Final Report: The Centre for the Study of Security and Development (CSSD)

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POLI4390

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**The Centre**

*“The Centre for the Study of Security and Development (CSSD) is a multi-disciplinary network of scholars, working together to explore the complex intersections of security and development. The CSSD is dedicated to increasing our understanding of these complex challenges and inform the development of new policies and institutions to meet them. Our diverse community of fellows brings to bear expertise from a variety of academic disciplines, including Political Science, History, Sociology, and Law, as well as experience in government service, the military, and other fields.”*

**My Role**

I had the privilege of aiding The CSSD during the Winter 2023 in a public outreach capacity. My supervisor, Dr. Brian Bow, had outlined a common problem The Centre’s faculty were facing when we met in mid-December 2022. Students across different faculties were reaching out hoping to gain valuable career experience in and around their various fields of study. Naturally, The Centre attracted these requests due to its vast interdisciplinary research – however lacked enough opportunities to suffice all requests. In an effort to aid students in this pursuit, Dr. Bow outlined a project which involved a webpage that could act as a hub for local opportunities relating back to The Centre’s research. The majority of my semester involved a public outreach “campaign” of sorts, in which I would meet, pitch, and compile various organizations within Halifax and the surrounding area that had a connection within The Centre’s field of study.

**My Experience**

I’ll begin with the actual requirements I faced during my time at The Centre. Apart from a few in-person meetings with Dr. Bow, my experience at The CSSD was entirely remote. This is to be expected, however, given the task at hand – outreach via email/phone – can be completed irrespective of location. This gave me a huge degree of flexibility when it came to completing my weekly hours (7) at The Centre. As I was in my final year, this was desirable when balancing my studies, a part-time job, and social life. Further, the actual task of outreach had rather flexible requirements too; most organizations/faculty could not respond instantly which meant – at times – days would pass between my first email/call and a response.

For a career, I’m hoping to pursue a position in a Governmental Relations role. The experience gained at The Centre has aided directly in providing me with adequate experience in relation to these types of roles. A large portion of my time at The Centre was spent – essentially – lobbying to local organizations to join our upcoming meta list of student opportunities. This meant understanding The Centre’s intricacies, fields of study, and relevant research to help these local organizations understand exactly where, and how, they can help. Having this understanding was vital to ensuring the most relevant information was being passed along to these organizations. Beyond the outreach component, this experience also refined my organizational skills. As you can imagine, upkeeping dozens of conversations with a variety of differing organizations and faculty is a tedious task in addition to scheduling meeting times, asymmetrical objectives, and different points of contact being floated by each. That’s why maintaining a spreadsheet and Word document with detailed notes was paramount to a fluid system. This spreadsheet contained contact information, meeting times, and a brief overview of the ongoing conversations. Detailed below was my process from first contact to the end of semester:

*Step 1:* Compile all relevant information and contacts for said organization.

*Step 2:* Begin outreach to organization – if needed provide two additional follow-up emails spread out by at least 5 days.

*Step 3:* If “*Step 2”* is successful, plan meeting with organization. And;

*Step 4:* Collaborate with the organization to compile a blurb for their section on the upcoming webpage.

Admittedly, most of the compiled contacts would not reach past *“Step 2”*. However, the process worked quite well for those that did respond with the desire for a meeting. While the list is not finalized and will be a continued project, foundational connections have been made, with roughly 7 organizations/faculty members providing interest to be on the list in differing capacities.

**Challenges**

As the weeks went by, a glaring challenge began to emerge that was consistent across all contacts. This challenge would be the only thing stopping a publishing of a list in Winter 2023 and was unfortunately unavoidable. There were simply scarce opportunities. Even as the pool of contacts grew and became more diversified, it was a recurring issue which hampered the amount of opportunities worthy of publishing. More broadly, even organizations which were committed to an inclusion had little opportunities, and I was consistently met with uncertainty behind exact positions for students. This is no fault to these organizations and is simply an unfortunate reality of opportunities available to students. This, in essence, is why I enrolled in POLI4390. I had, to no avail, applied for volunteering, internships, and part/full time work in the past around the community and was met with similar responses. It was not a lack of willingness from these organizations, it was just an unfortunate lack of capacity to take on students who, likely, have little experience outside of university school work.

**My Recommendations**

I have a few recommendations to offer to any subsequent students who may be involved in similar work at The CSSD for their placement. The first, ensure you are maintaining an effective database of all contacts. It will be easy to forgo this in the beginning, however once the contacts list has reached 30+ it becomes tedious to maintain based solely on your emails “*Sent”* folder. Secondly, outline from the onset that your request is not necessarily concrete positions for students. Simply having an organization or faculty member on the list is a success and can still serve a vital purpose without descriptions such as “*[X] offer positions for research on [Y]”*. Finally, choose a few days within the week to put in various amounts of hours. Since organizations will respond sporadically, having a varied schedule to respond to emails worked effectively for my semester, and allowed timely responses to all organizations. For example, I dedicated two hours every Monday, Wednesday, and three hours every Friday to email responses/meetings.

**Conclusion**

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my placement at The CSSD. It provided for a great semester to learn how to effectively engage in outreach, as well as how to properly organize a (limited) outreach campaign. Further, my placement at The Centre allowed me to finish my hours on my own time, which was a great addition to an already busy semester. It was a challenge to find concrete opportunities for students, but I can feel satisfied that the foundation I built during this semester will be used by future placement students. I look forward to seeing the list live, hopefully in the near future!