



Multilateral Diplomacy

IMPACT STORY

UNITAR NEW YORK OFFICE

GLOBAL DIPLOMACY INITIATIVE

Background

Gaining knowledge and strengthening capacities in global politics and policies is essential to sustain diplomatic relations in a globalized and interdependent world. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) contributes to the objectives above through its Multilateral Diplomacy programmes and events. As part of these efforts, the UNITAR Office in New York, (NYO) regularly implements the Global Diplomacy Initiative (GDI), which offers professionals and students in higher education the opportunity to strengthen knowledge and learn through first-hand experience about diplomacy from experienced UN diplomats, delegates, and ambassadors. This Impact Story highlights the experiences of four GDI participants and illustrates how the Initiative has helped broaden perspectives, define career goals, deepen confidence, and open doors.

The GDI programme is aligned to the SDG 16 on “promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

The programme consists of three-hours weekly face-to-face sessions,¹ which take place at the UN Headquarters in New York for three months. Besides the classroom learning modules, the participants are given the opportunity to observe sessions of the UN General Assembly and other UN forums. The courses have embraced topics for a better comprehension of the UN system, current global issues, and diplomacy and global treaties. The programme’s methods encourage participants to think collaboratively, creatively, and critically.

The first edition of the course took place in the Fall term of 2017 under the name “International Relations and Global Diplomacy”. In Spring 2019, the programme was relaunched with the name of GDI. It has been conducted in a term to term basis in Spring, Summer, and Fall. At the time of writing this, a fourth edition was being offered for the Fall term, expected to end in December 2020.

In 2019, 19 students and young professionals were selected for the programme, and all of them obtained a certificate of completion. The programme Level 1 Evaluation results for 2019 indicate that its performance was above the UNITAR average figures for the courses offered in 2019, with 92 percent of the participant respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the information and skills obtained in the workshop were very useful and likely to be used in the future. Also, for more than 80 percent of respondents, the information provided was new. Similarly, most of the participants agreed that the learning event was relevant to their jobs.

¹ Virtual in the Spring 2020 Term, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Completed Course Editions



International Relations and Global Diplomacy

- Fall 2017 (Oct – Dec)
- Spring 2018 (Mar – May)
- Summer 2018 (Jun – Aug)

Global Diplomacy Initiative

- Spring 2019 (Feb – Apr)
- Fall 2019 (Sep – Dec)
- Spring 2020 (Feb – Apr)



46

Students enrolled in the programme since 2017

100%

Received a certificate of completion in 2019



Students agreed that the information provided in the course was...

Spring Term 2018



Summer Term 2018



Spring Term 2019



Fall Term 2019





Ms. Udeaku Chikezie

Communications Specialist and Doctoral Student

Going beyond theory: A global professional

Ms. Udeaku Chikezie participated in the first edition of the GDI in 2017, after finishing a graduate programme in Diplomacy and International Relations. She wanted to apply the knowledge she had acquired and was looking for a more practical perspective on global diplomacy, multilateralism, the UN system, disarmament, and humanitarian diplomacy. The GDI programme seemed to be the right fit as it allowed her to observe General Assembly and Security Council sessions, amongst others. Today, she describes her GDI experience as a **pivotal moment in her professional career**. Additionally, she started to be interested in UNITAR's work, where she will work as a trainee and consultant two years later.

Regarding the course methodology and structure, she values the opportunity of having close interactions with the panelists, tutors, and trainers; its flexibility to meet the interests of each of the students, and the tutors' support, leadership, and openness for discussion. Being a flexible programme, the GDI allows its participants to focus on the topics they would like to pursue (or they are pursuing) in higher education and on what their profession might entail. Besides, it enables active interaction between students, creating a space where everyone can express what they think.

In fact, **sharing ideas with people with different professional backgrounds, beliefs, and from over ten different places of origin was one of Udeaku's main learnings and had impacted her professional and personal life**. According to Udeaku, the course taught her that all of us have limits in our understandings but, when coming together and sharing with others, you can change your perspective, expand your horizons and scope of the world; be open to having real discussions, without being insensitive. Now, **she feels very confident to discuss questions that matter on a deeper level and from a global perspective**.

