

Getting slapped in the face with UNHCR knowledge

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I'm in the beginning of week six with UNHCR, just beyond the halfway point. As I described it to one of my friends, I feel like I'm getting slapped in the face with knowledge every single day that I am here. I have learned so much about the UN system, humanitarian logistics, and international communications in the past five weeks, and I can't believe I'm already halfway done.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned is the importance of confidentiality and carefully monitoring any and all information put out by the UNHCR. At the beginning of the summer, I would have said that everything about UNHCR should be completely open and transparent. However, being here has allowed me to see how confidentiality and self-censorship within the UN can be vital for the safety of refugees and humanitarian workers in the field. It is incredibly complicated to run an organization across so many countries, and it involves dealing with many conflicting governments, individuals, and cultural norms. Unfortunately, I can't really provide specific examples because of the exact confidentiality I'm trying to defend. However, as I continue to study international humanitarian work at Tulane, I feel I will better understand decision making in terms of information sharing at the international level.

Though I have had an array of projects in my time here, the ones I have enjoyed most were research based. Not only did I learn more about humanitarian management through these projects, but I also got to improve upon my ability to present information in a clear and concise manner. For example, I was recently asked to come up with talking points for a press briefing on cash assistance programs for Syrian refugees in Jordan. It was interesting for me to learn more about this type of assistance, and in which contexts these programs are feasible. It also gave me a chance to improve my writing and communications skills in presenting the most important information in the most concise way possible.

I am glad to be working in communications because I believe skills in communications and writing will be applicable to all aspect of my academic and professional life. This ranges from my academic writing, to my position with the Tulane Center for Global Education, and even to job applications. I feel incredibly lucky to be here and I'm excited to see what the rest of the summer holds.