

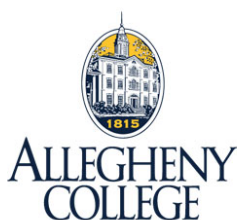


ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

A national liberal arts college where  
2,100 students with unusual combinations  
of interests, skills and talents excel.™

EXL 300 (1 COURSE CREDIT)  
CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING: THEORY & PRACTICE

SAMPLE STUDENT REFLECTIVE PAPERS



INSTRUCTOR: DR. ISHITA SINHA ROY

Associate Professor, Media Studies

Department of Communication Arts



## Re-Entry: Final Reflective Papers

You will be writing a five page critical paper that is a reflection on one of the key objectives of Allegheny College's mission statement (to prepare graduates to "meet challenges in a diverse, interconnected world").

To engage in meaningful reflection, you are encouraged to think back to how insider conversations/experiences with people from your host culture have changed who you are. Your paper should use, or respond to any quote from the course reading. Citations should be as per the MLA style handbook.

### **PROMPT:**

Having completed a study away semester, define what you think 'global citizenship' means, and what specific examples from your experiential learning have led you to this understanding.



## Rolling with the Punches By Benjamin R. Eyer (Spain)

Like a conquistador in the New World, I expanded my horizons with my study abroad experiences in Seville, Spain. I left knowing I would learn lots about the language, culture and history of a country much older than my own but I never truly understood how much I was to learn about myself. In the process of traveling, going to class and experiencing the nightlife of Seville, I unleashed my adventurous spirit, got my feet wet traveling alone, and learned that winging it/



flying on the seat of your pants is much more fun than planning everything out; it is through these experiences that I had the most fun and from which the best memories were formed. Seville was my city, my lover, my friend and I knew her, all her short cuts and her hidden treasures well. I truly lived the dream in Spain living at the interface of various European cultures and I feel that Allegheny College mission statement, "...to meet the challenges in a diverse and interconnected world," for me has become a fact and not just a slogan.

After Spain I am ready for whatever comes my way and I welcome these challenges with excitement and anticipation. What is a global citizen and how is this type of citizenship obtained? Before Spain I would have told you that meant you are accepting of different cultures and their beliefs without judgment or prejudice. Now, looking back in retrospect, that answer was flawed. Global citizenship for me now means blending in so well that the locals and actual tourists think



that you are native to the city. This is difficult to do since you need to have a cultural/historical understanding, comprehension, and the ability to apply these to every situation presented. While I knew the language well, the Andalusian accent was certainly a curveball to decipher. So, there was no better feeling than when two elderly couples from Britain confused my friend Jocelin and

me for Sevillanos and awkwardly asked us for directions in Spanish; to their surprise we responded in perfect English. While we helped the couples navigate from center city to the Guadalquivir River it was exciting to being seen as a local and equally how I was beginning to view the United States through the eyes of the Spaniards and Europeans I interacted with. It is this







Being tested outside of what is normal and familiar applies to more than just my crazy tourist adventures in Córdoba, Semana Santa, and Portugal. Because of the informality of Spanish society where even my professors and I were on a first name basis, I often went out for a glass of wine and olives after class with José Sanchez, Professor of History, and Diego Ross, Professor of Poetry and Cinema. We would talk about life, politics, love, football (soccer), and poetry. For in Spain, food, alcohol, and coffee are excuses to get together and socialize and not simply a way to satisfy biological hunger as we do in America. In my mind, the Spanish custom of “my house is your house” (*Mi casa es tu casa*) goes beyond the actual structure to the welcoming nature of the society as a whole. In Spain, there is no personal space, no bubble, no off limits facial closeness for a conversation and the heightened leveling of touching between both sexes. To me, this affirms the importance in Spanish society of the intimacy and bond established superpower, we are even more isolated from the rest of the world in the present than we were during the Cold War.

Learning how we are viewed, by the rest of the world, was an eye-opening experience. I once had a Spaniard get mad at me because I did not know what was going on in Hollywood with some pop-star. He said, “...but this is your culture, right?” My response that I kept to myself was if this is my culture then I want nothing to do with it. The Spaniards are beyond passionate and proud about where they come from -- something I feel is lost for most Americans who cannot wait to escape the clutches of their parents. Unlike here, most Spanish university students live at home and commute daily to the college nearest to them because of the importance of staying connected to family and regional pride.

This is further defined by their sports where fandom is a religion, a way of life which we claim to follow here but I have never truly seen until I attended several football matches there. The inter-city rivalry between Sevilla FC and Real Betis FC brought out hundreds of cops, dogs, 40 or so mounted troops and 3 helicopters around el Estadio Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán; a spectacle we cannot imagine happening in the United States. Something that further illustrated our global separation was that the Sevillanas, girls my age from Seville, would not really communicate or talk to Americans because they believed American men were rude and only wanted one thing. How sad is it that I had difficulty just socializing with someone to better my Spanish and learn their perspective because of the impression that American tourists have left behind of being ignorant or boors? My roommate and I even received glares in a pharmacy when we were buying deodorant and he slipped up in the pronunciation of a word alerting them to our status as foreigners. I feel that we as Americans have walled ourselves by resisting learning other languages or about other cultures so that we come across being insensitive, or sexist, or simply uncaring.