Through her career she has applied the knowledge and soft skills gained in the course at different levels depending on her work needs. After the GDI programme, she worked as a freelance researcher and focused on the refugee's crisis and humanitarian diplomacy issues. When working as a researcher, she could **apply the knowledge when writing papers**. The course shaped her understandings on multilateralism and how things work, helped her think from different perspectives (e.g., as a policy maker or someone who is vulnerable), and how to interact with people in different contexts. Later on, she joined UNITAR in the New York office, where she could apply much of the knowledge acquired by giving advice to the new GDI students and **structuring the next programme** by including for example a new component on peace and security.

Ms. Chikezie is currently doing a doctorate programme in Organizational Leadership. In the future, she sees herself as a communication specialist who is able to bring an unbiased and balanced perspective in her stories. She also wants to do research that offers different understandings and influence policy-making, leaving no one behind. She considers that without the UNITAR training, she would not have the understanding she now has on the issues of study. She hopes the

programme can be expanded to welcome more participants from outside the US, which generally face logistics challenges to participate in the course, or that a similar (with practical and active learning) but more accessible programme could be launched.



Ms. Leidy Castellanos

MA. in International Crime and Justice

Experiencing the UN through the GDI

Ms. Leidy Castellanos is a lawyer with a master's degree in International Crime and Justice from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Leidy is an enthusiastic professional, passionate about global issues such as organized crime, drug and human trafficking, and enjoys learning from international environments. While doing her graduate programme in New York, she had the opportunity to participate in GDI's 2019 Fall Term. When she applied for it, Leidy found the GDI programme convenient to her professional career, as she could specialize in her topics of interests, experience a multicultural setting, and gain three credits for her study programme.

Before the GDI, Leidy participated in a two-week Winter School on Transnational Organized Crime of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna, Austria. She considers that both UN learning experiences **defined her career perspectives and current professional interests**. Before the UNODC course, she wanted to focus her career path on human rights and migration issues. Once in Vienna, Leidy realized she wanted to work on drug and human trafficking related issues. Leidy believes the GDI programme allowed her to strengthen her knowledge on the topic and reaffirm her professional interests. As part of her final assignment in the course, and with the guidance of her programme tutor, she wrote an essay on drug trafficking and its social and environmental impacts in Colombia. Leidy is currently based in Colombia and wishes to continue contributing to this field in her country or abroad.

Nonetheless, what Leidy found unique of the GDI programme was having a first-hand experience of the UN day-to-day dynamics. Participating in the course gave her the opportunity not only to assist to UN meetings and events but to make use of the different building facilities, just like a UN staff member. Leidy remembers happily visiting the UN offices around three times per week to continue her learning experience. In this context, she could take two courses through the UN Library, one of them on Legal Research. She considers this active experience **improved her confidence to apply to employment opportunities in UN institutions and pursue new professional challenges**. For example, she recently volunteered in the 24 hours Conference on Global Organized Crime in which she coordinated with some speakers and managed four sessions. An indirect way to experience the UN was through the trainers. Given the large international experience of the trainers (many of them had worked or are still working in the UN), students can get information and knowledge from different perspectives.

The practicality of the programme allowed Leidy to apply the writing skills acquired in the course in her graduate classes, and while making job applications. Leidy also appreciates a lot the **networking opportunity** offered by the programme. Thanks to the GDI, she could meet people from different countries and backgrounds, and share ideas with them. Today, she is still in touch with many of her classmates which she calls friends now. Leidy says that she values highly the GDI programme and has recommended it to others.

We were fortunate to talk with **Mr. Marcin Cecot** and **Ms. Mounira Baraka**, participants of the GDI in Fall 2019. Both Marcin and Mounira have an impressive professional experience, and decided to enroll in the GDI while changing professions, turning towards a more international focus.



Mr. Marcin Cecot

International Relations and Financial Services Specialist

The GDI was not Marcin's first UNITAR learning experience. Indeed, he completed numerous UNITAR courses online and is taking a post-graduate programme in International Affairs and Diplomacy organized by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) and UNITAR. As part of the master, he also participated in a one-week UN immersion programme in Geneva. The flexible structure and first-hand experience offered by the GDI fit his motivations to experience new career pathways and he decided to also enrol in the course.

