STAKEHOLDER REPORT: NATO FIELD SCHOOL AND SIMULATION PROGRAM, 2019

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Meeting Simon Fraser University’s Strategic Plan to Internationalize the Curriculum and expand access to community-integrated learning opportunities, including student exchanges and international field schools, work-integrated learning, co-op, internships and transformative, community-focused learning opportunities.
“What students have achieved, I would offer, is way beyond what other students in their peer group anywhere have had the opportunity to do.”

— Ilay Ferrier, Director, NATO exercises and simulations (retired), NATO-UN and other IGO’s Crisis Simulation, NATO Field School CMX Director and NMDX Senior Mentor

The NATO Field School and Simulation Program is a for credit summer program for senior undergraduate and graduate students. Students learn through engagement, experience, observation, practice and professional interaction. They participate in classroom learning, attending lectures from experts and briefings from senior-ranking military and political officials. They also observe military operations and engage in simulations of real-life decisions faced by diplomats. During each program segment, students learn and interact with experts and political and military decision-makers in their work environment. Like a dynamic practicum or apprenticeship, the NATO Field School prepares students for entry-level employment in foreign affairs, defence policy and various national and international security sectors.

The first segment of the program was in Canada and concentrated on the practice of international security relations, the making of foreign and defence policy, understanding the functions and structures of NATO, introduction to diplomacy, and simulation training. Students visited Canadian military bases in BC and Alberta and were taught by several visiting experts and officials. In the next phase, students spent consecutive weeks in Europe at NATO and EU headquarters in Belgium, the Canadian-led enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia, NATO facilities in Romania and at the NATO Defense College in Italy. In the final segment, which takes place online, students completed their written assignments, including journals and policy briefs.
TARGET AUDIENCE

In 2019, the NATO Field School and Simulation Program was opened up beyond Simon Fraser University to university students from across Canada. The third iteration of the program received more than 100 applications. We admitted 42 undergraduate and graduate students from ten Canadian universities. The cohort encompassed regional diversity, different ethnicities and different disciplines. We had students from five Canadian provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and some students born in NATO member or partner states: the UK, the USA, Turkey, South Korea and Colombia.

“The NATO Field School has provided me with holistic skill sets, including: public speaking and communication skill, analytical skills and information organisation skills that will help me achieve my professional development goals.”

— 2019 student testimonial

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the NATO Field School and Simulation Program are as follows:

1. Educate students by engagement, experience, observation and practice, and professional interaction.

2. Prepare the next generation of policymakers by giving them an understanding of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), Defence Policy, NATO’s values, interests and functions, as well as the importance of NATO to Canada’s security and foreign policy. On the NATO side, this includes working under a UN mandate, in cooperation with the European Union, projecting stability, NATO partnerships, defence spending issues, deterrence and dialogue (focusing on NATO-Russia relations), transatlantic security cooperation, cyber and hybrid conflict and emerging security challenges.

3. Provide students with the opportunity to earn 12 undergraduate (three courses) or six graduate (1.5 courses) university credits while preparing them for entry-level employment in foreign affairs, defence policy and various national and international security sectors.

Due to the intensive nature of the program, the Canadian portion of student programming and curriculum focused on giving students practical advice and training to prepare them for expert lectures, simulations and other activities in Europe. With this aim, students had several guest lectures from high-level diplomats, government officials, simulation experts and military officers, providing introductory information about NATO, diplomacy, Canadian Defence Policy and current security challenges. Guest experts included:

- Kārlis Eihenbaums, Latvian Ambassador to Canada
- Illy Ferrier, Director, NATO exercises and simulations (retired), NATO-UN and other IGOs Crisis Simulation. Simulation CMX Raleigh and NMDX
- Dr. Chris Kilford, NATO-Turkey relations expert
- Commander Kristoff Langland (Royal Canadian Navy) and Major Powell Dudek (Canadian Army)
- Lindsay Moore Geros, Deputy Director for NATO Policy at Canada’s Department of National Defence
- Dr. Brooke Smith-Windsor, Former Senior Canadian Representative at the NATO Defense College
During these experts’ visits, we had small student lunches or dinners with our guest experts. Students could sign up for these meals and thereby have access to the experts at a small group level that most aligned with their academic or professional interests. Students were encouraged to take the lead and ask the experts questions about their careers and areas of expertise. To facilitate knowledge-sharing and develop public speaking skills, students were asked to share the information they gained from these meals with the rest of the class in a short informal class presentation followed by a brief Q&A section. In addition to guest experts, we arranged a Skype call with a former NATO intern who discussed NATO internship opportunities and application processes with our students. In collaboration with Women in International Security-Vancouver, we also organised a “how to network” event.