Being in Spain and within the EU gave me many unique intercultural exchange opportunities. I made several French friends in Seville who were also studying Spanish and through



them I met a Russian girl. Obviously we communicated in Spanish only since they knew no English and when we went to clubs I often translated the American songs from English to Spanish. My favorite memory of these times was when the song “Jump Around” came on and

no one was jumping since no one in the room knew the significance of the lyrics. We also would sit and talk -- two French guys, a Russian girl, and me, an American -- about politics, our views of each other’s respective nations, and pop culture. During Holy Week when I was vacationing in Madrid, I met a group of Spaniards and a Russian guy named Nick, with whom I still skype quite often. I actually had to translate the communication between them since the Spaniards knew limited English and Nick knew no Spanish at the time. This entailed me pretty much talking the whole time for all the parties involved. I became accustomed to them periodically shouting, “Ben, translate this for me,” or “tell him...” These experiences made me realize how ignorant I had been in believing that everyone should speak English if they want to come to the United States and that everything worldwide should be in my language; that ethnocentric arrogance was gone.

Being back in the United States has been strange and I would say the cultural shock on reentry was much more severe than when I arrived in Spain when it was pretty much a response to newness. I would even go as far as to say I was depressed for a period of two weeks when I came back. The feeling of comfort I had developed for my new life with my host family, with my friends from Seville, and for the pace and style of life in Spain could not, it seemed, be filled by what had been my only true home for my entire life. I felt suddenly that what had been familiar was now strange and I had to re-enter ‘home’ and learn about it as if I was discovering another culture. I had read that, “As a study abroad student, you are not going to be just a tourist- you are embarking on something much richer, doing the





kind of things that most tourists can only dream about” (Paige *et al.* 1). I feel as though I lived an adventure in Spain at times as epic as the ones Indiana Jones my childhood hero had in the movies as he traveled to exotic locals all over the world conquering quests that appear suddenly in his path.

It is still amazing to me how much I learned about myself intellectually, socially, and culturally, just from being outside my bubble of familiarity, and being shoved into something different. In the current context, I feel confident of my ability to travel, work, and adapt to any environment that comes my way. My ability to question myself and the world around me has led me to the conclusion that I want to belong to something bigger than just our American bubble. I admire the EU, which has successfully brought together many diverse and different ethnicities, cultures, and languages into one functioning economic, political and cultural system. Although my purpose and life path is still befuddled, I know that part of my heart, my essence, my soul was left behind in Seville, Spain. To be a global citizen, you must integrate into the world, understand the culture of others compassionately, question everything, learn from experience, and apply the knowledge later on to build strong relationships that will stand the test of time.

### Work Cited

R. Michael Paige *et al.* Maximizing Study Abroad: A Students' Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use. Center for Advanced Research on Acquisition, Univ. of Minnesota. 2002.

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### Struggling for Global Citizenship by Katrin Fabian (Kenya)

Walking to school everyday through the busy streets of downtown Nairobi, it was hard to feel like a global citizen. With every pile of trash I stepped over or homeless street kid I avoided giving money to, I felt more and more like a rich, elitist outsider who could never fully understand my surroundings, no matter how much time I spent there. Before studying abroad in Kenya, I had high and optimistic aspirations for my experience. I was excited to get up close and personal with the real, tough issues like poverty and inequality that I had been learning about for the past several years. What I didn't fully understand at the time, though, was that I couldn't visit a Third World country as merely a passive observer. I didn't realize that I would become part of the



situation; that my presence would contribute to the mindset Kenyans had about Americans; that my behaviors would dictate people's perceptions, even if the behaviors were acceptable and legitimate.

It became apparent almost immediately upon my arrival that I was going to have a hard time fitting in. The moment the other students and I stepped out of my terminal at the airport to find the bus waiting to pick us up, we were practically jumped on by dozens of Kenyans offering to give us a ride or even carry our luggage. Abdul-Aziz, one of our program's staff members, told us how to say no, and then proceeded to yell loudly in Swahili at the multitudes of people following us outside. Once we got situated on the bus, he told us to stay put, not to go outside, and to keep the windows shut so no one could rob us. Having just spent the last 24 hours traveling, we were weary and overwhelmed with the sudden drastic change in our surroundings. This was just the beginning of our realization of what exactly it means to study abroad in Kenya. In America, we tend to try to ignore the differences between being black and being white, for fear of being labeled as racists. We learned quickly after our arrival that race in Kenya has pretty extreme implications, and recognizing them is the best way to improve relations. There are generally three types of white people that come to Kenya: missionaries, aid workers, and vacationers. Obviously there are exceptions to this rule, but what Kenyans have come to figure out is that any white person in Kenya must be wealthy. This means that simple tasks like walking through town become a challenge because dozens of people ask for handouts, donations, and even plane tickets to the US. Many Kenyans experience these problems also, but as a blatant outsider the issues were constant and frustrating. Every time I refused to give a handout, I felt elitist and insensitive. It was hard to feel like a global citizen knowing everyone saw me as foreign.



