Immersive Learning: A Signature Strategy for Training International Professionals

Immersive learning is a signature element of the Middlebury Institute’s distinctive approach to graduate professional education. Middlebury Institute students don’t just talk about how to apply classroom learning to real-life issues; they go out and do it on a regular basis while still in school, often as a part of their course work. Immersive learning at the Institute is defined as “intensive, authentic, and contextualized learning that is active, applied, and hands-on” and that is related to a specific professional career path. Building on a foundation of theory and classroom learning, students emerge from immersive educational opportunities with two key advantages: a deeper appreciation of the challenges of being an effective professional, and a head start in their future careers.

Two principal types of immersive educational opportunities exist for Middlebury Institute students:

• **Applied learning experience as part of a course:** Students use concepts, theories, tools, and knowledge in a real-world setting and receive feedback from practitioners as well as the instructor, as part of regular course work. For example, a class dealing with nonprofit governance acted as consultants to a local nonprofit organization, preparing a strategic plan for them and presenting their report publicly to the organization’s board of directors.

• **Immersive learning experience off campus:** Students are engaged full-time in an assignment off-campus and in a real-world setting, outside of regular course work. These professional service positions may last from one month to six months; typically, students find positions in organizations similar to those they might want to work in after graduating.

Immersive learning opportunities at MIIS offer students unique and practical professional experiences that give them insights into possible career options and also the opportunity to apply and fine-tune professional skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom, not to mention make valuable professional contacts. For many of our students, an immersive learning opportunity serves as a capstone to their Middlebury Institute experience.

**Selected Immersive Learning Experiences**
- The Carter Center, United States
- Environmental Defense Fund, Mexico
- International Atomic Energy Agency, Austria
- International Organization for Migration, Sri Lanka & Thailand
- Mercy Corps, Colombia
- Unitas Seed Fund, India
- United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Security Council, United States
- U.S. Department of Commerce, China
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, United States
- World Trade Organization, Geneva
- Wicked Water Challenge, Monterey, CA
- International Labour Organisation, Jordan
- EcoFuels, Kenya

[Image: Participants in Team Peru, a group of students shepherding sustainable development projects in the Sacred Valley of Peru, 2011.]

[Image: Professor Robert Rogowsky (center) and students on an immersive learning trip to the Shanghai Free Trade Zone in March 2014.]

[Image: Participants on an immersive learning trip to the Shanghai Free Trade Zone in March 2014.]
Immersive Learning Opportunities at MIIS

An array of immersive learning opportunities are available to Middlebury Institute students:

International Professional Service Semester (IPSS)—Students from many Institute degree programs may spend six months working for a governmental agency, international or intergovernmental organization, or an international NGO in their field while also completing a significant field project towards their graduate degree. Organizations accepting IPSS student placements in recent years have included CARE International, Human Rights Watch, the International Atomic Energy Agency, National Foreign Trade Council, the United Nations Security Council, Wild Aid, World Bank, UNHCR, and the UN Development Programme.

International Business Plan (IBP)—Students in the Fisher MBA in Global Impact Management program are required to complete the IBP, a consulting capstone project in which teams work with a sponsoring company under faculty supervision to develop comprehensive plans for international growth and expansion. Past IBPs have been done for businesses ranging from confidential start-ups to high-tech giants such as Hewlett-Packard, Cisco, and Sun Microsystems, as well as consumer goods companies such as Clorox, Driscoll’s, and Monterey Mushrooms.

Program on Design, Partnering, Management, and Innovation (DPMI Plus)—Students in DPMI Plus apply planning, evaluation, and facilitation skills gained during the three-week DPMI training to complete academic deliverables while serving a social change organization in the field. DPMI Plus field placements have been with organizations such as the World Bank, Pact, UNHCR, Peace Corps, and many specialized nongovernmental organizations. DPMI Plus participants have worked in countries throughout the world.

Frontier Market Scouts (FMS) Training Program—Students in the FMS program receive intensive training in impact investing and social entrepreneurship prior to deployment to developing countries, where they work with local organizations dedicated to the promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation, and social investments. Recent scouts have been deployed to Colombia, Mexico, Turkey, Kenya, India, China, Lebanon, and Guatemala.

International Education Management Practicum—Students have the opportunity to work for 4-6 months gaining practical experience working with international education organizations in sectors including higher education, youth programs, policy and research organizations, language programs, and nonprofit organizations. Practicum opportunities include Middlebury’s Schools Abroad with its global network of sites.

Translation Practicum—Students practice and consolidate the sight translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpretation strategies learned in their regular classes, in a practicum tailored to the participants’ language combinations and professional goals, and simulating a professional working environment as closely as possible. Students have pursued interpretation opportunities at the Panetta Lecture Series, TEDx, and the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA).

Language Teaching Practicum—Students select a teaching situation relevant to their professional interests and goals, whether in the intensive language courses at the Institute or at local schools and universities. Students may also complete the practicum teaching during the summer in places such as the Middlebury-Monterey Language Academies in the U.S., Chilean government English courses in Santiago, or private language schools in Japan.

Translation & Localization—Students in this program have completed projects for the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau, localizing website content and written publications in multiple languages, while engaging in all aspects of the translation and localization management process—negotiating with a client, establishing a team, managing the project, translating and localizing the materials, and performing quality assurance.

Mid-Year Opportunities—During the between-semester January term and spring break, students have the opportunity to enroll in courses that may include international immersive experiences such as Team Peru and Team El Salvador; Conflict Studies (past practica have taken students to Cambodia, India, Nepal and Sierra Leone), and Human Rights Studies in Chile. Students have also taken advantage of these breaks to complete internships at places like the United Nations, and to provide professional support at international events such as the Olympic games.