

Robin Heemskerk intern testimonial

Hi my name is Robin Heemskerk, Communications student from the University of Twente in the Netherlands. I've worked as an intern for the Australian Institute of International Affairs for three months from the 1st of March till the first of June. I was joined by my fellow Communications student Emilie, who studies at the same University as I do.

As a Communications student I've been working on all sorts of projects that had a communications approach. I worked in Canberra in the AIIA National Office. My internship also contained occupying the office and answering the phone. Just being present in the office was a very important task in my view since the National Office isn't always occupied. This is because the National Executive Director, Melissa Conley Tyler, splits her time between Melbourne and Canberra; so every other week the office was unmanned, this changed when Emilie and myself started and since then the amount of mail and phone calls seems to have increased.

My communication projects involved designing a new house style for the AIIA, compiling a database of people we can send AIIA publications to, gathering contact details of AIIA-like institutes worldwide, designing an advertisement for a magazine, organizing and writing minutes for a media and a website working group and finally writing and reading a lot of emails!

Although I've worked in similar offices before in the Netherlands, working with the AIIA was very different than my previous experiences. The main difference lies in the fact that I felt very responsible but adequately supported by my supervisor. She gave me a lot of freedom in my projects and fortunately she was very content with the work I did.

What did I learn and achieve in my time with the Institute? Well, besides putting my communication skills into practice, I learnt a lot about International Relations! A benefit of working with the AIIA National Office is that I was able to attend several interesting lectures organized by the ACT Branch of the AIIA; they share the building with National Office and organize lectures in our Conference Room.

Also Emilie and I attended four reception parties organized by foreign Embassies here in Canberra and in the process we met and talked to several people of the diplomatic corps; very interesting and great champagne! Also I learned a thing or two about podcasting, lobbying and copyright by attending workshops organized here in Canberra. I was able to go to these workshops and receptions because the Institute receives a number of invitations for these events every month. Emilie and I were happy to attend!

What I achieved is in my mind foremost the fact that by being in the office full time and by sending our Branches requests for information or providing them with template documents with our new common style, Emilie and I were able to revive the central role of National Office within the AIIA. Off course, special appreciation needs to be giving to the constant flow of ideas and suggestions by our supervisor Melissa.

After three months of work we leave Canberra content and with the knowledge that the AIIA and it's Branches have appreciated our input and that they look forward to welcoming new interns to continue our work.