Many of the other foreigners I came across contributed to these stereotypes in the way they lived their lives. People from aid organizations seemed to be doing their best to help poverty and degradation, but were inadvertently spreading the message to Kenyans that they needed outside help because they were incapable of solving their own problems. Others were gullible and simply unaware of the consequences of their actions. For instance, many vacationers on safari would willingly give out money to street kids, coerced by their innocence and desperation,



oblivious to the fact that many of them were being used by adults to collect handouts, and getting nothing in return. On the coastal city of Mombasa, I met a Dutch man named Jan who owned a large piece of beachside property that was inhabited by about a dozen old, rich Europeans and their young Kenyan “friends” (girlfriends? lovers? prostitutes?). Jan was under the impression that Kenyans were inherently wretched people and that anything foreigners could do for them, including starting a relationship and supporting them financially, was helping their situation. While this could be true to some extent for the individuals who were benefiting from the support, it was a racist view that certainly did nothing for the fundamental issues that Kenya as a country faces. Despite the fact that I often felt like I struggled to be a global citizen, I came across many people like Jan who were essentially the opposite of global citizens, and probably did more to hurt the image of outsiders than to help it.



Through these experiences and as time went on, I was able to accept the plain truth of what it meant to be an American student abroad in Kenya, and from that, I was able to find ways to be a global citizen despite everything. Global citizenry, in my opinion, comes first from the awareness of your role in the situation and second from the little things you can do to counteract the stereotypes that permeate society. The first and arguably most important way I found to do this was to engage in the community around me and simply talk to people. Whether it was with my host family, my coworkers, or even just the people walking with me down the street, I talked endlessly about my home life. In the hospital at which I was working, I told people about the problems that our country has with HIV and AIDS. Many people I met, even highly educated nurses and doctors, were under the impression that this problem existed only in Africa. While it is certainly worse there, especially in countries like Kenya, I know I was able to discredit some of the utopic ideas people had about America. At home, I discussed with my host families the similarities between their middle class life in Kenya and my middle class life in America. While it's true that middle class Americans generally have more in terms of net income, middle class Kenyans are equally as able to live comfortably in their surroundings. Without discounting the fact that vast differences exist between Kenyan and American society, I tried my best to share with my families the perspective that their relative prosperity was no less valuable than mine.



This particular perspective came into practice one day as I was relaxing with my host family in Mombasa. A cousin of the family stopped by to say hello and we started talking about sports. He mentioned that he was the coach of a volleyball team at a nearby high school, and wanted to know if I would be willing to take pictures and information about the team back to the US with me in order to raise money for them. After reconciling with my annoyance that this person I had never met before was asking for such a large and unrealistic favor, I explained to him that he was more capable of finding a solution to his funding problem than I was. As an adult business owner, the best way for him to find funding was to search online for funding and grant opportunities as opposed to leaving the information with a young exchange student with little to no knowledge about volleyball. I was perturbed that he assumed that I, as an American, would be willing and able to assist him with something I knew nothing about despite the fact that he was a grown man with a job and internet skills. Fortunately, after I explained the situation, he seemed to accept that he could rely on his own resources to further his endeavor. In this way, our relationship was built on the basis of more genuine reasons rather than the common misconception that Americans are wealthy and powerful and therefore somehow superior to others, like Kenyans.

My other attempts at maintaining global citizenship came through my everyday behaviors. Simple things like taking public transportation gave people tangible evidence that foreigners can do more than just seclude themselves in their Land Rovers. I made the effort to do things like ride buses, buy food at roadside kiosks, and willingly eat Kenyan dishes, which often surprised the people around me. Perhaps the thing that impressed people the most was my ability to speak Swahili. Even the smallest phrases, like the ability to tell a vendor that their price was too expensive, helped me gain respect and legitimacy in my surroundings. A handful of foreigners would decide to take buses around town, but only a select few could argue with the conductor that they knew for sure the price was only twenty shillings. Ironically, despite the fact that my proficiency assured conductors that they would not make more than the fair price for the ride, they were generally pleased and impressed that I was able to speak their language.





Looking back on my abroad experience in Kenya, my attitude shifted often between optimism and pessimism about my ability to uphold the idea of global citizenship. I sometimes struggled to convince even myself that global citizenship was even possible for an American in Kenya. My most valuable realization came through learning to pick my battles. Some people would always see me as an elitist and selfish American, but by acting in a conscious manner about myself and my surroundings, I could change the way people saw me, and simultaneously change the way I saw myself.

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## **The Global State By Greg King (Mexico)**

When our founding fathers formed the United States of America they compromised between local tradition and the general rights of each citizen. Being an American citizen means accepting all forms of local beliefs, customs, laws and traditions, while promoting the greater overriding concepts of freedom, equality and the pursuit of happiness. For example, a US citizen could move from Texas to NY and, while she would have to adapt to different customs and rules, her rights as a US citizen would not change.

It is easy to see that the final goal would be to preserve local traditions and customs around the globe, while giving every person the same general rights and liberties. These rights would of course be called, human rights, and while people could move around the globe and observe and experience the differing local ways of life, they would always have the rights given to them by “global citizenship”.

Of course, taking the leap on a global level is much different than on the national level. There is no powerful “global government” to enforce these “natural rights” of its citizens in every part of the world. Therefore, it is up to us as individuals to promote and strive towards this goal and to no accept anything less than a world where in every society, everyone is protected by these global rights.