In the European portion of the NATO Field School, students were again given access to mentors and experts at lunches and dinners. The list of experts and mentors in the European portion included:

- Tanya Hartman, a representative of NATO HQ Political Affairs and Security Policy Division
- Colonel Ian Hope, PhD., Faculty - NATO Defense College
- Colonel Bill Foster, Faculty - NATO Defense College
- Chelsey Slack, Deputy Head of the Cyber Defence Section at NATO Headquarters (NATO HQ)

On average, during the European portion, there were two to three student meals organised per week with experts and mentors. Also, the NATO Field School team was honoured to receive invitations to two exclusive embassy receptions with Ambassador Kevin Rex, Canada’s Ambassador to Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, and Ambassador Kevin Hamilton, Canada’s Ambassador to Romania, the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova. These events allowed our students to interact with and ask questions of Ambassadors Rex and Hamilton in an informal environment, as well as network with Canadian diplomatic staff and military officers.

“I feel like the Field School provided me with new skills and also strengthened the skills that I had. The experience challenged me in many different ways (time management, work ethic, planning, problem-solving, etc.), forcing me to adapt and learn and improve.”

— 2019 student testimonial

2. PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION OF POLICYMAKERS

The Canadian portion of the NATO Field School helped students develop an understanding of Canada’s defence and security policy, as well as the CAF, through classroom learning, guest lectures and military base visits. In Europe, students received high-level briefings from experts in privileged settings like NATO Headquarters (NATO HQ), Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), EU Military Staff Headquarters (EUMS), and the European External Action Service (EEAS). From these briefings, students gain a comprehensive understanding of the four central components of NATO’s current agenda:

- Defence and security (investment and capabilities)
- Projecting stability/NATO partnerships
- Defence, deterrence and dialogue
- Transatlantic security cooperation and new security challenges

A core component of our program is our week in Rome. There, students experience hands-on simulation learning in a Negotiation, Mediation and Decision-Making Exercise (NMDX) under the mentorship of NATO Defense College staff. Students quickly gain insight into the opportunities and difficulties of diplomatic negotiations and the nature of a diplomatic career.

“The wire-diagrams, process charts and simple-seeming daily objectives obscured the messy reality of dealing with a room full of individuals with competing agendas. Tact and nuance, the toolbox of the diplomat, were required to navigate these competing agendas, demonstrating the essentially non-mechanical nature of NATO decision-making.”

— 2019 student testimonial
This exercise introduces students to the processes, challenges and complexities of NATO decision-making with special emphasis on the complex interaction between political and military stakeholders. Students immerse themselves in the roles of NATO International Staff and a NATO member-state national representative. After participating in the NMDX, students develop confidence in their abilities to think quickly, work in committee, speak publicly and negotiate effectively.

During our 2019 program, students deepened their understanding of the military by attending Canadian and Allied forces briefings. At NATO HQ, a panel of deputy military representatives from Canada, the US, the UK and Lithuania shared the important role of the armed forces in security and defence cooperation. The EUMS and EEAS also helped students understand contemporary security issues and cooperation between the EU and NATO. Our visit to SHAPE gave students insight into Allied Command Operations, the Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Process, and NATO’s Operations Planning.

During our visit to Headquarters Multinational Division South-East (HQ MND-SE) in Romania, students interacted and engaged with the commander of HQ MND-SE, Major General Daniel Petrescu. They learned how, as a divisional headquarters in the south-east region, the HQ MND-SE is preparing to command and control an Article 5 operation under the Joint Force Command Naples (JFCNP), operational control (OPCON) and the operational command (OPCOM) of SHAPE.

These briefings were supplemented by field visits to army, navy and air bases. Students observed a premier Canadian training event: Exercise Maple Resolve19 in Wainwright, Alberta; the Royal Canadian Air Force in Cold Lake, Alberta; the Royal Canadian Navy in Esquimalt, British Columbia; the Canadian-led EFP battle group in Latvia and NATO’s Air Policing mission at Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK) Airbase in Romania. In all settings, students were educated on defence and security and experienced how Allied members work together to respond to conventional and unconventional threats in an integrated and multinational environment. In addition, students interacted with senior-ranking officers, non-commissioned officers and lower-ranking soldiers from several nations. Some highlights from these excursions included standing in a simulated village at CFB Wainwright populated with soldiers firing at “the enemy”.

