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In the 1990s, as many countries in Latin America shed their dictatorships in favor of democratic governance, legislators in the region undertook significant reform projects to increase access to justice and modernize their countries' judiciaries. However, widespread dissatisfaction with these ad hoc reforms emerged by the end of the decade. On the face of it, most Latin American countries developed model statute books, but antiquated legal cultures and ideologies continue to permeate the region's legal systems. For example, early Chilean politician Diego Portales famously noted, "the Constitution is a woman that needs to be raped from time to time." This vulgar personification epitomizes the historic prioritization of power politics over law in Latin America's governance culture. To strengthen judicial reform initiatives, in 1999 the Organization of American States, the region's premier diplomatic forum, created the Justice Studies Center of the Americas (JSCA), a think tank based in Santiago, Chile, tasked with undertaking in-depth and comparative studies of judicial reform projects in the Americas.

My work for JSCA primarily focused on developing an index measuring access to justice in the Americas. The rationale behind this project is to provide concrete indicators on which governments can track their progress and work to improve. Such a measure for access to justice does not currently exist on a large scale, and the process of defining this ambiguous and nebulous concept pushed me to delve into the procedural and substantive building blocks of both civil and common law legal systems. In defining these indicators, I researched international standards and academic discussion on the availability and cost of dispute resolution mechanisms, institutional capacity and efficiency, procedural fairness, access to information, independence and impartiality, substantive fairness, and extra-judicial infrastructure. Under the tutelage of JSCA's lawyers, I worked to craft a measurable tool that evaluated the strength of these essential building blocks of a judicial system. While I will not be at JSCA to develop this project through its completion, I anticipate seeing the final version of this important tool for judicial reform.

A secondary project for me at JSCA was assisting in authoring an article on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in judiciaries worldwide. Admittedly, at first glance this project lacks some luster. However I quickly came to realize that expanding ICT use is perhaps the easiest way governments can expand access to justice, as ICTs enable greater connectivity, transparency, and efficiency. Further, this project provided a unique perspective on the diversity of judicial processes and exposed me to some unanticipated initiatives being pursued abroad, from court-sponsored e-mediation in Singapore to labour trials broadcast online in Brazil.

Further, in response to various needs as they arose, I was assigned to other tasks when necessary. For example, I aided one of JSCA's scholars in researching an

academic paper and conference presentation on how judges are trained and what qualifications are deemed necessary in different contexts worldwide.

Perhaps the most important part of what made my experience at JSCA so enjoyable was working alongside Chilean lawyers and law professors. My most significant complaint about first year law was that it was too narrow and applied. I finished the year lacking any meaningful understanding of law and legal systems writ-large. I could not relate or compare my newly acquired understandings of Canadian law with what exists elsewhere and why our model exists as it does. As a result it all seemed arbitrary. Working at JSCA, a fundamentally trans-national and comparative legal environment, has allowed me to fill this fundamental hole in my knowledge. Through attending law classes conducted by my superiors at JSCA, visiting Chile's newly-reformed criminal courts, and interacting with my colleagues, I've acquired critical understandings of the differences between the development of civil law in Latin America, civil law in Europe, and common law, which help me make sense of Canada's legal system on a global and historical scale. For me, this will be the most enduring and beneficial aspect of my work at JSCA. I am grateful to the International Human Rights Program for enabling this experience and to my colleagues at JSCA for teaching me so much.