In my mind, global citizenship involves two distinct aspects. First, it is the complete and total loss of any form of ethnocentrism. Second it is the willingness to stand up against ethnocentrism in efforts to improve the state of mankind as a whole with the realization that all of us, whether it be man, localities, or states, have a responsibility to the world and must obey her rules of human rights and environmental protection. Everyone should be held accountable on the



global level to act in a way that benefits our planet and the citizens it holds. While spending a semester in Mexico, I realized that it is only through the commitment to these factors that we can improve our planet while giving everyone the rights to equally enjoy it.

Before departing on my semester abroad I never would have classified myself as an ethnocentric person. I always thought I had an open mind and accepted other people's customs and beliefs and would never think, let alone say, that my way of doing things was better than others. Of course, about a month into my semester in Queretaro, Mexico, I realized that, not only was I ethnocentric, I had an extremely hard time not thinking that my host culture's customs were simply inferior to my own. A person cannot claim to be open to all cultures and customs until he immerses himself in different cultures and sees how he reacts to them. People who have only lived in one culture their entire life will by definition be ethnocentric since their way of life is all they know.



My problem was I could not move past the fact that everything in Mexico happens so much slower than in America. Everything from getting money out of an ATM, to waiting for the bus, to getting served at a restaurant seemed to take ages compared to the time it took at home. I kept having thoughts such as, "if they would just do things this way, everything would be a lot more efficient." Luckily after about a month of this I was able to get past my initial problems and access my experience more objectively. My comparisons to my home country are inherently wrong because customs, traditions and methods of doing things are based on values which are different in each culture we visit. Mexican people do not value time the same way Americans do. For example, *manana* doesn't mean tomorrow in Mexican culture, it just means some time in the future. Time is valuable in Mexico in the sense that things should be relaxed and enjoyed without always worrying about deadlines. Mexicans do not have the stress that comes with always worrying about doing things in the quickest most efficient way possible. Once I was able to see that comparisons to what I thought of as "normal" were not an effective way to take in a new culture, I began to enjoy myself much more. In order to become a global citizen it is essential have first hand experience outside ones home culture.





To be a global citizen we must give people the same respect and observe all peoples general rights regardless of their local values and culture. This does not mean that we should deem these local customs unimportant. By treating all cultures equally, we are celebrating the differences in all cultures by knowing that these differences make everyone who we are. In Maximizing Study Abroad, the authors tell us that local values are a basis on which to judge that culture and predict expected actions (Paige 61). This is acceptable as long as these judgments are purely objective and are used to learn how one should act in a foreign culture. When these judgments get to general and we start making our own conclusions about them, it can become very dangerous. For example the statement “Mexicans like to laugh and have a good time with each other,” is a useful statement because it gives us a guideline for how to act in certain situations. The statement “All Mexicans do is drink tequila and throw parties,” is placing it’s own judgment by implying that they party “too much” and therefore should not be taken seriously. This goes against global citizenship since the statement is implying one culture is better than another. I heard countless statements like this before I departed, and while I didn’t think much of them before I left, I would now find them offensive after living there for a semester. Global citizenship is as much about respecting and observing the rights of all people as it is about countering any force against these principles.



Global citizens must work to ensure that their goals become a reality because there is no global force with the power to enforce human rights and respect of all cultures. People who are able to adjust to different cultures and make sense of the world through each culture’s values will be more able to combat the prejudice of ethnocentrism. In most cases, it is the people who have only lived in one place who cannot see the importance of working towards global citizenship. After spending a semester in Mexico and meeting real people who I cared for such as my host family, I more strongly support and appreciate the Mexican way of life. People who have immersed themselves more than two cultures will have an even greater appreciation for the differences in human cultures once they too can see how the world works through the eyes of each culture. It is only when these differences are appreciated will people be willing to fight for them.

Now that I am back in my home culture I see the world in a very different way than I did before. I am sorry to say that my new view is not such a positive one. Not everyone even has



the ability to become a global citizen. People who do not (or cannot) travel outside their own culture; will not have the perspective they need to have global citizenship. In order to achieve a world where global citizenship is possible for everyone, we need as many people as possible to fight for its cause. The world is not set up in a way for people to get the experience they need become a global citizen. Although transportation and communication have developed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are still many people who lack the ability to travel where they wish or are not allowed to leave their own culture in order to gain that new perspective. On the other hand, many privileged people do not wish to visit other societies for long enough time to gain a different cultural perspective. Many of these people make brief travels with a closed mind without trying to gain a more worldly perspective.

Big changes need to be made in the global structure in order for more people to have a chance to become global citizens. The paradox is that it is global citizens themselves that need work toward this structural change. However there are leaders working to change the balance of power in the world and eventually its unfair global structure. Greg Mortenson works to improve the quality of life of less fortunate societies through education, which will help shift the power away from the few and into the hands of the many. People like him are making it easier for others to become global citizens and work towards the goal of human rights and respect for all. With forces like these at work the global structure can be changed and more of us will have the ability to work towards a world where all people are given respect and basic unalienable rights in a new global state.

