

CISA Launches *Campaigns, Operational Advising and Strategic Threats* Course

By Elizabeth Williams, CISA Intern



CISA South Central Asia Security Studies Program students visit with the Afghan Ambassador to the United States at the Ambassador's residence in Washington D.C.

Forty South and Central Asia Security Studies Scholars and Faculty from the College of International Security Affairs (CISA) spent a week engaging with think tanks, government agencies, and embassies as part of the new *Campaigns, Operational Advising and Strategic Threats* (COAST) course. COAST leverages resources in the National Capital Region with onsite visits and direct engagement with experts in their agencies. “This better prepares students to become dynamic leaders by expanding their operational knowledge and understanding of the interagency world with hands-on experience,” said Army Major Kelly Gleason, the course director. “They also build their database of professional contacts and resources for their scholarly research.”

COAST included visits to the National Security Council, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Embassies of Pakistan, Afghanistan and India, the Department of State, Voice of America, New America, the Stimson Center and other organizations. Prior to the visits, students researched the organizations’ missions, contemporary challenges, and their strategic roles in National Security. “The course challenged our thought process and opened our eyes to different ways of strategic thinking and how organizations affect policy,” said Dionne Whitby, a Department of Defense civilian who plans to focus her research on how technology impacts the assimilation of refugees in the U.S.



CISA South Central Asia Security Studies Program Student Michelle Arias studies Islamic Art at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.

A number of the SCAP scholars are using material from the visits in their theses. “COAST exposed some of the gaps in my initial theory,” said Army Major Rodney Thomas. “But I also strengthened other facets of my thesis statement during the visits.” After the visits, students wrote an analysis paper synthesizing the information. The process helped many of them refine their thesis topics and research questions.

“Coast represents an example of CISA’s cutting-edge, experiential learning,” said the Dr. Michael Bell, the college’s chancellor. “It capitalizes on the unique resources we have in the National Capital Region, and complements and strengthens our existing curriculum.” CISA students will complete Part II of COAST in spring 2017 during a weeklong trip to New York City. Their master’s degree culminates with a Thesis Symposium and defense in May.