

Elizabeth Furman
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For ten weeks this summer, I worked for the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, DC. The OAS brings together leaders and citizens of countries in the Western hemisphere to discuss the most pressing issues in international politics today, and it is an essential component in promoting dialogue and democracy in the region.

Specifically, I worked with the Summits of the Americas Secretariat, the part of the organization that coordinates the Summits, or meetings, of Heads of State and Government, where leaders discuss important topics and make commitments related to relevant hemispheric issues. The Summits do not occur every year, and the next one will be held in 2012 in Cartagena, Colombia. In the interim, the Summits Secretariat engages in a number of activities, including preparing for the next Summit and getting different actors involved in the Summits Process, from nongovernmental organizations to labor groups to other powerful international organizations.

For most of my time in the OAS, I worked with Summits personnel who help to coordinate the involvement of social actors in the Summits Process. Essentially, this means getting the input of different citizen groups on the documents and commitments that come from the Summits of the Americas; these groups include nongovernmental organizations, indigenous peoples, youth, afrodescendants, labor unions, women, the private sector, think tanks, and others. I enjoyed this aspect of my work because it helps to connect the OAS to the actual people in the region and tries to bridge the gap between high level politicians and the average population. I was able to participate in meetings with different actors as well as help plan activities that allow for the greater input of social actors in the OAS.

Probably my favorite project on which I was able to work this summer was the Seminar for the Mechanisms of Indigenous Peoples in the OAS, which took place from June 22 to 24, 2010. Representatives of different indigenous peoples from the OAS member states all over the Western hemisphere gathered in Washington, DC to participate in the Seminar, which provided information on ways in which indigenous peoples can participate in the OAS as well as gave information about the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and how indigenous peoples can use that as a resource in cases of rights abuses. The indigenous leaders produced a formal document as a result of the Seminar, which spoke to ways in which they would like to participate in the OAS, including asking for a Permanent Forum for their participation. This allowed me to see the Summits relations with social actors really come to life, and I thought the indigenous representatives' initiative was very powerful.

My job at the Seminar was more as a general helper with everything from registration to note-taking to showing the guests how to get to their hotel or to the White House. After the Seminar, I compiled the notes from the whole event from the different note-takers and created a summary, which will be included in the final publication about the Seminar. However, what I most enjoyed about the experience was meeting each of the indigenous representatives personally and talking to them about their communities and culture. Indigenous peoples generally live more simple, sustainable lives and are willing to share their wisdom with the rest of the world. They are also communities that have been persecuted in almost every country at one point in time and have persevered. My time spent working the Seminar was a great learning and cross-cultural experience.

I had some other jobs working in the Summits Secretariat as well. Towards the end of my internship, one of my central tasks was to coordinate, edit, and translate a newsletter that the

Summits Secretariat publishes online a few times throughout the year. This required compiling the articles written by different members of our department, preparing them to be published in English and Spanish, and working with other team members to get the Newsletter published on the Summits Secretariat website. At times this was a very interesting procedure, at times it was tedious, but certainly I found it to be a good experience to be the person essentially coordinating the newsletter process and making sure that the project came to fruition.

In addition, I also did some other jobs for the Summits Secretariat during my time with the OAS. Being one of few native English speakers, I helped to edit and translate documents and articles for the department. I also helped with some small tasks of the Joint Summits Working Group (JSWG), whose job is to coordinate the involvement of partner institutions of the Summits in the inter-American system to better implement mandates and commitments that come from the Summits of the Americas.

Moreover, working within the OAS allowed me to have access to the most up-to-date news about international relations in the Western hemisphere. In July in an extraordinary session of the Permanent Council of the OAS in the headquarters in Washington, DC, the ambassador to the OAS from Colombia presented evidence the Colombian government had gathered showing that Venezuela was harboring leaders of Colombian drug cartels and refusing to turn them over or allow Colombian officials to enter and capture the criminals. The ambassador from Venezuelan responded to Colombia's complaints, claiming that this was not actually occurring in Venezuela and that Colombia was presenting false evidence. Other member states gave their input, some for and some against Colombia, during the Permanent Council meeting as well. This was an extremely important meeting internationally, although the conflict remained unresolved, and I was able to watch a live video of it as well as discuss the ambassador's presentations with

very knowledgeable OAS personnel immediately afterward. This is just one example of many events that occurred this summer in the OAS, but being of the forefront of international relations and having access to political experts was one of the most interesting aspects of my internship.

Another big part of an internship with the OAS is the meetings and activities with other interns. The Organization had 90 interns this summer, and there were weekly meetings where different aspects of the OAS were discussed or guest speakers gave lectures. Interns were also required to participate in a model of the Permanent Council of the OAS, where we represented a country, similar to Model United Nations.

Finally, one of the most significant benefits that I took away from this internship was a much greater understanding of the workings of the OAS and international institutions in general. In studying such organizations in an academic setting, one gets a sense of their structure and their function, but actually working within an organization allows for a much more comprehensive understanding of how the organization operates in reality. For me, this included understanding how departments work together, how diplomats interact with each other and with the organization, how important documents are translated and distributed to the member states and their citizens, how an OAS department can contact the government of a member state to collaborate on a project, how commitments made at the Summits of the Americas are actually implemented within the Western hemisphere, and many other aspects as well. I was able to see both the good and the bad that occur in all office settings, the collaboration and the inefficiencies. Essentially, this internship made the OAS come to life for me.

My internship with the Summits Secretariat of the Organization of American States was an extraordinary learning experience. I was able to meet men and women with great knowledge about politics in their own countries as well as international relations. I learned the workings of

one of the most powerful organizations in the Western hemisphere, and I was able to participate in interesting activities with people from all over the region. I am very grateful to the Kellogg Institute and to the Summits Secretariat of the Organization of American States for giving me the opportunity to have an unforgettable summer internship experience.