

Practicum Written Report

Thomas MacEachern

GWST4390/POLI4390

April 3, 2026

This semester, I was a practicum student at the Centre for the Study of Security and Development (CSSD) here at Dalhousie University. As a constituent organization of the university's Department of Political Science, CSSD is a research hub specializing in such subjects as war, diplomacy, development, and international relations. While it mostly consists of research from academics in Political Science and International Development Studies, it also includes such disciplines as History, Sociology, and Law. It also collaborates with other research and advocacy groups at Dalhousie, especially such organizations as the Dallaire Institute, the MacEachern Institute, and the Jean Monnet European Union Centre of Excellence. CSSD operates under the recognition that the security and development of states are often intertwined, and that a world made up of developed, equal states will lead to one that is more secure and prosperous. It does not represent one particular ideology, as the contributing academics have different views and specializations in their own fields of study (such as the environment or trade).

Because of a recent transition of the Political Science department from the Henry Hicks to the Marion McCain building, there was no real office space for CSSD, and most of my work was completed virtually, with the exception of meetings with my supervisor and any work I did at events. My main supervisor and contact for the practicum period was Dr. Marion Laurence, who has recently taken over as director at the Centre. I also worked alongside Dr. Heather Tasker, a professor in the Law, Justice and Society program, as well as Thomas McGowan, a

young member of the Canadian Armed Forces who contributed to our work at CSSD. Some of my work involved the assistance of Tracy Powell and Mary Okwese, administrative workers in the department involved with the Centre.

As a Political Science major myself, I was excited to hear about my placement at CSSD. I had taken a class with Dr. Laurence last semester, Contemporary Security Studies, which introduced me to her research expertise and some of the ideas that I would encounter at my practicum. My own interests within my major have always included international relations and global security, especially in the context of the War on Terror and a post-9/11 world. Recent developments in the United States, including the Trump administration's increasingly imperialist foreign policy, made this semester a particularly interesting time to be a practicum student at the Centre. Prior to getting my assigned placement, I had considered the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives my preferred choice, as I had read their policy briefings before and appreciated their work. However, having heard about the experience of the students who were placed at CCPA during our group meetings, and how their placements did not involve much policy analysis, I am glad I ended up where I did.

A semester-long, ongoing project that was assigned to me was related to a conference being held in Halifax in early May 2026. The conference is on security force assistance, which involves armed forces and officials from one country (or countries) assisting another state in such things as military training, organization, and intelligence gathering. My primary responsibility was to work through a bibliography of related academic sources that had been previously assembled with another student affiliated with CSSD and annotate the sources. While doing this, I could also add any sources that I found that I thought were relevant to the conference. This project was separate from the rest of the work I did at the practicum placement,

always in the background, so I usually had something to work on during slower moments in the semester.

One of the earliest things I did at the practicum was assist with the Massey Lecture held at Dalhousie, which CSSD helped organize. Alex Neve, former secretary-general of Amnesty International Canada, gave a lecture on renewing and expanding universal human rights in a fractured world in which they are frequently violated and denied. My role in this event was relatively minor, as much of the organization of the event was external to CSSD and completed prior to me beginning the program. I worked as an usher for the lecture, showing both the panel members and audience where they could sit, given that we had an overflow room for anyone that did not fit in the main auditorium. While my role was small, I greatly appreciated getting to hear Neve's lecture, which felt like a much-needed burst of optimism about the current international order.

Shortly after this, I began working on what I would consider the main project of my practicum. This was a panel discussion on American intervention in Venezuela, which resulted in the kidnapping and extradition of President Nicolas Maduro. This action was emblematic of a wider foreign policy strategy, known as the "Donroe Doctrine", which asserts the right of the United States to interfere in the affairs of its neighbors in the Western Hemisphere. Therefore, it was a great subject for CSSD to have an event for. This would be an event completely organized by CSSD, and my main responsibility was assembling the academics who would be a part of our panel. Initially, I had trouble finding candidates who were both interested and available. Time constraints meant that I limited my search to academics at nearby institutions, mainly Dalhousie and Saint Mary's University. After changing our scheduled time and date, I was able to secure the participation of Dr. Talan Iscan, Dr. Isaac Saney, and Dr. Laurence herself. This gave us a

broad field of expertise in our discussion of American interventionism, including Dr. Iscan's specialty in economics and Dr. Saney's experience in critical theory and Black diaspora studies.

Our panel on March 19th, held in the Rowe Management Building, drew an impressive crowd of both students and faculty. I co-hosted the event with Thomas McGowan, asking our panelists questions from a list we had co-written prior to the event. While our stated topic was America's intervention in Venezuela, a lot had happened in the time span of planning our event, and our conversation inevitably began to include recent developments in Cuba and Iran. By the end of our panel, which included questions from the crowd, the conversation had slowly drifted to a discussion of a world increasingly devoid of international law and liberal cooperation. While I was initially concerned this meant our panel had drifted away from its initial intent; it seemed to be received well by both the audience and panel members. I think people enjoyed the opportunity to hear intelligent, qualified people attempt to make sense of an increasingly fast-paced, incomprehensible world.

Once we had finished this event, we pivoted again to another panel discussion, the Glyn Berry Lecture. Glyn Berry was a Canadian diplomat and Dalhousie alum who was killed in a suicide bombing in Afghanistan. Every year, the university hosts a memorial lecture in his honor, on such subjects as diplomacy, state security, and antiterrorism. Unlike our Venezuela panel, this event was a joint effort between CSSD, the Canadian International Council, and the MacEachen Institute for Public Policy and Governance. This collaboration resulted in a much easier workload, and the speakers had already been finalized by the time I shifted my focus to it. Most of my work with the Glyn Berry lecture was putting up posters around campus and working on the Q&A document with Thomas McGowan, finalizing the questions to be posed to panelists. At

the time I am writing this, the lecture is still a week away, but I intend to be there to support Dr. Laurence in hosting and to complete one more set of hours.

Similar to the Glyn Berry lecture, the previously mentioned conference on security force assistance will take place after my practicum with CSSD has finished. I will hand in my annotated bibliography around the same time as the Glyn Berry lecture, and that will likely be the extent on my participation. However, Dr. Laurence has mentioned that I am welcome to attend the conference if I am available, and I may decide to check it out to see how it goes and how my research may have contributed.

Overall, I would recommend the Centre for the Study of Security and Development to a Dalhousie student interested in doing the practicum program. It is a good opportunity to work alongside professors in the Political Science and Law, Justice, and Society programs, as well as being conveniently situated on campus. I would especially recommend it to any student interested in the fields of policy analysis, Canadian foreign policy, and the intersection of international development and security.

That being said, there are some caveats to be considered for any student interested. Most important is that most of the work will be done virtually, sending emails and doing research. Outside in-person meetings and events, there is not as much opportunity to be in an office environment or “shadow” contributing members of CSSD. Many of these members are busy academics with their own research and courseloads, so any contact or collaboration with them is limited. In addition, there was not much opportunity for me to do original research during my practicum term, which I originally thought would be more of a possibility. I want to temper these criticisms by restating that this was a transitional year at the organization, both in terms of physical space and the leadership team, so they may just reflect my experience and not

necessarily another student's. I nevertheless recommend CSSD as a practicum placement, as it is a great entry into the worlds of research and debate that many Political Science graduates hope to one day work in.