Figure 3: At the 3rd Canadian Division Training Centre, students observed Exercise Maple Resolve. Pictured: Canadian Air Commander briefing students about the air component of the exercise

Figure 4: The three-day NMDX culminates with a press conference by the Secretary-General, where the rest of the cohort acts as reporters. Pictured: Secretary-General and Press Secretary

Figure 5: Briefing about the military dimension of the European Union at EUMS by Col. Bernard Markey
“I’d still like to work for NATO in the future. However, joining the army short-term seems like a good decision because it would open many doors in the future.”

— 2019 student testimonial

Additionally, students toured the Romanian frigate Regina Maria on the Black Sea coast; observed an Italian Eurofighter Typhoon at the MK air base in Romania, and watched an overflight of a Romanian MiG-21, also at the MK air base. By hearing different perspectives from Canadian and Allied Nations’ officers and soldiers from all ranks, students gained a holistic understanding of NATO’s activities and functions, as well as how defence budgets, capabilities and operations are linked. Students also discovered how important interoperability is and how the Alliance tackles common challenges.
As young academics, our students were keen to learn about new security challenges facing the Alliance and how the Alliance is adapting to meet them. At NATO HQ, students heard from Chelsey Slack (Deputy Head, Cyber Defence Section) about cyber threats and how individual member states and NATO are generating cyber defence capabilities. Students further deepened their understanding of cyber issues at the Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia by learning about elections influence, social media manipulation, open-source evidence verification and information environment analysis. Latvian Ministry of Defence officers briefed our students on the hybrid threat facing the Baltic states. Also, a common theme among the students’ questions focused on current security threats emanating from the East (Russia) and the South – the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. As well, students asked about the spread of nuclear threats, weapons of mass destruction, hybrid warfare, and the rise of China.

“My career goal of doing international reporting is still the same, but the field school solidified my interest in China and the Asia-Pacific region. At multiple briefings, it’s referred to as one of the most important emerging areas, even for a Euro-Atlantic organization like NATO.”

— 2019 student testimonial

In all our activities and modules, we reiterate the importance of multilateralism and transatlantic cooperation. Emphasis on this transatlantic cooperation began with Simon Fraser University’s MOU with the NATO Defense College. It will continue as we accept university students from all 30 NATO member-states (effective October 2019). The foundation of our program is built on strengthening the transatlantic bond by engaged and preparing the next generation of allied leaders in Canada, the United States and Europe. The cohort will become a mini-version of the multinational dimension of NATO.
3. EARN CREDITS AND PREPARE FOR EMPLOYMENT

Our program is designed to immerse students in the realities of entry-level employment in the security and defence sectors. Some of our students have successfully obtained an internship or employment in these sectors after attending the NATO Field School (see “Student Success Stories”). Each aspect of the Field School is designed to teach students about defence and security policy and international organisations, as well as help them to develop professional skills, such as negotiating, public speaking and networking. Participants will be able to use all the knowledge and skills they gleaned from the nine-week NATO Field School and Simulation Program as they embark on various career paths. Students also form a network of contacts and acquire an in-depth knowledge and understanding of current security issues that they can draw upon, regardless of the career they choose.

Student Success Stories

- Cornel Turdeanu (2017 cohort, 2018–2019 staff member): working with Canada’s Department of National Defence in Ottawa, Ontario
- Jazlyn Melnychuk (2017 cohort, 2018 staff member): interning with the NATO Centre of Excellence - Strategic Communications in Riga, Latvia
- Jerry Chen and Joshua Baker (both 2018 cohort): interning at the Political Section at the Canadian embassy in Washington, D.C.
- Marina Bishara (2018 cohort): completed her internship at the NATO Defense College Foundation in Rome, Italy
- Oben Okta (2019 cohort): completed his internship at the Consulate of Turkey in Vancouver, B.C.

- Canadian Armed Forces Members:
  - Brandon Sherwin (2018 cohort)
  - Pia Brinkshulte (2018 cohort)
  - Jerry Chen (2018 cohort)
  - Joshua Baker (2018 cohort)
  - Evan Pearce (2018 cohort)

- Students Pursuing Further Education in Security and Defence:
  - Samuel Thiak (2017 cohort)
  - Harleen Atwal (2018 cohort)
  - Antounia Saleh (2018 cohort)
  - Mohammad Imdakem (2018 cohort)
  - Graeme Hopkins (2019 cohort)

- Kosovo Outreach: Every year, two students engage in a week-long mentorship of university students in Pristina, Kosovo during their model NATO experience (the students from the 2019 cohort were Arthur Smith-Windsor and Sandra Barake).