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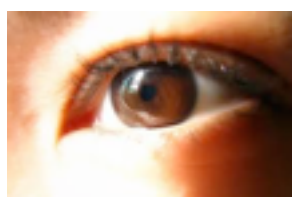
### **Sharing of Cultures By Jennifer Yin (China)**

Global citizenship as defined by Taso G. Lagos, a professor at the University of Washington, “cannot be expressed in any legal sense. It is, however expressed in other ways that may have a significant and profound impact on the development of civic engagement and citizen-state relations” (Lagos). Indeed, global citizenship has no legal definition, however who can we define as a global citizen? In all technicality, every person, every being on the Earth is a global citizen, and as any citizen we have responsibilities towards our country and our culture. A global citizen, by my definition, is someone who is willing and able to adapt and learn from whatever culture he or she finds him/herself in, and is willing to share their own cultures with others.



Being an American, we like to think that our country is a big melting pot of cultures and people, but how true is this belief? Visiting any major city can be like visiting different parts of the country with Chinatown, Little Italy, and all the other ethnic neighborhoods. But how much of these cultures have leaked into mainstream America? How many Americans have watched a foreign movie? Listen to foreign music? Read foreign authors? Know a foreign language? Watched a foreign TV show? America has become an exporter of culture.

As a citizen of a culture exporter going abroad means fighting preconceived notions that exist due to our exportation of media. As an Asian American in China, the experiences were strange. Due to the popularity of the hit TV show, *Prison Break*, my classmates asked me if everyone in America had guns. Being near illiterate and not being able to read menus received strange and incredulous looks. I even had people not believing I was American simply because I looked Chinese, and lacked the prerequisite blonde hair and blue eyes.



In China, I was not immediately noted as an American. I did not look foreign, I was fluent in Chinese, without any type of strong accent, and since college students everywhere predominately dressed alike (T-shirts and jeans), nothing about me stood out to the Chinese people. I sat in on classes with my Chinese friends, and was snuck into the regular female dormitories (international and visiting students were put in a separate building). Despite fitting in with my looks, my accent singled me out to some.

When I opened my mouth to speak, it was extraordinarily apparent to all that I was not a native Beijinger. I did not have the accent, even if I did have most of the vocabulary. The majority pinpointed my accent as southern Chinese, and many were able to pinpoint my accent as Taiwanese. After all, I sounded just like the people on TV! or so I was told by many people, including some of my teachers. My accent and my voice were described as “嗲” which would be best translated to cute, childish, or coy. When I told people I was studying Chinese at college, they assumed I was studying Chinese in China as English major studies English in America. My looks did not point me out to be anything other than your average college student, and my accent only pointed me out to be Taiwanese at best. I became an ambassador not of America, but of Taiwan instead.

Despite the fact that I have lived in America all my life, some of my closest friends call me “un-American.” This in a large part is due to the fact that I have been exposed to the Chinese



culture and way of life more so than American. As well as I blend into American society, I miss references to American pop culture, such as the phrase “Jumping the Shark.” They were incredulous at my lack of knowledge about who the Fonz was. I was raised in an ethnically Chinese neighborhood by traditional first generation Chinese parents. The vast majority of my friends before college were Chinese. Going to China did not give me culture shock of any sort, however, coming to Allegheny College did.

Listening to Professor Sinha Roy during the pre-departure meeting made me realize what I went through during my first two years at Allegheny College. The cultural euphoria, where everything was new and wonderful and I couldn’t wait to experience it all, to the cultural confrontation, and the homesickness, to the adjustment and adaption (Paige 86). However in contrast to the seven months that was estimated in the textbook, my cycle of culture shock spanned a whole two years. Compared to New York City, and my life back home, Allegheny College was extraordinarily different. Everything was closed on Sundays, there was no public transportation, and getting anywhere was a hassle without a car, the food that was wonderful at first became bland and disgusting. However, I met some of my best friends, picked up new hobbies, and learned many new wonderful things. Having become adjust to Meadville, Pennsylvania, I have come to enjoy the slower pace in life (not counting school work frenzy), the personal connection of people, and to simply enjoy the rare days of bright sunlight.

Being so familiar with the culture made culture shock in China nonexistent, after getting acquainted with the neighborhood and surroundings, Beijing immediately felt like home, I understood the culture, the deeper culture, and the majority of the surface aspects. Beijing was a large city with bad traffic, and a decent public transportation system. All in all, Beijing was just about as close to home as I would possibly get in China. A Shanghainese friend of mine visited New York City one break, and remarked that New York was just like Shanghai, with more diversity of people. Beijing was just like New York, just with more Chinese people. In Beijing, I was simply one of the many people.



Global citizenship is flourishing with modern society. The internet is a wealth of information on various cultures that one can find prior to departure. With modern conveniences, one can travel anywhere and everywhere. With modern communication technologies one does not even





need to leave the comfort of one's own home to become a global citizen. There are many websites that will link up modern day pen pals through instant messaging or email so that people can talk to one another trading language and cultures instantaneously with little to no costs. With the help of modern technology, everyone is a global citizen. We share our cultures through modern technologies. Should we lack the technology or conveniences to do so, there are almost always upstanding global citizens willing to share their experiences and their lessons learned with the rest of the world.

