



EXL 300 Cross Cultural Learning: Theory and Practice

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Quick Flashback: A selection of thought provoking, funny, and insightful posts from Allegheny College students in the Fall 2010 Study Abroad/Study Away programs.

BLOG ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS:

PERSONAL MAPPING: What have you noticed about people around you in your new “home”? Tell us a story drawing from some point of difference (e.g. mode of communication, non-verbal expressions, physical appearance, language, age, etc.) that has made you aware of ‘seeing’ yourself differently in your new surroundings.

CULTURE TRADE: Having spent some time in your surroundings, what have you introduced your hosts to as part of your unique “home” culture (could be national culture or regional culture)? In exchange, what have you learned that is non-touristy, and involves deeper interactions with people who live in the place you are visiting?

REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE: As you settle into your new home-away-from-home, what are some of the cultural rules or what non-verbal forms of communication strike you as different? Explain what you have learned with examples.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: What dining customs or food in your new culture reflects insights about the culture you are in? Remember, your account of the customs or food should be an explanation from your host-culture's point-of-view, and not through the lens of your own culture.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: Describe one cultural feast or tradition that you have been introduced to. What is the myth or story behind this celebration? How has it evolved and been influenced by globalization and/or technology?

PROFESSOR QUESTIONS CONT'D:

YOUTHSCAPES: Select a media example or a cultural artifact that you can share with us visually, and discuss why you selected it as being of particular interest in representing the popular culture of your host site.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP: Please describe and reflect on how your experiences are shaping your understanding of what it means to be a citizen of the world, and not just your own country.

COMING HOME: As you prepare to leave your host site/country, can you reflect on how you have fulfilled the role of either Allegheny College ambassador, or American ambassador, or both? What were some of the challenges of fulfilling this role.

PERSONAL MAPPING:

Before coming to Spain, I heard much about the late meal hours, and the siestas (mid-day naps). I understood the concept of naptime and big meals, but could not yet comprehend this lifestyle. Now, after a mere week and a half, I have experienced quite the culture shock, but a good one to say the least.

Back in the United States, immediately after waking up I would have my biggest meal of the day generally consisting of an omelet, fruit, oatmeal, juice, and coffee.

But here in Spain breakfast is a quick meal, usually a piece of toast and coffee because most people are in a rush to get to work, school, or wherever. The Spanish lunch, generally served around 3 in my house, is considered to be the biggest meal of the day. My host mom returns home from work around 2 to begin preparing the meal for the family (she has four other children plus me) while all of the children set the table.

When it is time to eat, we sit in front of the TV with everyone's eyes glued to the screen and forking food into our mouths. There is always a buffet of food, ranging from meats, usually ham, to salad to soup to bread to rice. After about an hour of eating and watching TV, everyone clears the table, and it is siesta time. My host mom takes a nap and then attends her second shift at work until about 9 PM.

– Rachel Jensen - Spain

For my entire life up until now, I've been the standard to which I would compare the world. People were short if they were shorter than me, tall if they were taller than me, smart, if they were smarter than me, funny if they were funnier than me. So when I came to the UK and was told that it was I that had an accent, I was understandably puzzled. At first, in the airport, I just shrugged off the comment.

I don't sound American, it was just that English people sounded English, and since I didn't sound English I, by default, sounded American... It's really a humbling experience. To realize that you are only the standard in your own eyes changes a person, perhaps for the best.

- Nate Summers -
England

Two weeks in France and I have already noticed things about me that I did not notice before. I love to smile and take the time to get to know people. Apparently, people do not smile as much as I do. I have observed that while I walk down the street and smile at people as a friendly gesture I do not get the result I would in my own country. The other pedestrians do their best to keep to themselves while they are walking on the street. However, if one were to engage a French person in

conversation they would immediately make eye contact. Eye contact is something that seems to be very important in the French culture and something that is somewhat lacking within the American culture. When I go to the store, the cashier makes eye contact with me and says thank you and have a nice day. I feel that over the years the American culture has lost the emphasis it once had on personal skills in respect to maintaining eye contact within a conversation. It made me reflect on if I make eye contact with people in my country when I talk to them. I realized that I seem to only make eye contact with my parents, grandparents and professors. I do not make eye contact with my friends. In my class, we actually practiced making eye contact. We walked around the room and then our professor would have us stop. We would then make eye contact and commence a conversation.

