

Professional Reflection Essay

The International Security Studies program was a well-rounded introduction to a variety of security issues ranging from armed conflict to counterterrorism, and from global health to cyberwar and other technological threats. It was structured in a way that students could concentrate entirely on their area(s) of interest without needing to spend time on prerequisite courses – and I enjoyed being able to jump right into it. My undergraduate degree in Political Science with a Foreign Affairs emphasis included courses such as ‘Governance, Security, State Formation and Terrorism,’ ‘Human Security,’ and various foreign policy classes focusing on different regions such as Latin America, Europe, and South Asia. The ISS program allowed me to build upon that foundation and was a very valuable extension of these studies – with each course providing an in-depth examination of the world’s biggest security challenges from both a historical and contemporary perspective.

In terms of my professional background, I have not yet worked within the field of international security specifically, but I suppose there have been elements of it in the positions I have held thus far. During my tenure as Deputy Director of the Governor’s Southern Arizona Office, I had to be well-versed in not only the Governor’s policy priorities, but the issues that are most important to Arizonans – including immigration, human trafficking, drug smuggling, securing the state’s water supply for the future, and our economic and cultural relationship with Mexico. All of these have components of non-traditional security threats related to human rights, transnational crime, the global economy, and the environment. Though my role in all of this was very small, I know that the material covered in the ISS program will be beneficial when I go to pursue a career in which my duties and responsibilities require a strong background in this field.

During the summer of 2019, I traveled to Guatemala to work alongside the leadership of a local nongovernmental organization (NGO). AMOIXQUIC Asociación de Mujeres is an organization that promotes women’s rights and supports Mayan women in the highlands of Guatemala through education and empowerment programs. During my time with AMOIXQUIC, I delivered multiple 2-hour presentations in Spanish to groups of rural, indigenous women and facilitated relevant exercises and conversations about equality, domestic violence and healthy relationships, and reproductive rights. Guatemala is still very much male-dominated in virtually all aspects of life, and this has had negative generational outcomes for the entire country. This organization seeks to empower women to change that narrative by giving them the tools to stand up for themselves, earn an income, and be independent as possible. Among my many interests within international security is human rights – particularly understanding the vulnerabilities of marginalized populations and addressing them by challenging the status quo. My degree program – and particularly the ‘Concepts of Human Rights and Security’ course, allowed me to explore this interest as a possible career path. This course introduced me to some of the international legal framework that includes statutes and articles related to gender – encompassing issues of discrimination based on sex, child marriage, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), women as victims of armed conflict as well as during times of “peace,” and a multitude of others.

Based on the material I learned from 11 different courses since September 2019, coupled with the resources consistently made available by the School of Government and Public Policy and a faculty that is approachable and cares about the success of their students, I am confident that finding a fulfilling and successful career will be much less of a challenge having completed the International Security Studies graduate program. Before starting the program, I did not realize how extensive and ever-changing this field is, which definitely provides me with the motivation to continue my education either in a formal setting or on my own. It also occurred to me at some point that so many issues may seem unrelated to someone who is inexperienced in these broad topics – but that they are very much interrelated. The ISS program helped to break down these silos and demonstrate the links that exist among international security issues. Among the skills I have been able to further develop are policy research and analysis, writing policy memos, evaluating the effects of policies, laws and social norms on people, understanding political, social, and economic trends, and being able to convey my findings effectively – both in writing and verbally. It has been a privilege to continue my studies with the ISS faculty – many of whom I had in-person classes with during my undergraduate degree, and the like-minded students from all walks of life who challenged me to think critically and look at things from different perspectives.