Marcin is currently working as a financial services specialist in a private firm in New York. Yet, he is in a career break from his previous job, where he also worked in the financial services field but for a regional organization. When eventually returning to it, he could join a different division and thematic area. Marcin decided to take new professional challenges by looking at finance from a different angle and in order to work on something he considers more impactful. The GDI offered him the opportunity to gain experience and learn in a variety of thematic areas that he could incorporate if he shifts to another professional field and in order to find "his niche". Moreover, the course also allowed Marcin to strengthen some knowledge that, although not directly linked, could be applied to his current position. For example, the most interesting modules for Marcin were those related to the **SDGs and the Agenda 2030 and on Climate Change, while the firm where he works is considering incorporating the Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) principles.**

In his own words, the programme has been a **confidence-booster** for his career. He can mention the course as part of his professional experience and add it to his CV without hesitation. The active participation in UN activities and the exclusivity of information coming from the tutors with broad expertise explain much of the gained confidence. To Marcin, the GDI was also an opportunity to get contacts and expand his networks, as he even got to meet the former Queen of Jordan at one of the side events. Particularly, he could continue working after the course with his supervisor for the publication of his final assignment, an article on the role of Central Banks to address financial risks posed by climate change.² The publication process was a valued experience for him and he hopes that UNITAR may help to share other student's work through its website or newsletters.

Another important feature of the course for Mr. Cecot was the active participation in UN activities and access to the United Nations headquarters in New York as he had never expected. Marcin funnily compares this experience to having access to every room in the White House for someone interested in US government. He shared that the GDI supports the participants in understanding

² <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3509012>

how international diplomacy works in practice. Participating in the different events was interesting even for finding ideas for his assignments and future professional interests and orientation.



Ms. Mounira Baraka

Lawyer with emphasis in Migration and Refugees – Legal Aid Ontario

Ms. Mounira Baraka demonstrated to be a **very committed learner** and dedicated professional. Originally from Algeria, she now lives in Canada, and for the course, she travelled every week from Toronto to New York to attend UN events and the weekly sessions of the programme. Mounira is currently working as a lawyer for Legal Aid Ontario's Refugee Law Office and has previously worked in non-profit organizations in Bangladesh, West Sahara, and Algeria. Prior to the course, she has focused her work on Humanitarian Aid, especially migration and refugees, and her professional interests were oriented to Human Rights issues with attention to the third committee. After taking classes on disarmament in the GDI, she became interested in the field. Now, she would like to orient her career towards disarmament and conflict with a special interest in the Middle East.

As the other GDI participants we talked with, the active participation in UN events was well appreciated by Mounira. Furthermore, the timing of the course (Fall term) was very convenient for taking advantage of the programme's opportunities, since "the most important" events occur during that term (e.g. General Assembly). Mounira believes the programme has opened many doors and changed her professional views and interests. The course also gave her the opportunity to attend many conferences outside the New York office. In December 2019 she participated in the Biological Weapons Convention in Geneva, organized by the United Nations Office in Geneva. She could also attend two more conferences in Geneva: The Weapons in Mass Destruction Middle East Free Zone Conference in January 2020 organized by UNIDIR, and the third on Disarmament in August 2020. During the conferences, she could expand her professional networks, as she did during the GDI. Mounira still maintains contact via WhatsApp with many of her classmates from the GDI.

Mounira is looking for new opportunities in the area of disarmament and conflict, where she might apply her new learnings. Mounira considers that the fact of being connected to different diplomats, ambassadors, and experts during the course, gives importance to her professional experience, and it is something that she can mention with confidence. For Mounira, the programme provides participants with a key that can open as many doors as they can and desire. Ms. Baraka believes that along with the new possibilities created by the course, it would be ideal to include in the programme at least one session about job opportunities in the UN system, helping those participants, like her, who want to pursue a career in the UN system.



Conclusion

Unlike other UNITAR programmes that target potential participants with common careers pathways and goals, the GDI is designed to integrate professionals with diverse backgrounds and working experience. While the GDI is designed to contribute to Goal 16, its effects are much less aligned. There are, nevertheless, important unintended outcomes. The GDI has influenced participants in defining their career goals, providing insights into new thematic areas, changing of career focus, expanding networks, and becoming more familiar with the UN system.

While the GDI might not have led to immediate career opportunities and application of knowledge in participant's current job positions, it has certainly strengthened the confidence and commitment of the professionals to pursue their goals to contribute to something they consider meaningful or impactful. Besides, they have been able to apply other technical and soft skills gained in the course.

Though most share the common goal to work eventually for or with the UN, only one of the interviewees has already made this happen.