At the time, I thought it was a silly thing to practice but later when I went out into the city and spoke with local people I realized just how important it is to make eye contact during a conversation. Just by making eye contact I felt more engaged in my French conversation and felt more comfortable speaking in French.

- Philip Anthony - France

CULTURE TRADE:

I have been living with an Arabic family in Jordan for over a month now. I have found in my time here that family is a very important part of Arabic culture. The children in an Arabic family often live with their parents through college if they go to school nearby, and even after college when they work. Extended families live together as well. When I was in Madaba, I visited a family that is now considered a tribe-- consisting of about two thousand family



members! They made up a large chunk of the city and had really fostered a trusted community through this family connection. This concept of family is much different from that in the United States. It gives children, into their young adulthood, a chance to gain more experiences and have more opportunities without having to step off on their own prematurely. Family togetherness is something very treasured in the Arabic culture. They are there for each other.

- Elizabeth Boykiw – Egypt

I come from a small town near Meadville, Pennsylvania called Cochran. When I was planning to come to France to study abroad I purchased two gifts from my local and surrounding

communities. I bought maple syrup and Channellock pliers... The gifts allowed me to share the culture of my small town life and tell a story along with them. In return they shared their culture with me. Sitting at the dinner table has introduced me to many different cultural aspects. I quickly learned that cheese and baguette are essential items for every meal. Everyday my host mother goes to the bakery and buys baguette. The baguette is used throughout the whole meal. After one finishes eating what is on their plate they use their baguette to clean their plate. Directly after eating the main meal my host mother serves cheese. The cheese is so different from any cheeses I have ever tasted and they are quite delicious as well.

- Philip Anthony- France



Mexico is a place where time really does not matter. Everyone does everything at their own pace; and being late for something is normal, while being on time is exceptionally early and rare. There is also almost always loud music playing, whether reggae, ranchero, or whatever other kind of music, it's playing on the speakers of your bus. Music is a very important part of Mexico. In fact, it's very rare that you never hear any. It's playing in restaurants, in homes, in the streets...we even have music playing every day on campus between classes!

- Alicia Seggelink – Mexico

REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE:

Through my program I am working at Un Techo Para Mi País, a Latin American non-government organization that is very similar to Habitat for Humanity in the United States. I've done and seen some things that both shocked and inspired me through my work there, but my first day was something that I will never forget. While usually we work in the office, the week that the three other students and I were officially accepted was right before a "construcción masiva," one of 5 weekends throughout the year when hundreds of Argentine youth gather to go into the neighborhoods outside of the city to build houses. Because there are so many volunteers (that weekend alone there were close to



600!) we were divided into separate neighborhoods, and then groups of 10 that were going to build a house.

During that weekend not only did my Spanish improve from living and working with 9 Argentinians all weekend, but Mati was right and I did learn about poverty in Argentina. Living in one of the nicer neighborhoods of the city, it's sometimes easy to forget that I'm in what is still considered a third world country. However in that weekend I saw a side of the country that I probably never would have, met some amazing people, and can say that I went to Argentina and built a house one weekend!

- Stephanie Klock -
Argentina

I grew up surrounded by kids because my mother ran a daycare in our house for six years. This has made me appreciate working with kids a lot more. When I had the



opportunity here in Costa Rica to work with kids at the local elementary school, I was very excited. I continue to think back on this experience because it was something that really fit my interests. There were four of us students from my program that went to the Escuela Central to plant some trees and flowers in one of the courtyards. When the kids came out to work with us, I'd expected it to be easy to jump right in and start talking with the kids in Spanish, but it turned out to be more difficult than I imagined. This really opened my eyes as to how much it takes to learn a language and how different it can be to speak with school age kids versus adults versus peers.

