The CIERP Travel grant enabled me to further build my experience and skill as a practitioner by allowing me to present and run the negotiation simulation that I spent my summer creating as a research assistant for Concur Inc.

CONCUR, Inc. is a company in Berkeley, CA that provides facilitation, policy analysis, and professional training suited for multi-stakeholder environmental issues and related matters of public policy. Their areas of practice include air resources, land use and infrastructure, water resources, among others. I spent June-August 2015 working for CONCUR as a research assistant and writing a negotiation simulation* to be used in professional training programs.

At summer's end I was offered the opportunity to travel to La Jolla, CA in order to help teach a negotiation training for 25 masters students at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. The course took place over two days and focused on delivering negotiation skills to scientists who are likely to serve as advisors (or similar roles) to inform public policy decisions with prominent environmental components. The training room was in The Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics, overlooking the Pacific - fitting for a group of oceanography students and a rare treat for a resident of Boston!

My role was to present and run the negotiation simulation that I spent my summer creating. Professionally, this was valuable in a few ways.

First, although I have worked on a number of negotiation and mediation trainings before, this was my first opportunity to be involved in a training that was focused specifically on negotiating environmental issues. Particularly interesting to me was the content focusing on how to structure stakeholder engagement processes when complex scientific or economic analysis needs to be communicated to the public. This also comprised how to structure fact finding processes so as to make them collaborative rather than adversarial. In this sense, participating in the training allowed me to ingest new ideas and concepts about managing multi-party conversations and raised a host of questions and considerations that are salient to managing dialogues concerning environmental policy and planning.

Second, designing, writing, and teaching a simulation gave me new insight into how to best prompt students of negotiation to learn and apply new concepts. It also required me to apply concepts backwards. Normally, you try to filter interests from text or dialogue, however in writing the simulation I had to determine interests, construct a zone of possible agreement, and translate this into text. It has since given me a new perspective on interpreting fact patterns (both simulated and real). The value of this has been emphasized particularly in continuing my work organizing Fletcher's mediation practicum, and also in helping another Fletcher student write a larger simulation as a capstone project.

Finally, it was valuable to experience a training model outside of the ones I am accustomed to. Prior to this experience, the professional training I had been part of had been far more general. CONCUR presents training programs tailored much more specifically for a particular client - scientists likely to participate in public policy making, in this case. As someone whose intent is to work in this particular area of practice as a practitioner, seeing how training materials are selected and adapted to suit specific needs was a valuable learning experience.

Without CIERP's assistance, I would have had to turn this down on account of funding. The opportunity to make the trip and further build my experience and skill as a practitioner, and to continue building a professional relationship with my summer employer were all invaluable.

I wrote a multi-stakeholder, multi-issue simulation designed to require participants to implement consensus building skills and to conduct mutual gains processes in the course of their work as scientists. The simulation was set in the San Francisco Bay and was premised on a fictional initiative by the California Governor's office to implement sea level rise adaptation programs throughout California. As per the scenario I wrote, San Francisco is the pilot in what is to be a state-wide program.

Scenario Outline

The parties must select a scientific report on which to base their decisions and thereafter determine a strategy to adequately address the projected amount of sea level rise. The task at hand is reflective of the policy challenges associated with evaluating science and accommodating the interests of different government entities. As such, one of the main teaching points is reconciling the different priorities of, for example, an engineer charged with maintaining the integrity of bridges and tunnels in The Bay and an elected official seeking reelection. Consensus building among individuals that have different mandates, premises, and methods for evaluating public health is often the crux of policy making decisions, in particular when environmental issues are concerned. The sea level rise simulation was intended to challenge participants to address those issues in the context of an ongoing policy debate in a relatively local setting.

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