cross-cultural understanding. I remember being nervous to dig deep into cultural norms and how they could be communicated. Nonetheless, over the course of 20 weeks, we met regularly to share our unique

backgrounds and experiences as they related to Intercultural Theory and Edward T. Hall's Primary Message Systems [1]. These interactions not only allowed me to share my Canadian upbringing but also provided me with a platform to delve into Arab culture. One requirement of the program was to produce a final project. As we all were passionate about art, we decided to create drawing prompts from our discussion topics and combine them into a virtual scrapbook to present. Every other Sunday, as we gathered on a video call to discuss various topics – from hobbies to time tracking – we shared a ton. By the end of the project, we had combined 20 weeks of topics with 60 photos, one for each of our perspectives. I had not only expanded my worldview on the culture of my peers, but I also was able to learn more about my own. Every discussion, every photo shared, and every drawing prompt created a lasting impact on me, highlighting the importance of cross-cultural communication and understanding in our increasingly interconnected world.

From sacred practices of traditional smudging to the numerous global encounters of communication, my journey through CIL has left an indelible mark on my perspective of the world and the intentionality of every action I take. This experience has emphasized the importance of understanding perspective when fostering meaningful connections and enabled the opportunity to be exposed to the importance of engineering going beyond just designing, in that it must also consider impact. CIL has taught me the importance of listening and learning and has given me the tools to truly be a global citizen committed to making a positive impact on the world.

References

- [1] E. T. Hall, *The Silent Language*, 1 st ed. Garden City, New York: Library of Congress Catalog, 1979