- Janna Dickerson - Costa Rica

One experience is when I jumped out of a perfectly good plane, free fell for 48 seconds, glided the rest of the way and crashed landed back onto solid earth- I am of course talking about skydiving and in my case from 11,000 feet, one of the more crazy heights. In the weeks leading up to that day I felt a mix of emotions from complete terror to crazy excitement. At times when I felt terror I remembered my old life, where I didn't do something I now regret not doing for fear of something else, and let that be my motivation. I was not going to let fear of the unknown rule my life anymore!

- Julianne D'Amico-
Australia

In the United States, we are constantly motivated by ourselves and each other to accomplish as much as we can in a short amount of time and to the best of our ability. We work through lunch,

we stay late to finish work, and we don't sleep until the task is complete. We are unsatisfied, as a culture, with anything less than the best. The French don't operate that way. They work, certainly, but at 17h00, when the work day is over, they are out the door and on their way home. We take breaks in our classes every hour on the hour, for at least five minutes, generally for no reason other than to just sit. The French don't believe in perfect scores, deeming work graded 10/20 as "passable" and 14/20 being our equivalent of an A. They want to spend time at home with their families, enjoy their moments slowly, and relish what is around them, even during their lunch breaks.

- Alina Meltaus-France

One experience that had a huge impact on me was during a school excursion to the castles of the Loire valley. We visited several castles that day but my favorite castle was called

Chenonceau, a castle from the 1400s (the original, from the 1000s, was destroyed in a fire) which had had housed French royalty, nobility and foreign figures of importance. Just being inside such a place was an incredible experience, but I was completely blown away inside one room in particular, the chapel. The room itself was fairly small and ordinary, but on the plain white walls, one could see several carved words, Phrases, and even just dates, the most famous of which being two simple sentences etched by Mary, Queen of Scots' guards during the mid 1500s. It was amazing. I stood looking at the walls of the chapel for at least fifteen minutes, touching the carvings in awe. Exactly where I was standing, someone five hundred years ago was standing, leaving the message I was then



touching on the wall. It made the history of the place very real to me and left a truly lasting impression. History is sometimes hard for me to grasp and seems like a made up story, but this experience helped me, literally and figuratively, get in touch with the vast history of France. I will never forget this experience.

- Marla Rogers – France

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS:

The picture above is of a typical Turkish fast food stand, this one in Berlin. The big hunk of meat in the background, Döner meat, is used in what is known as döner kebabs, a food loved by Germans and Turks alike. One finds these Döner Kebab places literally everywhere in Germany - there's enough in Köln to have a favorite one. While tasty, these kebab stands represent much

more in Germany than just food.

In Germany, there is a slight tension between Germans and Turkish migrants, similar to (but not as pronounced as) the situation between Americans and Mexican migrants. Since the end of World War 2, Germany has been constantly fighting to establish itself as a normal country with normal people, which has meant working closely with other European countries in the ECSC/EC/EU, building and maintaining a stable government, and having a tolerance for foreigners. The Turkish migrants came in large numbers when they were invited to do so as part of a program to create a bigger labor force back in the 1960s. However, even though they were migrants, most of them stayed in Germany. Now, there is somewhere around 3 million Turks (or around 10% of the population) in Germany.

- Sarah Davis - Germany



In the Mezquita at Córdoba, there are many double arches that support the roof, made of alternating brick and stone to reduce weight while still retaining strength. The cream of the stone and the red of the brick created a neat visual effect. Since I consider the Mezquita and the Cathedral two of the most impressive buildings I have seen in my entire lifetime, I can honestly say that I will never forget them, or stop to think about the grand body of work that they encompass. In regards to the Spanish (Specifically Andalucian) culture, these structures encompass both the old Muslim traditions as well as the new Christian ones.

- Gregory P. Eyer – Spain

Seeing the picture (below) for the first time gave me pause, which surprised me. I had just taken another goofy picture with friends, and yet this picture said so much about my experience. I have spent the last few months eager to mimic all that I see around me, trying desperately to fit in as quickly as possible. In my haste, though, I make silly mistakes, or miss details, or lunge with my right leg forward instead of my left (in this particular case). I'm so busy trying to jump right in and be like the French that sometimes I forget to take that extra moment to really absorb and learn. In my last two months here, I am determined to make a better effort to stop tripping over myself trying to fit in, and really observe and soak up as much of my surroundings as I can. I will fit in best



when I stop trying, so that's what I have to do – but I don't plan on missing out on the fun photo opportunities along the way!