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### Individuals and Societal Responsibilities: A Path to Global Citizenship by Edayatu Lamptey (Washington D.C., USA)

A semester abroad in the nation's capital, Washington DC, has contributed to my understanding global citizenship. From experiences and interactions with students, administrators and my supervisors, I came to understand global citizenship as the responsibilities that every individual has as a citizen of the world, and the various ways by which we use these responsibilities to shape society and other individuals in the world. Numerous experiences contributed to this understanding of global citizenship. I classify these experiences in two broad contexts: tangible and intangible experiences. I define intangible experiences as those experiences that require abstract procedures such as policy-making and lobbying. Although these experiences affect changes in society, their end results may not be seen immediately. Tangible experiences, on the other hand, are experiences that require one to establish concrete ideas and intuitions, such as, the establishment of non-governmental organizations and the organization of protests, which yield immediate results that are visible and can be felt.





These two categories of experiences are both fueled by empathy. The book, *Maximizing Study Abroad*, does a very good job in defining empathy however, I find this definition rather incomplete. Empathy as defined in the book, is the willingness to understand how other people feel and to actively seek further insight from other perspective (Paige *et al* 45). Empathy as defined above, I believe, fails to incorporate the true definition of global citizenship and the responsibilities of a global citizen. It is very important that one is willing to understand the situations of other individuals, and also be open to other views; however, this motivation should not just end there. The motivation to gain understanding and insights of other people's problems and situations should also enable one to go out of their own way to work towards changing that situation to the benefit of society. Defining empathy this way does not only entail one's willingness to understand situations, but also the willingness to take the initiative to transform that particular situation in order to make it beneficial to society, a key concept of global citizenship. Looking at empathy from this perspective has enabled me to understand my responsibilities as a global citizen and also enabled me use experiences from study abroad to affect change in DC.

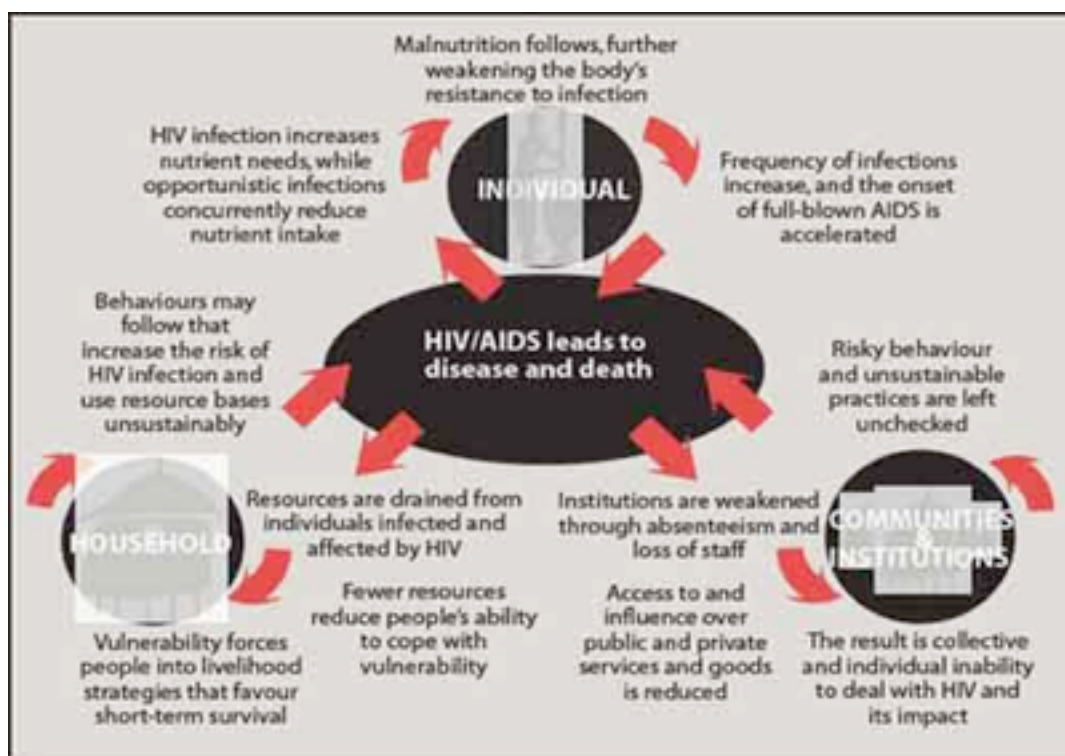


An intangible experience that contributed to my understanding of what global citizenship is and also my responsibilities as a global citizen was my internship experience with “The Center of Concern”, a non-governmental organization. The Center's mission is to create awareness about poverty and injustice, both in the United States and internationally. At the Center I worked on the Women's project team, and we explored the social and economic injustices that women around the world face. Some of the issues the project researches are the wage disparities between women and men working in both developed and undeveloped nations, and the lack of food and other important amenities to citizens around the world.

As part of my internship duties, I was asked to research some of the factors leading to the food crisis and write an article on any that I found interesting. I explored the effect of the HIV-AIDS epidemic on the food crisis, focusing on how the epidemic has led to a decrease in labor in the agricultural sector and how it is exacerbating the food crisis. I also looked at the key roles women play in the agricultural sector and how the contraction of the disease affects their partici-



pation rate in agricultural production. I conducted a significant amount of research and also had the privilege to talk to HIV-AIDS activists from African. This article is to be published in the Centers monthly newsletter, to raise awareness to policy makers and the public on the food crisis issue as well as on the HIV-AIDS epidemic. My work as a global citizen was approached from an intangible perspective, where I was responsible for raising awareness about the food crisis issue and also lobbying at congress to ensure that policies are implemented to curb this situation. These responsibilities made me aware of the food crisis. My involvement in the process also brought to light my duties as a citizen of this world, and precisely in Washington DC.



