

Ecuador. Her job was to resettle in third countries refugees who had fled the conflict in neighbouring Colombia.

Pleszewska credits the internship with giving her credible experience in her search for permanent employment that fits with her goal of working internationally in the area of children's rights. "To allow young professionals to gain access to and knowledge of the international working community, which is sometimes difficult without contacts, is like offering them a trampoline for their careers," she says. After she returned home to Canada in 2005, a referral from Pleszewska's boss at UNHCR sent her back to Ecuador, where she currently volunteers for the agency on a project to combat child prostitution.

For other young people, the UN experience happens closer to home. Earlier this year, Vancouver political science student Lisa Fry organized delegates from her campus at Simon Fraser University to attend a model UN at the University of British Columbia. The assembly—like others that draw more than 5,000 delegates across Canada each year—brings

together students to work in teams that pass mock legislation on global affairs.

"It's a good chance to meet people and understand the UN process," says Fry, 22, who is active on other UN issues such as landmines. "It's much more exciting than sitting in a classroom."

Sparking youth interest in the UN is a goal of FAC's Public Diplomacy Program, says project manager Graeme Hamilton. "It provides us with the opportunity to educate future global citizens." Last year, the department sent 350 Canadian students to a model session of the General Assembly at the UN Headquarters in New York. FAC also provides financial support to the Canadian International Model UN, a bilingual simulation exercise for 600 Canadian post-secondary students and 100 more from abroad that is held in Ottawa each spring.

Fry will begin graduate studies this fall, with a possible UN career in her future. "There is a lot of criticism of the UN, but there is also a lot of potential for the UN," she says.



photo: courtesy of Lisa Fry

More exciting than a classroom: Vancouver political science student Lisa Fry has been active in model UN assemblies and on other UN issues such as landmines.

"That's why youth are interested in getting involved." 🍁

For more information on Foreign Affairs Canada's Young Professionals International program see www.international.gc.ca/yipi-yipi. Find the United Nations Association in Canada at www.unac.org.

Scholars shine light on the UN

Canada is the current home base for an unusual network of scholars whose focus is the UN.

The Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) brings together academics in international law and diplomacy, as well as working UN professionals, to shine light—not heat—on the world body and its affiliated organizations.

"People are interested in the UN whether they hate it or think they love it," says ACUNS executive director Alistair Edgar, a professor of international relations at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, the current host of the council. "What you will get from us is serious and well-informed critical analysis."

First set up in 1987 at Dartmouth College, an Ivy League university in New Hampshire, the 1,000-member

independent, worldwide organization changes location every five years. For 2003-2008, ACUNS selected Canada as its first home outside the United States.

While think-tanks dispense advice, ACUNS prefers the exchange of scholarly research and in-the-field practice through seminars and conferences and a journal on global governance. The council also offers a two-week summer workshop, held in different international locations, where up-and-coming young researchers and those early in their UN careers can engage in intensive discussion.

"This kind of interaction is extremely valuable and quite rare," says Barbara von Tigerstrom, a Canadian lawyer and senior lecturer at the University of Canterbury School of Law in New Zealand who recently participated in an ACUNS workshop

in New Delhi. "It allows us to explore ideas in depth and establish a network of people working on related subjects from different perspectives."

At this year's ACUNS annual conference, hundreds of top academics and invited UN officials are meeting in Ottawa in mid-June to measure progress on the UN Millennium Declaration, which was signed by member states in 2000 with the goal of eliminating extreme poverty by 2015.

It's a good time, says Edgar, for scholars and practitioners to ask, "What is working, what isn't working and what do we need to do to make it work by 2015?" The answers, he believes, will help the UN live up to its original ideals.



Visit the Academic Council on the United Nations System at www.acuns.wlu.ca.