- Alina Meltaus - France

In the United States we're all about our right to the freedom of speech, but I have never witnessed anyone actually taking advantage of this right as powerfully as the strikes ("grèves") in France. Protesting against their country's recent reforms on their retirement system, the French have had multiple strikes and several huge demonstrations in the two months I've been here, which is more than I've ever seen in the US in my whole life. The first day I saw one of the demonstrations, I got chills. It blew my mind to see so many people standing together behind one issue and actually doing something about their beliefs, not just sitting back, complaining, and expecting politicians



to take care of everything as we commonly do in the US. However, as fascinating as it is to see a movement like this develop before my eyes, the impact of the strikes has definitely had an effect on my daily life. For example, there have been countless times when the buses are striking, leading to massive amounts of people crowding onto the extremely infrequent buses making their rounds that day. Also, the garbage men were on strike for a few weeks, so Angers began to resemble a dump; at my apartment complex alone, the garbage area was more than overflowing and one could smell it before seeing it. There were even days when various blocks in town would be closed off because of kids setting fire to giant mounds of trash in the middle of the street.

- Marla Rogers - France

While I don't know if this specific flower is endemic to Costa Rica, there are plenty of unique flowers that are. I think that the flora of Costa Rica is an essential element of the culture and also of the economy. Costa Rica, while it is a small country, is host to around five percent of the world's biodiversity. This is evident with the multitude of plant and animal species you can see just walking down the road. The part of Costa Rica that we have been exposed to through this environmental science program is definitely one that places a lot of importance on the biodiversity of the country. Costa Rica went through a period when the country had a very high rate of deforestation, and consequently, species loss. But now things have changed and the culture is more focused on species diversity now that it is obvious how much potential biodiversity holds. A lot of the potential has been initially realized through the

economic side by opening doors for opportunities such as ecotourism. It has been amazing to be in a country that is teeming with life and to be constantly surrounded by new, exotic plants. This has opened my eyes to the difference in culture here and what the people and country value.

- Janna Dickerson - Costa Rica

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION:

Pasties are a really common British food that you don't see too often in the States or anywhere else. Cornish pasties usually consist of beef, potatoes, and onions inside a sort of pie crust. They originated in Cornwall and were used as a portable hot lunch for miners who spent their



whole day in the mine. I think farmers often used them as well. Many miners did the same thing in the US but it didn't stick in the same way it did here. They also have sausage rolls, which are popular for breakfast, and meat and potato pies. Pasties are a really popular, fundamental food unique to the UK, showing the British love for hearty, rich, savory food.

Kelly Burtch – England

As far as non-verbal communication goes, there isn't much that Germans leave unsaid. It is part of their culture to leave no ambiguity (except in literature), so even if things can be assumed, they don't assume them and ask to make sure. For instance, my host mom taught me that to indicate you're full, 9

you place your utensils parallel to each other on the plate, and if you're still hungry, you put them facing each other. Even so, she still asks me every night "bist du Satt?" "Are you full?" just in case I have perhaps mindlessly placed my fork and knife. Also, if you're doing something they don't like, instead of passively looking annoyed or relying on your self-awareness, they outright tell you. One night, I was on Skype, having a particularly loud conversation, and my host sister came to knock on my door and tell me to be quieter. This is in stark contrast to my roommates last year at Allegheny, who would try to solve things passively - silently leaving post-it notes or talking about the problems loudly to others (which didn't work very well). It must be less stressful for Germans to live together for that reason alone - you can basically be as loud as you want, knowing that if someone has a problem with it, they will tell you,

while in America, we seem to worry (or at least the sensitive types worry) about if we're annoying our roommates without actually knowing what would annoy them.

