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Rotary World Peace Fellowship Applied Field Experience (AFE) Report

Introduction

I was very fortunate to receive funding from Rotary which contributed to my costs of undertaking an AFE in two places: the Global Negotiation Insight Institute Summer Learning Forum in the United States and Caux Initiatives of Change in Switzerland.

Part 1: Global Negotiation Insight Institute, Summer Learning Forum

The first part of my AFE saw me flying to New York state to take part in the week-long Global Negotiation Insight Institute Summer Learning Forum for research towards my thesis. Founded and directed by Erica Ariel Fox, a Lecturer at Harvard Law School, the Forum teaches participants that true mastery in the work of negotiation and conflict resolution requires practitioners to operate from an inner space of centred awareness.

I enjoyed and was impressed by the way the Forum integrates wisdom traditions and spiritual practice in this work and was grateful to be able to interview Erica for my thesis at the end of the week. I was also grateful that I was invited to lead a session one morning that allowed the participants to embody the theoretical concepts behind the negotiation skills they had been learning. At the end of the week, Erica invited me to return as an assistant to the Faculty in their Autumn Learning Forum in October this year, but unfortunately I wasn't able to afford the money or time to fly back to the States for that.

Part 2: Caux Initiatives of Change

The second and major part of my AFE took place at the Caux Initiatives of Change Conference centre in the little village of Caux, high up above Lake Lemman in the mountains of Switzerland.



The palatial building the centre is housed in (see above photo) was originally built as a luxury hotel for the rich and famous at the turn of last century. When the Great Depression hit, the Rockefellers and their friends abandoned the site, the owners were bankrupted and the empty building fell into

disrepair. After a brief role as a refuge for Jews and prisoners of war during World War II, the building was bought by the Moral Rearmament Army (MRA) to use in its lofty mission to infuse the world with “absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute love and absolute unselfishness”. Today, the building is leased to a Swiss Hotel Management school for nine months of the year, and reclaimed each summer by Initiatives of Change, the modern incarnation of the MRA, for conferences on subjects such as Conflict Transformation, Human Security and Multiculturalism.



I was selected to work at Caux for six weeks over the 2009 northern hemisphere summer as a Special Intern for the Caux Scholars Program (CSP) and Caux Scholar liaison with the Caux Forum for Human Security (CFHS).

The CSP is an annual academic program that gathers bright young university-aged peacemakers from around the globe (such as those pictured above) to study conflict transformation in the larger framework of peacebuilding, with an emphasis on personal responsibility and transformation.

The topics included culture, identity and leadership; conflict transformation theory and practice; religion and peacebuilding; restorative justice; and trauma healing. The CFHS was a conference which brought together peacemakers from all over the world who are active in diplomacy, politics, business, the environmental sector, academia and the media, in order to focus on responding creatively to the world economic crisis and global warming; to strengthen the fundamental conditions of good governance; and to deepen cultural dialogue and understanding.



As a Special Intern, my tasks involved assisting faculty members and students in the CSP with academic, logistical and emotional support. For example, I facilitated a series of conflict analysis presentations by the students; demonstrated mediation styles; assisted small groups with experiential exercises; suggested discussion questions; provided teaching materials as needed; scribed; and contributed additional instructional points.



I also taught a workshop on Narrative Community Document making to the students. Outside of class, I tutored individual students on conflict analysis presentations they had to do; provided academic and career mentoring; assisted with a class trip to Geneva; supported sick students; taught daily yoga sessions; took part in social activities and initiated group walks after meals. I also assisted with

organizing student volunteer work service to the Caux community and was part of a work team that did gardening each day.



As Caux Scholar liaison with the CFHS, I assisted with planning meetings leading up to the Forum; co-wrote instructions for workshop facilitators; co-facilitated a workshop stream on Governance (the participants of which included former and current members of parliament from Israel, Sudan and Australia, and NGO workers from African and European countries); provided some French interpretation; assisted with the organization of visiting speakers to the Caux Scholars; helped with the orientation of new arrivals and served tea.