"I hope to spend some time in the CAF. This is something I have thought about for a long time, but have become more certain about since participating in the NATO Field School.”

— 2019 student testimonial

Kosovo Outreach: Every year, two students engage in a week-long mentorship of university students in Pristina, Kosovo during their model NATO experience (the students from the 2019 cohort were Arthur Smith-Windsor and Sandra Barake).

"Until taking this class, I didn’t realize the immediacy of security threats. One briefing in Romania by a Canadian colonel at MND-SE HQ changed my view on this.”

— 2019 student testimonial

To assess the quality and effectiveness of the program in achieving various objectives, we ask our students to complete an anonymous survey at the beginning and end of the course. This allows us to see how the students have developed their knowledge throughout the program.

There was a significant increase in both the familiarity with and positive impression of people serving in the CAF in the Before and After NATO Field School surveys.

When students were asked to describe why their impression of CAF members changed, the majority of them stated that it was because of the personal interaction they had with CAF members. In particular, student visits to the Wainwright, MARPAC and visits with Canadian Forces in Latvia were cited as changing student perspectives. For example, one student stated, “Military visits to Wainwright and Esquimalt were an excellent introduction to the CAF, and all the people we met were friendly, professional. It left a very good impression.” While another student noted, “Getting direct exposure to members of the CAF like at Wainwright, MARPAC and Camp Adazi really helped to build up my knowledge and confidence in the CAF. Getting to meet members of the CAF in person helped to humanise them and add some perspective to what they do.”
In these results, it is clear that students were more likely to view their family member or friend’s decision favourably after attending the NATO Field School. The majority of students did not cite a specific event or experience that changed their opinion, but just cited the NATO Field School as a whole.

Overall, students are more likely to feel that the CAF is outdated after they have completed the NATO Field School. However, responses to this question were split, with some students viewing the CAF as more modern after the Field School, but the majority of students viewing it as less modern. When asked to explain why they viewed the CAF as less modern after the Field School, most students cited viewing “outdated” or “old” equipment as the cause. While some viewed modernity in terms of capabilities or skills, as is evident by this student’s response, “The Field School showed me that although the Canadian Military does not have all the best or the most expensive gear, they make up for it with the extensive training that the troops are given, and the multitude of skill sets that every soldier possesses, which makes them a modern force.” These different understandings of modernity may explain the split trend change in the data.

The question regarding CAF funding shows that students are more likely to feel that the CAF is underfunded after the Field School. The reasons they cited included interacting with members of the CAF and visiting CAF bases and operations.
Like the responses to the CAF familiarity and impression question, students feel more familiar and are more likely to have a positive impression of NATO after attending the NATO Field School. The reasons students cited for the change in their overall impression included increased knowledge about NATO and interaction and visits with NATO officials. For example, one student wrote, "I used to think NATO was a tool for the US to assert their dominance and now I know that it is an essential consensus and values-based political military alliance that is crucial for the security and defence of its member and partner states."

Students are more likely to feel that NATO is important to Canadian security after attending the NATO Field School. The reasons for this change are relatively diverse, and many students cited the entire Field School experience, as opposed to individual experience. However, some students noted that the NATO Field School changed their understanding of Canadian security from domestically focused to internationally minded. For example, a student responded, "A safer world means a safer Canada. There is no one experience that made me realise this, rather it happened over the duration of the course."

**ENABLER SURVEY RESULTS**

In October 2019, we conducted a survey that asked our NATO Field School stakeholders and enablers for feedback on the NATO Field School and Simulation Program. We received seven responses from academia, as well as national and international organisations that we worked with during the 2019 NATO Field School. The responses are distributed over all five locations for the NATO Field School: Canada, Belgium, Italy, Latvia and Romania.

**Organisation and Programming**

We asked respondents to assess the quality of programming and organisation of the NATO Field School. This is important, as it will give us insight into how to better engage and plan for future iterations of the NATO Field School.

**Overall Experience**

When asked to rate the experience of interacting and/or providing programming for the NATO Field School, the response was overwhelmingly positive with 100% of respondents rating the experience as "Very Positive".