- Sarah Davis - Germany

In Costa Rica there is a saying, Pura Vida, that you will hear being used almost every day. Literally, Pura Vida means pure life, but it is used in wide range of contexts. The one that I have found most common is for someone to ask how you are and for the response to be, "Pura Vida!" if everything is just great. I think this phrase really captures the laid-back, life is good feel of the culture down here. Also when driving down the road, you will often be greeted with an amiable "Pura Vida" being yelled out the car window. I think that this statement is also indicative of the culture in Costa Rica because there is no one, concrete definition of Pura Vida, and it can be

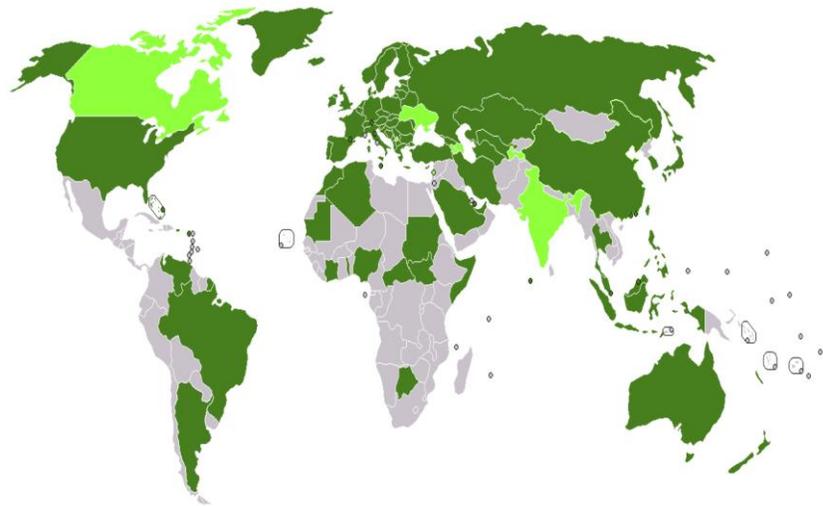
applicable in many different situations. There are a lot of things here that are not set in stone, especially things like time and schedules.

- Janna Dickerson - Costa Rica

As for social interaction, there is a wide range of greetings. Some Germans greet with a hug, others with a kiss on the cheek, and still others (but not nearly as often) a handshake or nothing at all. I have tried to figure out which greeting happens when, and it seems to be a mixture of personal preference and social norms. Handshakes are used in either formal settings or when people first meet each other. Hugs and kisses tend to be between friends, but the choice between a hug or a kiss seems to be the person's preference and not a social standard. For instance, my "mentor" (a person I was matched up with to help with the foreign student - native student mix) hugged me

after our first chat, and the next day, invited me to dinner at his dorm. Many other Germans I know would not have done this. On a deeper level, friendships are also an interesting topic for social communication. I have found that the more open, curious, and flexible you are, the more welcoming people will be to you. For instance, it has occurred at least two times in which I have shared a personal struggle, or something of the like, with a German, and they respond by sharing one of theirs. It is not as if that was my goal, but it was an interesting thing to observe. Even though there is the stereotype of the cold and distanced German that you need months to have the possibility to get to know, I have found that the people here are warm and welcoming to new things and sharing their own ideas and experiences as well.

- Margo Blevins -
Germany



YOUTHSCAPES:

I would highly recommend travelling abroad to young people who want to experience other cultures and especially for young people who want to learn a language. Compared to actually living in a foreign country and speaking a foreign language every day, one really doesn't learn all that much sitting in class. I took roughly six years of German before studying here in Köln and frankly I could hardly get a thought across in German. Now, after just three and a half months, I feel as though I can U-bahn, TV, or radio. I can also carry on a conversation in German

with relative ease. This would have never happened had I stayed in the U.S. I would have been able to theoretically speak the language, but that is much different than being able to speak it in practice. I would also recommend studying abroad because of the cultural immersion that one just doesn't get from visiting a country, even for a couple weeks. I was here once before, in high school, for three weeks and in that time I didn't even scratch the surface of German culture.

- Cameron Eddy - Germany



As a young person from the United States, studying abroad has given me a new perspective on the world that could not be obtained through any other means. As much as we like to think that we understand other cultures by studying them from a distance, the only true way to understand others and how they live is to insert yourself into the culture directly. No textbook could have shown me a political insecurity as demonstrated through public manifestations like the people of Angers; no professor could have explained to me the nuances in French table manners like my host mom.