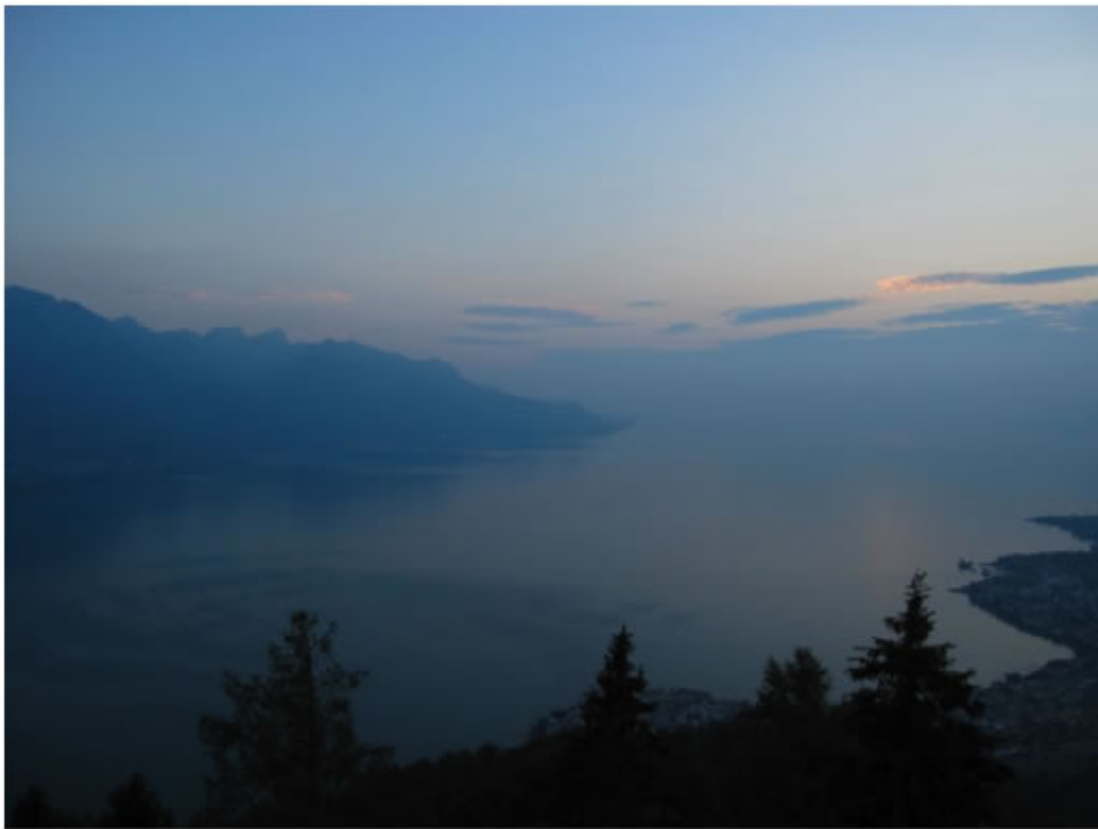
In addition to the CFHS, I was able to take part in some other Caux conferences and meetings when they took place outside of CSP class time. The highlight of these was my attendance at off-the-record sessions on the Middle East peace process. Once the CSP was over, I stayed on for a week to participate in the Tools for Change program, which included a workshop series on conducting “Honest Conversations” in communities. During that week, I was part of a support team that worked in the kitchen and dining room, and another that worked in the garden.

Reflection

1. Impressions of the organization, its mission and its service users

I applied to work at Caux over the summer primarily because I wanted to learn how to conduct a world-class academic conflict transformation program from recognized masters in the field. I knew little about Initiatives of Change (IofC) as an organization, but two Peace Fellow colleagues had recommended the organization to me and I was intrigued and pleased by the CSP website’s description of its emphasis on personal responsibility for global conflict transformation.

It was not until after I had already applied for the internship that I looked up photographs online of the venue.



My jaw dropped when I saw the astonishing beauty of the views to be had from Mountain House – golden light streaming from the heavens, soaring mountain peaks, and the shimmering stillness of the lake below.

As the days went by and I saw with what commitment and kindness people were working to service the needs of the hundreds of people streaming through the building, I found myself becoming increasingly moved by the story of how the once-exclusive Caux Palace has now become Mountain House: a venue which aspires to be an inclusive home for all, where leadership is expressed through service to others and deep reconciliatory healing can occur in an environment of peace and acceptance. I loved the fact that everyone on site was invited to contribute to the daily running of the House, so that people like the former head of the International Red Cross (Cornelio Sommaruga), and Australia's former Minister for Immigration (Phillip Ruddock) might both be washing dishes or serving breakfast, as well as contributing to a conference's plenary sessions or panel discussions.

