In spring 2012, the IAPP held on-site Certification Foundation and Certified Information Privacy Professional/Canada (CIPP/C) training for staff members at the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC). In this interview Joel Scott Mignon, an information officer at the OPC, talks about how he gained greater insight into federal and provincial privacy legislation in Canada, as well as the global privacy climate, through his participation in the training.

How does privacy play a role in your job?
Individuals and organizations from both the private and public sector contact us with concerns about the use of personal information, and one of my primary functions is to assess their situation through the lens of our federal privacy legislation and offer information accordingly. This means that I am not only dealing with specific situations, but also sometimes with organizations that plan to implement privacy policies or programs. We typically give them information about our legislation in a general fashion without vetting their practices pertaining to the use of personal information.

What motivated you to seek IAPP training?
A lot of us were eager to take advantage of the opportunity because the IAPP training offered us a chance to learn more about the global privacy climate. I’m familiar with our own federal privacy legislation, but particularly in terms of the Foundation training, it offered me an opportunity to learn more about what the international community is facing.

The Canadian training was also an opportunity I was keen on, because it gave me insight into the Canadian climate that led to some of the legislation we work with. It was also interesting to learn more about provincial legislation.

“As information officers we’re understandably focused on our own federal privacy legislation. The IAPP offered us a chance to gain exposure to foreign issues and concepts that lie outside of the parameters of our own legislation.”
Joel Scott Mignon, Information Officer, Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

How has the IAPP training helped you in your job?
I, and the other information officers here, are the frontline for a lot of Canadian privacy issues, but not all concerns shared by our clients are concerns that fall within our federal jurisdiction. Knowing more about what lies outside of our jurisdiction (provincial or foreign) contributes to my capacity to help our clients. It gives me additional context and a better understanding of the nuances of the jurisdictional issues and policy rationale.

The Foundation course surpassed my expectations. I saw the different approaches taken by various countries when tackling individual privacy concepts. This will be helpful when encountering new situations in which clients refer to concepts that are foreign to the Canadian legislation.

How important do you think it is for privacy professionals practicing in Canada to hold a CIPP certification?
I would say that professional certification can be a very valuable asset for those seeking further knowledge of privacy issues, both domestic and international; I could see it being useful for me and my colleagues.

Personally, I plan to take both the Foundation and CIPP/C designation exams to achieve certification. I also attended the IAPP Global Privacy Summit in Washington, DC recently, and I hope to have an opportunity to participate in similar events in the future.