The best teachers of French language and culture, without a doubt, are the run-of-the-mill Angevins I see every day. My host mother, classmates, neighbors, bus drivers, and even people I pass on the street have all taught me something new about this culture.

- Alina Meltaus - France



As my time at Lancaster University comes to an end, I am overwhelmed with emotions. Gearing up to say hello to family and friends I have not seen in months, all the while preparing to say goodbye to the family I have created here. It is at this point, amidst the confusion of my ever-changing emotions that I can most confidently say that all students should consider studying abroad. Here are a few things that I have learned:

-Learning a new culture and being away from family is hard work, but it is the best work you will ever do.



all the years of my schooling combined. I wish everyone could have this experience, every bit of it. The ups when you're seeing something beautiful and famous things and soaking in how fortunate you really are, and even the downs when home seems impossibly far away, for those are the moments you gain strength from. As students we have been instructed for years to become life learners but my new challenge is this: learn from life. It will do you more good than a book ever will.

- Amy Sapalio- England

-When you are asked for a "fag," no one is being derogatory.

-Go forward confidently; you can do more than you have ever imagined.

-Be open minded, try new things, take pleasure in life. Don't take the little things for granted because even though the days are long, the weeks are short.

-Eat and buy locally whenever possible. Why drink Starbucks when there is one of those on every corner at home? Why not try the hole in the wall café next door?

-Locals know everything. Talk to them.

-Be yourself. You will be loved for exactly who you are. You will make friends that will last you a lifetime.

-Let fear drive you. If you are afraid of it, decide to conquer it.

-Broaden your comfort zone. Don't be afraid to ask questions or look silly to make it happen.

The list could go on for miles. In the time I have been here I have learned more about life and myself and the world than

There is so much to be gained from living in a culture so different from your own-your perspective and world view change so much. Sometimes it's hard to believe it has all been real. I remember, one day on field work, walking down a dirt road in rural Kenya, greeting farmers and chewing sugarcane that fell off the back of a



truck, and having to stop and remind myself that this is real. I'm really here. So much, if not all, of what I learned here was through my experiences. Only so much can be learned in a classroom or from books; to really know about our world, you have to experience it first-hand. There's no other way. I would encourage everyone, student or otherwise, to spend time abroad, especially in a developing nation. The experience is one of a kind. It's one of the best decisions I've ever made, and something I'll never regret.

- Nicole Eckstrom- Kenya

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP:

In the context of going abroad, it seems to me

that being a citizen of the world means gaining an appreciation and understanding of people who are different than you but exist with you on our special planet. We are united by some things, such as being human and thus having basic needs and feelings, but there are many different ways people live, and that is much more evident when you leave the US. In Germany, for instance, being "green" is an idea that is widely practiced. Whereas, in the US, it's more talked about. Back home, people worry about the planet, but then proceed to take half-hour showers and leave all of the lights on in the house. Here, people actually cut down their showers to 5 minutes and are very careful to turn off lights. They also have a better recycling system, where you get more back from bottles and you can recycle



them inside the grocery store with an automatic machine, rather than in a shady looking crate with an equally shady looking guy behind the store. I see many more people recycling here, including my host family. Also, you are encouraged to bring your own bags to places, and in some grocery stores, you pay extra for the plastic bags. Overall, Germans tackle the issue of helping the planet a lot more proactively than we do in the US. We have the same goals, but different ways of reaching them. It's places like the UN where you really see this idea of global citizenship in action. I visited the UN campus in Bonn while I was here, and it was really quite interesting to see what things that UN countries get involved with. The UN campus is mainly focused on environmental issues, and my favorite cause was EUROBATS, where people from several different countries (even non-european ones) have gotten together to help



save Europe's bat population from America, it always feels like we are doing so much while other countries comparatively do less, but really, they just don't always agree with the means with which we do things. We are all here, we're all alive, and we have different personalities. It's a big party, really.