Source: *FAO.org*

Another experience, perhaps the most important intangible experience that shaped my understanding of what global citizenship means and how I as a global citizen can cause change was my class “policy assignment.” This assignment helped me understand my role as a global citizen. For this assignment, I adopted the Brookland community in the district. I learned about the community’s culture, familiarized myself with its problems and most importantly proposed policies that would help to improve and make it a healthy community. I refer to this assignment as my most important tangible experience mainly because it elucidates the true meaning of global citizenship to me and also clarifies the success of empathy as a key to a successful study



abroad experience. This experience enabled me to actively seek to understand the situations the members of Brookland face. For example, the members of the Brookland community feel neglected by the government, and also feel as second class citizens in the city that houses the nation's president and many prominent policy makers. This experience made me aware of the fact that my duties as a global citizen are bound to change depending on the community I find myself in, thus I should be willing to accept the unexpected, as elaborated in the book, *Maximizing Study Abroad* (Paige *et al* 30).

Another intangible experience that enabled me to understand what global citizenship means was my participation in a protest in Washington DC to protest against the various policies that the World Bank and the International Monetary Funds implement in most third world countries. These two international institutions have implemented various policies around the world such as structural adjustment policies in third world countries, which are intended to help but rather hurt the economies of these nations. The energy at this protest was very empowering and vibrant. There were many other students from various parts of the United States and from various cultures present. The beautiful aspect of this protest was that the issue of race, gender and socio-economic difference did not deter any of us present from participating. We all recognized our duties as global citizens and came together to try and bring about change in society.



Just as intangible experiences shaped my understanding of global citizenship, tangible experiences also played a key role in contributing to my understanding. During my semester away, I volunteered at Catholic Charities for two hours a week. As a volunteer, I tutored GED math and also helped students with resume building in addition to helping them search for jobs. Most of the students that I tutored were individuals who had been incarcerated, and were trying to regain their lives and make themselves useful citizens in the community. This experience enabled me to appreciate who I am as a person and my responsibility as a citizen of the world to help these individuals adjust back into society and most importantly to get to the roots of the various factors that causes obstacles in the lives of these individuals. I was able to witness change in the lives of the students that I taught. Although some students were not able to get jobs and some others were not able to pass their GED's, majority of the students managed to get their high school diplomas and some were able to get part-time jobs.





Another tangible experience that shaped my understanding of global citizenship was a visit to the jail in Maryland. This visit was not the most pleasant class trip, however, it was the most life-transforming experiences I have ever had. Listening to each inmate's personal story and getting to know them, did not make me realize how unique each individual is in life, but instead how intertwined our lives are in this world. Just like me, the inmates wanted to effect change; the difference, however, was that they understood change from a more violent point-of-view. Most of them had been deprived of a lot from childhood and this had shaped the way they viewed themselves in the world. This discovery made me realize criminal vices in the society cannot always be curbed by education and by prison institutions. Instead, feeling empathy and being ready to interact with society's outcasts can result in an understanding of social ills on a case-by-case basis as compared to a broader stereotyping. From this experience, I feel that global citizenship is about looking at and understanding the human face of larger tragedies such as crime and war. If we continue to villainize the 'enemy' in any confrontation that is presented in moral terms (good vs. bad), we will never move towards trying to arrive at a truly global solution; we will only seek a solution that works to *our* advantage.

A semester in Washington did not only allow me to explore the nation's capital, but rather helped in making me realize who I am as a citizen of this world and what I can do to effect change in society. Global citizenship can be defined in various ways. I see it as the privilege of being able to see and feel that our lives and futures are interconnected as members of a world community. Ultimately, what I have come to realize and hold myself accountable to is the knowledge that what I do can make a difference, for better or worse, on the lives of others, and the other way around. The world in that way is truly round!

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## Global Citizenship: Learning From Experience By Sarah Kropp (U.K.)



The term “global citizenship” can mean a number of things. It is recognizing your responsibilities and obligations as a world traveler and ambassador to your respective country. It is being knowledgeable about the world around you, your own country, and whatever country you happen to be in. It is being respectful of other cultures and respectably representing your own. It is assimilating and adapting to another country’s environment and customs, rather than staying set in your own ways. It is experiencing other cultures and learning from them. It is recognizing community on a local and global level. Finally, global citizenship is seeing beyond the barriers of race, nationality and religion and recognizing universal rights and commonalities. In this essay, I will express the meanings of global citizenship and how I came to understand this concept through my various experiences studying abroad in Lancaster, England (as well as in my concurrent European travels).

