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Co-op students find work at UAE campus

by Livia Fama, Waterloo UAE Campus

Two University of Waterloo engineering students have broadened their horizons by studying and working for one term at Waterloo's UAE campus in Dubai.

With internationalization being a major item on Waterloo's sixth decade plan, the Waterloo UAE campus serves as a bridge to offer students the opportunity to study and work in a different culture, further enriching their education, and enabling Waterloo to produce graduates that are culturally minded, global citizens.

Emiliano Pineda (*right*), a second-year civil engineering student, has set a precedent for main Waterloo campus students by being the first to do both a study term and a co-op term at the Waterloo UAE campus.

"I have four years to study in Canada, so I might as well do one term abroad," said Pineda. I've heard so many good things about Dubai, so once the opportunity came, I jumped on it immediately."

Micky Agrawal, a second-year chemical engineering student, found studying at the Dubai campus for one term a convenient option to be closer to family.

"International study and work experience helps you understand how people from other ethnic backgrounds interact in adverse situations," she said.

During his study term, Pineda enjoyed the smaller class sizes and easier access to TAs.

"What I do like about the campus is that it's so small that you get to know everyone so well — it might seem cheesy, but it's like a second family."

For Pineda, who is of Mexican descent and has lived in both Washington, D.C. and the Dominican Republic, international experience was a prerequisite for his undergraduate career.

"You make contacts all over the world and learn about how people across the world live — their histories, their food, and their customs," he said of the experience.

Pineda found charm at the docks that sit upon Dubai's ancient creek; a place where there is an abundance of lively markets and cheap shawarmas, a popular Middle Eastern staple.

For a civil engineering student, studying in Dubai holds a wealth of inspiration taken from the city's innovation in architecture and design principles. One structure Pineda never tired of seeing was the Burj



Khalifa, the iconic symbol of Dubai. “Even after seven and a half months of seeing the skyline, it is pretty impressive,” he said.

Pineda spent his co-op term in Dubai working at IBI Group’s transportation division. The Canadian company is a multi-disciplinary architecture, engineering, consulting and design firm with offices worldwide. He got hands on experience creating models in programs like TransCAD, Synchro, Sidra and UltraPRT. He also did mapping with AutoCAD, MapInfo, and ArcGIS to create road networks for models and for visuals.

Zain Ali, an associate at IBI Group who supervised Pineda, is happy to hire Waterloo students. “We’re Canadian so we hire co-op students all the time in Toronto -- we know that it’s useful for us and the students,” he said. “Obviously we want to support Canadian communities; we knew about the campus and Waterloo and a lot of staff here [in our Dubai office] are from Waterloo.”

Waterloo UAE plans to welcome more main campus students in the near future. “That’s the grand plan, to provide more international work and study opportunities for all University of Waterloo students,” said Employment Manager Ralon Nazareth, who works on job development and sources out co-op opportunities for students. “I’m really proud of these guys for coming to Dubai.”

Photograph by Livia Fama.