- Sarah Davis -Germany

To be a citizen of a world means to understand and appreciate what the world has to offer, and in return to offer your knowledge to the world. Being an American citizen, I have grown accustom to the American lifestyle and the cultural aspects that have surrounded me my

entire life. Assimilating to the Spanish culture was not difficult; it was about being patient, open-minded, and willing to learn. In order to feel more comfortable and more in sync with Sevilla, I attended a bull fight. Going into the bullfight, I had no idea what to expect. A few of my friends refused to go because they thought it was too violent and cruelty to animals, but I wanted to see what they were about. The fight was brutal and in total six bulls were killed in front of the audience, but I believe having the opportunity to see the fight helped me to understand the culture. A few months after I went to the bull fight, I went to the bull farm and met a matador (bull fighter). Through his passionate explanations and involved descriptions of the concept of bullfighting, I gained an appreciation for the bull fights. Although they appear to be inhumane, there is a rich culture and history behind them. I believe that being a citizen of the world means trying the norms of a culture that may appear different to you. It is about keeping

your mind open and not passing judgments before you have experienced something new.

- Rachel Jensen – Spain

Being a global citizen, to me, does not have to correlate to the number of places around the world a person has visited; rather, a global citizen is someone who can see the world from a perspective not limited to a narrow, personal one. It is almost impossible to know how to look at the world from the standpoint of a global citizen without first relinquishing the worldview that is known only within one particular country, region or state. One of the greatest challenges I faced during my time in Angers was giving up my very American perspective, especially when it came to availability of businesses and services. In France, as I've mentioned before,

they take their time when eating lunch, or opening a store, or preparing a mailing. Americans are too efficient, in their eyes, and don't take the time to enjoy their days. Maybe this is true, but during my first week in France it was hard for me to accept that it's normal for the train station to be closed for two and a half hours while each employee enjoys his sandwich au jambon. New, improved, me, who considers herself a global citizen, now understands the reasons behind this long break, and can appreciate it instead of fuming like some of my American tourist compatriots that I see in France each day. Being a global citizen doesn't mean giving up your national identity, or ignoring cultural differences; it means embracing new cultures and living in awareness of the vast variety of people on this planet.

- Alina Meltaus - France

We are all humans, all inhabitants of mother earth, and not that different from each other. At the same time, I cannot imagine a world without countries and/or without borders. Humans are categorizing creatures. In search of understanding, we put people in different categories, and nationalities are a large part of that. One thing that being in Germany has made me think about it is what it means to be an American. In order to answer the prompt about world citizenship, I feel I need to figure out my national citizenship first. Almost every time I talk to someone new (who is a German), they almost immediately notice my accent and ask me where I am from. That then leads the discussion in a predictable path – usually something academically or politically related.



Even if I did not have an accent and decided to live in Germany for the rest of my life, I would not be the same as the “real” Germans – they have a different history, different childhood memories. To be indoctrinated into the category “German” instead of “exchange student” or “American” seems at the moment, improbable. That’s when it hit me: Why am I talking about switching categories? Why am I trying to be a German *instead* of an American? It’s like in high school, trying to move from one clique to the next so that you can feel accepted while still being “cool”, and right now, “cool” in Germany includes being critical of the U.S. Being a world citizen doesn’t mean that you are at home no matter where you go. It is a complicated balancing act. On the one hand, the place where you were born, where you grew up, and where your roots are, are an irreplaceable part of who you are. I am an American,

and always will be. On the other hand, people are individuals and should be treated as such rather than members of categories. You need to strive, no matter where you are, to learn and to connect with people around you, while also being aware of others across the globe.

Countries are made of people, and although countries have borders, people do not. I am not saying to "imagine there's no countries" as John Lennon would say, but rather to keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open. Being a world citizen is being human.

- Margo Blevins –
Germany

Making friends with people of all ages in a different culture has been eye opening. Learning about different religious and cultural customs has broadened my horizons, to realize that there is so much more about being American and the aspects

of American and Spanish culture that I like and dislike.

Strange enough, to learn about my own culture I had to leave, in order to make a proper comparison. Having stayed in another country for an extended period of time has made me feel like a Spaniard, I would like to think that I will take part of this country with me when I return, not just physically in the form of Christmas gifts and pictures to share with family and friends but also in the form of memories and new attitudes. I can say now with confidence that this semester has changed me for the better, with new outlooks that have and will continue to enrich how I experience life. I plan to keep in touch with all my new friends, and already have a nice list of email addresses, just in case they come to the states someday or for when I return to Spain. I have fallen in love with this country, and am sure that I will return someday, hopefully for good.

