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Reflection Paper

I was overjoyed when I received both an offer of an internship at the National Defense University (NDU) and financial sponsorship from CMC. Each consecutive summer since I entered CMC has been full of great experiences and helped me discover not only my career aspirations but also a little more of myself. My summer after my freshman year was spent studying Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan under a Taiwanese government scholarship. It restarted my passion to learn Mandarin that had fizzled out in elementary school. I then spent the following summer beginning a six month study abroad in Beijing with the help of the NSEP Boren Scholarship. I owe a lot to the CMC study abroad office, which helped me earn that scholarship and find great programs for me to enroll in in China. My time there reinforced my desire to enter public service. One encapsulating memory was when my CMC Alumni mentor reached out to the State Department's deputy political counselor stationed in Beijing and arranged a meeting at the new United States embassy for me. This past summer, I interned at the College of International Security Affairs (CISA) located within the NDU. It was my first formal internship outside of Claremont, in Beijing I had a part-time internship at a Chinese women's rights NGO but work expectations and responsibilities were different.

CISA is a staff college for mid-career security and military practitioners to study irregular warfare and terrorism. Most of the students were military and enrolled in one year master's programs, a significant number were from foreign countries. There were eleven summer interns at CISA. Our responsibilities were to help with administrative tasks, maintain the biweekly alumni publication "The Eagle Eye", and support faculty. The administrative tasks we helped out consisted of the usual work interns of any organization are expected to do: set up rooms for conferences, run mics for question and answer sessions, make name tags, etc. However, due to the special nature of CISA as a military staff college, we assisted with many interesting events such as the annual joint CISA-National Counter Terrorism Center Conference and the reserve preparatory course for reserve officer. We were able to sit in and run audio visual assistance for when the Iraqi Minister of Defense came for a talk at CISA and when Director of National Intelligence Clapper spoke at the counter terrorism conference.

The main opportunity that came with interning at CISA was the chance to support CISA faculty. The CISA faculty is very diverse; several had previous military experience, one worked for a private military contractor in Africa, several were ambassadors, and others were career academics. In regards to interns supporting CISA faculty, the intern coordinator had two approaches. The first was to allow interns the opportunity to work on any projects CISA needed immediate help on. The second was a more hands off approach giving interns the initiative to meet individually with professors. Through the first approach, I ended up assisting the Director of the Strategy and Operations Division to analyze the models used in a board game based off of the insurgency in Afghanistan. On the surface, this task seemed simple. However, I worked with another intern who had actually served two tours in Afghanistan—many hours were spent reviewing the rules and linking them to real world concepts. The game had a high degree of complexity to simulate the reality faced by international troops on the ground in Afghanistan. For example, at the end of every round the Taliban faction in the board game was allowed to hide its troops. This was to simulate the end of the summer fighting season when the real Taliban would pull back and recuperate until the winter was over. We ended up writing a report on our findings and submitted them to the NDU's Center for Applied Strategic Learning so the board game could be used to teach Afghanistan as a case study for insurgency.

Allowing interns to individually take the initiative to find faculty to support was extremely rewarding. I ended up conducting research support on three projects during the summer. The first project was researching China's military to military relations with other countries. I combed through Chinese open sources online to search for joint-military exercises, military visits, and cooperation on military education. This summer was the first time I had conducted extensive research outside of schoolwork for a professional report. I created multiple briefs detailing the development of China's military relations with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Pakistan. The second project I worked on was studying domestic and geopolitical factors of Xi Jinping's "One Belt, One Road" initiative. I combined Chinese open source information with academic information to create several summaries detailing the role of economic overcapacity, regional integration, and geopolitics. For my last project, I assisted one professor with research for the forward of an academic journal anthology he was putting together on maritime issues. One of his specialties was maritime trends and countries, he was assembling the anthology to shine more light on the increasingly important topic. I conducted research support to help him frame the current demographic, environmental, and economic trends occurring around the Arctic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans.

Besides the work experience I gained while interning at CISA, another benefit was being surrounded by such an accomplished and passionate faculty. While I touched upon this above earlier and in my other paper, working in such an environment influenced me to think critically about leadership. Most of the faculty had flexible schedules and were open to answering any questions interns had. I spoke with a good amount of the CISA faculty, but also visited other faculty stationed in the other schools within the NDU. They were all quite receptive to sharing about their experiences and giving professional advice. Perhaps the security focus of CISA rubbed off on me, but I now intend to search for employment within the nation's intelligence community. Many of the faculty, especially the ones with military background, had experience serving or working with the intelligence community. Following their footsteps, I would like to use my own past experiences abroad in East Asia to help with regional analysis in any of the intelligence agencies. In addition, the passion and drive that motivated the faculty was an inspiration. Whenever I talked to them, I could sense that as leaders they all had vision, a goal they wanted to fulfill. For some it was as simple as teaching or as complicated as contributing to the effort to counter violent extremism. Regardless, the drive each one had was awe-inspiring and something I learned from.

For me, public service is the epitome of leadership – taking initiative to help others to create a better world. My time at CISA has helped me continue my drive to be a leader in public service. I am grateful that the Keck Center was able to help fund my experience at the National Defense University.