Practicum Spotlight: Catherine Keating MS – NDR ‘15

There are many aspects of the Werner Institute that I am grateful for: my classes with extremely useful and practical content; the warm and inviting instructors/professors; the community of my classmates; the Jesuit-values oriented mission; a challenging and exciting practicum; and more. All of these pieces of a great program made my time at Werner one of much growth and learning.

I focused my studies around the International Conflict Resolution tract. I found my classes fascinating and varied. There were courses that helped me to understand conflict at its core, for both macro and micro conflict scenarios. Course content was helpful for me in both my personal and professional life. This is exactly what I had wanted from the degree: skills coupled with theory for many spheres of life.

I would like to highlight the practicum that I did with a local community-organizing group called the Institute for Public Leadership (IPL). My practicum is a great example of the way that my interests with international and cross-cultural work could be paired with a look at engaging dispute resolution on a macro level. I worked with the lead organizer of IPL, Joe Higgs, on an initiative called the Refugee and Immigrant Women’s Leadership Academy. Our goals were to bring refugee and immigrant women together to name issues that affect their lives. We then brought in local female leaders from the community to dialogue with the women about ways to effectively engage those issues in their lives. We also hoped to empower women to look at the systems and structures that underlie the issues and challenges that they face so that they can advocate for themselves, their families, and their communities in large and small ways.

The practicum helped me gain experience with macro-conflict engagement techniques through community organizing. I saw how important it is to build relationships with people in order to empower them to voice their own needs and make changes in their own lives. I was also able to use micro-conflict engagement techniques via mediation and facilitation at meetings and in one-on-one conversations. I engaged women from many different cultures and countries, needing to use tips learned in my courses about cultural competency and working with people with varying conflict styles.

I know that my practicum, as a pinnacle of the course-work and experience that I gained through the Werner Institute, was important in helping me to attain my dream job in my next step. Beginning in mid-July, I will be heading to Bethlehem, Palestine to do grassroots Peacebuilding work with the Mennonite Central Committee. It is exactly what I wanted to do when I entered the Werner Institute, and I am so grateful that the program helped me to achieve this professional and personal goal.

Thank you to all of my wonderful professors and mentors at the Werner Institute!