In addition to many Christians, there were a large number of Muslims, some Jewish and Hindu people, and one or two Buddhists and non-religious people among the participants and volunteer interns. Talking with some of the older people who had been involved with the organization from the early days, it was evident that this diversity in belief and practice is a fairly recent phenomenon.

The meeting of people from all around the world was a special component of my time at Caux due to a number of factors, such as the voluntary service in community mentioned above; the shared concern for healing the world's problems; the uplifting natural environment that had this meeting somehow connected to the rest of the world yet high on a mountain away from it all; the stimulation of discussing both intellectual ideas and practical solutions; the opportunities for silence and reflection; and the continual reiteration of the need to take personal responsibility to be the change we want to see in the world.



I met some wonderful, inspiring people, some of whom have become good friends.

As Special Intern to the Caux Scholars Program, I was privileged to have been able to work alongside and, in three cases, to also interview the faculty for my thesis research. These people included Michelle LeBaron, Professor of Law and Director of the Program on Dispute Resolution at the University of British Columbia; Barry Hart Professor in the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University; John Katunga, Catholic Relief Services regional technical advisor for peacebuilding and justice in the east Africa region; and Mohammed Abu Nimer, Professor of International Peace and Conflict Resolution at American University in Washington, D.C. I also got to interview two practitioners who I met at the CFHS: Marc Gopin, Director of the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University who does peace negotiations in Syria, and Jehan Perera, Executive Director of the Sri Lankan National Peace Council.

Being Special Intern, I also got to know many of the Caux Scholars well. These included inspirational young people like Nnaemeka Ikegwuana from Nigeria, who in his early twenties founded an NGO dedicated to rainforest preservation through community participation; Taameem Al-Maliki from Iraq, who at a similarly young age founded one of Iraq's first women's organizations after the fall of Saddam Hussein; and Bungkheng Sreng from Cambodia who has facilitated grass roots dialogue between Vietnamese and Cambodian youth over the past four years.



Through the CFHS and other conferences and workshops I attended, I got to meet with and listen to impressive speakers such as Rajmohan Gandhi, politician, author and grandson of Mahatma Gandhi (pictured above with the Caux scholars); Gilead Sher, human rights lawyer and chief negotiator at the Camp David peace talks; Ginn Fourie, South African woman who forgave the liberation army commander who ordered the attack that killed her daughter and now works with him for reconciliation; Ajmal Masroor, Imam and director of a training course for young Muslims called "Learning to be a Peacemaker"; John Graham, former US diplomat and President of the Giraffe Heroes Project; Salman Ahmad, popular Pakistani musician and UN Goodwill Ambassador; Chad Briggs, from Lehigh University who works with US and European governments on security issues related to climate change; Angelina Teny Machar, Sudanese Minister of Energy and Mining; Carolyn Hayman, CEO of Peace Direct; and Paul von Tongeren, Secretary General of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

In addition to the people I met and learned from, I also got to see some inspirational material such as the films *The Imam and the Pastor*, which depicts the reconciliation between Imam Muhammed Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye from Nigeria, and the peacemaking initiatives which have flowed from it; 8, eight short films by international film makers about the eight Millenium Development Goals; and *Soldiers of Peace*, a celebration of the work of peacemakers from around the globe. I hope to obtain and share some of these films with others, during my time as a Rotary Peace Fellow and in the future.

My impressions of the CSP were on the whole extremely favourable. The program set itself the formidable challenge of combining academic excellence in the field of conflict transformation with experiential, personal transformation for the participants. The majority of the classes were of a very high quality, and each of the lecturers had both significant practical experience in the field and thorough theoretical knowledge. It was excellent that between them the lecturers had worked with conflict in Africa, including the Democratic of Congo, Liberia and Kenya; Israel and Palestine; the former Yugoslavia; the United States and Canada. The lecturers were also all people of high moral integrity who taught about peace by their example in the world. The students were chosen well, both for their considerable individual attributes and their diversity as a group. The fact that each of the students was required to present and analyse a conflict from their home country was an excellent exercise in allowing the students to get to know each other's suffering and to put a face to the conflicts around the world that would otherwise be abstract and remote.