- Gregory P. Eyer – Spain

COMING HOME:

Allegheny College has taught me how important it is to embrace diversity and appreciate how amazing it can truly be. I had always been told these things and thought that I followed them, but it wasn't until I was thrown into another country that I actually realized that I still had many misconceptions and preconceived ideas about different cultures that I needed to change. The international program in which I was enrolled while studying in Angers helped me to really get to know many different people from all over the world. I cannot describe how absolutely amazing it was to get to know them and discuss their opinions on different topics. I never realized how much I enjoy getting to know people who have grown up in such a completely different environment than myself.

- Nikki Smilak - France



To me, being an ambassador not only meant representing America in a positive manner, but it also meant helping Spanish people understand American culture. Like most people, Spaniards have stereotypes of the "American people." For example, while eating lunch one day my host mother asked me if I liked the Spanish food. I said I did, but that it was very different from food in America. The twenty-six year old daughter then asked if everyone eats McDonalds and fast food. At first, I was a little frustrated because although fast food is very dominant in our society, it doesn't define American

culture. There are many people in America who are health conscious and regularly attend the gym and watching what they eat. I explained that there are many fast food restaurants in the United States, but they are no more popular than in Sevilla. Specifically, in Sevilla there were multiple

McDonalds, Burger King, Starbucks, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and more.

Whenever I walked past the McDonalds situated right across the street from my apartment, there was always a crowd inside and outside of this fast food restaurant. Little children had birthday parties in McDonalds, and older



people ate dinner there. As an ambassador, it is important to explain the American culture and have patience. Having my Spanish host family understand that there is more to the American culture than what they see on TV, or read in the news was a difficult task. But, I think I helped them to open up their minds a little bit and realize that not all stereotypes are true.

- Rachel Jensen- Spain

Representing America and Allegheny well was very important to me in Angers. As an American, I felt compelled to portray our country in a positive light, especially in a country of people very interested in my home country. The Alleghenian in me wanted to represent my favorite undergraduate institution well for the French and for the other Americans in our program. French people, particularly the students, have a lot of interest in the United States.

From watching American sitcoms to paying full attention to our midterm elections, they are very invested in American culture. I fielded many questions about my college experience, my trips to big destinations like New York or Chicago, and even about how often I ate apple pie. There were more serious topics too, like war, politics and the environment; these subjects were of serious interest to the younger French people.



I also did my best to introduce less obvious aspects of American culture to their image of the average American, like friendliness, determination and efficiency.

- Alina Meltaus - France



Coming home from Kenya has been difficult. Reverse culture shock has in many ways been worse than the culture shock I felt when arriving in Kenya four months ago. While there, I believe I fulfilled the role of an American ambassador by being honest with the people I encountered. Most Kenyans have little experience with Americans other than tourists, and that combined with the media's portrayal of American life has given them a very skewed perspective of America and Americans. One time, my seven year old host sister asked me how many cell phones and

computers my siblings and I had, and she was shocked when I said just one. My host family was also shocked to learn that not everyone in America had a job, made tons of money, and that the power sometimes goes out. Their views on life in America are that it is paradise and, if they could just make it there, all of their problems would magically be solved. I also encountered people who were afraid to talk to me because I was white and American, like I was a different species. It sounds silly, but that's what they think.

I hope that in my time there, I showed them that life is life, and that

everywhere you go, there will be challenges and problems and hard work to do, and that people are people, no matter where you come from.

- Nicole Eckstrom - Kenya

Being back in the U.S. for a short period of time, I constantly find myself thinking of my experience while in Spain. This study abroad experience has impacted my individuality and my understanding of the world. As always in any culture, there were some things I could not emotionally deal with.

I remember one night sitting with my host dad explaining on why I did not want to watch the bull fight on TV. I told him I understood that it was a part of the culture and that, to some people, it can be perceived as beautiful. I thought this aspect of Spain was infuriating, but after my experience there I understood their strong beliefs in keeping traditions and customs. Now I can accept this custom as a traditional aspect of their culture.

- Leah Jaenicke - Spain



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