Six out of seven respondents also reported that their interaction and programming with the NATO Field School contributed to or achieved one or more of their organisation's goals or objectives. The most common objective identified was youth engagement. For example, one enabler responded to the question of whether NATO Field School programming contributed to organisation goals by saying, "Absolutely, it does. Building a deep knowledge of Trans-Atlantic security and the role NATO plays in it is essential among the younger generations. And they may want to work at NATO in the future!"
Quality of Programming

Respondents assessed the overall quality of the NATO Field School programming to be either high quality (50% of responses) or very high quality (50% of responses). The quality of the NATO Field School programming was also noted in responses to the question of how the program could improve. For example, one respondent stated, “I consider the dedication, focus and responsibility demonstrated by the organising team as outstanding. As an SFU outsider, but one with wide-ranging international experience, I consider that I have little further improvement advice to offer.” While another stated, “Very professional approach at all levels, quality and professionalism of candidates, excellent program. Timing could be something that can be improved, but on the other hand, it is extremely hard to have the ‘right timing’ at every location.”

Students

We asked our respondents also to rate the knowledge, quality of student questions, professionalism and preparedness of the NATO Field School student cohort. This is important, as it shows how effective the syllabus and in-class training the students receive is in preparing them to engage actively in the field.

The student cohort was ranked somewhat strong to very strong in professionalism and visit preparedness. Six out of seven respondents rated the quality of student questions during briefings and other activities as somewhat or very strong. Knowledge of the enabler’s organisation or topic was the lowest, with five out of seven respondents rating student knowledge as somewhat or very strong. For many of our students, the NATO Field School is the first time they have studied defence and security issues in-depth. Therefore, it makes sense that knowledge of organisation or topic is the lowest student score.

We also asked respondents to assess how well the NATO Field School achieved these educational objectives:

1. Students engaged and observed professionals and experts in their working environment.
2. Students simulated and better understood the decision tasks that political, diplomatic and military personnel face.
3. Students built relationships and pursued analysis and questions with visiting experts, senior officials and academics.
4. Students are now better prepared for a career in diplomacy, government, international organisations, international law, international business and other careers after the NATO Field School.

For each of the four objectives, the majority of respondents assessed the program as very or extremely effective in achieving the objectives listed above. This suggests that the programming is achieving its educational aims.

Quotes from Mr. Ilay Ferrier, Simulation Visiting Expert and NMDX Mentor, After Action Report on NMDX in Rome:

“This provided a unique opportunity to experience the complexities of international strategic negotiation in an environment with which students have little experience or in-depth knowledge. Their successful completion underpins their achievement and will no doubt enhance their future lives. This is irrespective of whether students choose a future in the world of international and multi-lateral affairs or domestic and local engagement; the lessons apply to almost any style of workplace interrelations.”

“They have learned a bit about NATO’s consensus-driven negotiation and consultation procedural architecture in order to enable the students to engage in the practical implementation of multi-lateral negotiations.”

“Whether students choose a future in government, international organisations, the business world, or something else — these negotiation practises and procedures are similar to those used in a wide-variety of institutions and multinational organisations — but they apply equally to negotiations in small, medium and global business environments, too.”

“What students have achieved, I would offer, is way beyond what other students in their peer group anywhere have had the opportunity to do.”
PROGRAM DIRECTOR’S CONCLUDING REMARKS

I write these concluding words on behalf of my dedicated and hard-working (student) assistants team. Cornel, Jazlyn and Harleen have invested so much of their lives in this new venture. Alexandra, my co-teacher and simulation expert continues to invest in our curriculum. We are grateful to the enablers at Simon Fraser University who have supported us. Both the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the SFU International Engagement Grant have, from the start of this program, provided funding. NATO’s PDD division has also granted us some funding for components of the course.

The successful completion of the third year of our NATO field school is a milestone. This unique and hybrid program is now a proven concept. I have seen how it has changed students and how it has helped many prepare for their career. Nothing in the classroom can compare. Students will also tell you the program is physically and mentally demanding. The learning is practical, but the material is rigorous. Learning together is itself a new experience for most students in international affairs. This year, students from across Canada’s best universities studied and experienced this material together for eight weeks. It can build life-long networks.

Our ambition remains. In 2020, we are accepting student applications from all 30 NATO nations, and have added several days in Ottawa. We are building a NATO university experience covering multiple NATO locations and vocations. We do not want this to be an elite program, which means we need outside funding to keep program fees low. Reaching our civilian students, who hardly think of defence and security issues, is vital for our constitutional democracies. Multilateralism and international cooperation is essential for our security, but also hard work.

Few of us realize, at first, how many people, locations and events need to work together to deliver the persistent quality we pursue. Our national and international enablers and stakeholders help turn ideas into action. I hope this stakeholder report will encourage you to work with us in the future.

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