

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
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Two Laurier students set to intern with human rights agencies abroad

Suzan Toperczer heading for Gambia, while Andrea Bumstead will work in Costa Rica

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WATERLOO – Two Laurier students with a strong interest in human rights will spend three to four months this summer interning with international aid agencies in Africa and Central America.

Andrea Bumstead and Suzan Toperczer are participating in the Canada Research Chair in International Human Rights Internship Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. The program is designed to provide young Canadians with experience that will make them employable in the human rights field after graduation. Host organizations benefit from the assistance of motivated and well-educated university students.

“This gives Canadians a really good sense of all that is going on in parts of the world that they probably wouldn’t otherwise experience,” said Rhoda Howard-Hassmann, holder of Laurier’s Canada Research Chair in International Human Rights. “The students will develop a better vision of the world and become better citizens of the world. Thirty years from now, they may be influencing Canada’s foreign and aid policies.”

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Toperczer will spend four months working for the Christian Children's Fund in Gambia, West Africa. Her duties will include assisting with HIV/AIDS activities, evaluating the interventions of a UNICEF-funded HIV/AIDS project, monitoring and supervising support programs for orphans and other vulnerable children, supporting the staff at a centre for the care and protection of children, and drafting proposals.

Bumstead will spend three months working in the Costa Rica branch of Defence for Children International. Her duties are still being defined, but she will support the organization's aims, which include fostering awareness of and support for children's rights issues and initiatives around the world. The organization encourages ongoing, practical, systematic and concerted international efforts for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

Both students were selected, in part, because of their interest and experience with global issues. Both have focused their studies on global, political and cultural issues, and have lived and worked abroad. Still, both are eagerly anticipating the opportunity that lies ahead.

"I'm sure you recognize how excited I am to be given this opportunity," said Toperczer. "This internship has changed my life and I haven't even left yet."

The funding for the two internships comes from Howard-Hassmann's Canada Research Chair. The budget for these two internships is \$10,000–\$12,000 per year, for seven years (2003–2010).

This year's internships are being organized in partnership with Human Rights Internet, an Ottawa-based organization for the exchange of information within the worldwide human rights community.

Bumstead and Toperczer have already undertaken two orientation sessions to prepare for the internships. Laurier International, the office at Laurier that looks after international and exchange students, offers a general session. April 7, the pair spent the day in Ottawa undergoing the more specialized orientation offered by Human Rights Internet.