I believe more personally transformational outcomes among the students might have been achieved however had they been more thoroughly briefed before arrival on the importance of participating in the morning silent reflection sessions, and had deeper personal encounters between the students been facilitated from the beginning of the program. Nevertheless, close relationships were formed

between all the participants and a number of the students expressed how much they were changed as a result of the program.

I also thought the program would benefit from the introduction of better coordination between the different lecturers and more structured opportunities for meeting among all of the faculty, administrative staff and interns.

As noted above, the CFHS was impressive in the line-up of participants. The discussions were unfortunately in general more superficial though than they could have been, due to the fact that much time was spent in plenary sessions with large numbers of speakers each given a tiny amount of time to speak. The smaller workshop and change-maker sessions were often very good though, as was the opportunity for informal dialogue with participants over meals and tea breaks.

I am left with a deep fondness for the organization, its goals and what it achieves in the world; a strong feeling of gratitude for all the people I met and the learning I did; and an abiding sense of awe at the natural beauty of that mountain top setting.

2. Reflections on my tasks and contributions

My roles as Special Intern to the Caux Scholars Program and Liaison with the Caux Forum for Human Security were both new roles for the organisation. Once it was established with all members of the faculty that I was there and could be useful, my skills were often used well and most of what I was doing was interesting to me. I was impressed by the caring and flexibility shown by the organizing staff. All along they made me feel they genuinely wanted the best for me and were doing all they could to make the experience as valuable as possible for me.

The report prepared for the Service Learning Program by my supervisor at Caux commented very favourably on my understanding of tasks, my teamwork and flexibility and my cultural fluency. My work was described as “outstanding”. I felt very happy to know that my contributions had been so appreciated. I was also happy to learn that the narrative workshop I gave to the students was so valued that the faculty wants to incorporate an exercise I taught in future programs, as a way for the students to bond more deeply earlier in the program.

Lessons Learned

My experience at Caux will no doubt be usefully applied to my own life in many ways. The highlighting of the importance of clarity regarding roles will be useful if I return to my previous job as manager of a mediation service, as I understand more than ever how important it is for any staff I employ to be given clear forums in which to contribute their best skills. Likewise, the experience affirmed for me the importance of good communication with all members of a work team and the usefulness of regular meetings. The flexibility and willingness to accommodate that was shown to me by some of the team members is something I hope I will always be able to show to my staff too.

I learnt a lot from observation about what it takes to be an excellent presenter in the field of conflict transformation. One element that I will definitely try and incorporate more in any teaching or presenting that I do in the future will be the greater use of carefully prepared relevant storytelling, and greater attention on creating a warm and loving presence that the students can relax into.

It was confirmed for me that, while it is challenging at times, I really love living in community with people from diverse backgrounds. The experience at Caux has left me more convinced than ever that the opportunity to serve is a vital element in creating a cohesive feeling of community, where everyone feels valued and learns to value the contributions made by others. I hope to facilitate many workshops, training programs and retreats in the future where this sort of feeling is generated and maintained.

I think, more than anything else, my time at Caux reinforced for me that personal integrity – walking the talk and being the change you want to see in the world - is what matters to me most, and also what is most difficult to achieve. The example of so many people working for peace in so many settings has also reaffirmed for me that the mediation work I do is but a tiny thread in the vast tapestry of peacebuilding, and that there are many ways I could contribute. I was most moved by those who went about their work with humility and dedication to excellence, and hope to learn from their example, no matter what direction my career path takes from here on in.



Conclusion

I am profoundly grateful to Rotary for funding me to undertake such an interesting and rewarding Applied Field Experience. I have deepened my understanding of both the practice and the theory of conflict transformation in the broader context of peacebuilding. Through my exposure to inspirational people in the field, and opportunities to share my skills with others, I have gained more confidence in my own ability to work as a practitioner and a teacher in various contexts in this field. I have also been able to visit some wonderful places and to make friends who I hope to keep for life. Thank you Rotary for giving me this unique and precious opportunity. I hope to make use of it in ways that will benefit as many people as I can.