The main instances in which I experienced the concept of global citizenship were in my dealings with my British friends, professors, and their school system. First, was accepting the cultural differences which offered potential barriers between me and my host culture. Even though the U.S. and the U.K. share the same language, as well as an intertwined history, that by no means makes it easier to assimilate. In fact, it makes it harder in the sense that both countries have pre-conceived notions and stereotypes about the other. For instance, many of the British people I met assumed I was from New York City or Los Angeles—most of them had never even heard of Ohio. However, about 90 percent of my friends and acquaintances from home thought I was studying abroad in London. Some still think that I did. Thus, I extended global citizenship by forcing both my English and American friends to realize that countries are diverse and do not



necessarily follow the stereotypes we have about them. There are completely different ways of life that we can never understand unless we experience them firsthand. It is really important to gain this perspective to remain open minded. It is also important to be cultured, particularly when entering the work force or applying to graduate programs, because it gives you an edge over other candidates. Just in terms of education, it is good to get away from Allegheny because the experience we receive is not the most realistic elsewhere. Therefore, it is important to travel and experience different ways of life in order to gain independence and individuality and understand the concept of global citizenship.

Another specific example of how my experiential learning helped me to understand the concept of global citizenship was through my travels to other countries and in particular the people I would meet while staying in hostels. When you are in this type of environment, it is particularly important to be respectful of others, as well as being a model representative for your own country because many times the people I met had never met a real American before. For the most part, it seemed what they knew about America was based off of television shows and movies. In particular, when I was staying in a hostel in Brussels, Belgium with my friends a girl from China struck up conversation with us and began questioning us about America. Not only did she want to know what our lives were like in America, she wanted us to answer for the U.S. government. Although many people I came across in my travels loved Americans or loved our new President, I found it to be very different how concerned with and knowledgeable they were about world politics. There were many times I was asked to speak on behalf of America, or was questioned about American history or politics and frankly did not know the answer. There were several occasions where some of my British friends knew more about the American government than I did. This cultural gap is important because it forced me to adapt to my surroundings by talking and learning more about politics, which is widely discussed by people of all ages in Europe and is a more taboo topic in America.



This trend also forced me to be a better representative of my home country by learning more about it, as well as recognizing the global community that we sometimes take for granted in America. Perhaps because the European countries are so close together geographically while



America is geographically isolated, many Americans feel they can get away with being ignorant of other countries and cultures. Our media culture makes us feel that our country is at the center of world politics and policy-making and that people who come to America from other countries want to learn about us. So, the emphasis has never been about Americans learning about other cultures in the world or why we should care about global intercultural relationships. However, most Europeans make it a point to be actively engaged in both national and international politics, which was a big factor in helping me to understand citizenship on a global level.

Finally, what most helped me to recognize the concept of global citizenship was when I would do something wrong in another country. For example, it happened that several times I got yelled at in German on the German train system. The first time, I was walking outside of my sleep compartment without shoes on. The second time, I was riding the train in Munich with my feet on the seat across from me. Now I didn't realize at the time because I don't understand German,



but the Germans are extremely proud of their train system and it is considered one of the best in Europe. But since I was totally unaware of this and am used to putting my feet all over things in America, I didn't think twice about doing it and had no idea the act would be offensive. This is when I really came to recognize my responsibility as a world traveler—to be well informed about the countries you are visiting. At the time, I was just traveling to see beautiful and important things. However, I came to realize that it is selfish to just go somewhere and be a tourist without even attempting to fit in or offer anything in return. I found the biggest obstacle in achieving this was the constant language barrier. This ended up being the main reason I would unknowingly do something that did not make me a model global citizen, or would cause frustration that would make me want to stop trying.

It is hard to be in a country where you don't speak the language, in particular in countries that don't speak any English at all. Because I was traveling so much, by the end of my respective trips I would start to get sick of nobody being able to understand me. In particular, when I was visiting Paris with my mom, I was at the end of a month of straight traveling. However, I was thrilled to be in Paris because of all the Starbucks they had there. So when I ordered an iced coffee there one day, the barista did not hand me a straw with my drink. I went to look for one and





there were no straws to be found. After looking, I went up and asked the barista for a straw (in English) and she stared at me blankly. So I decided to mime drinking with a straw in the hopes that she would understand. All I got was a dirty look and a shake of the head, although it was pretty obvious that there had to be straws somewhere—it is Starbucks, after all. At the time, this scenario made me furious. I was convinced that French people just hated Americans

and that was why I was not given a straw. But in retrospect, I came to realize it was ignorant and somewhat rude of me to go to France without even trying to speak the language. Sure, I probably wouldn't have memorized the phrase “Can I have a straw?” in my studies, but it would have been both courteous and respectful of me to at least write down a few helpful words or phrases. These were instances in which I was still stuck by the barriers of nationality. I went to Europe assuming that everyone in the world knows at least some English, which was clearly not the case. I rarely took the time before my travels to do any serious research into the customs of the cultures I would be visiting—I was just there for the ride and hoping to pick things up as I went along.

Looking back on my experiences, it is now obvious to me how ignorant I could be of the world at large while wrapped up in the bubble we know as Allegheny. In Meadville, it is easy to just be thinking about the next exam, how much you hate all the snow, or what happened at last weekend's party. Sometimes it is hard to reach beyond yourself and consider what else is really going on in the world, or how hard some other people might have it. It's easy to be comfortable in your life, and that is the part that I realized I do not want for myself. I almost decided not to study abroad because I was too afraid of change and leaving the comforts of my life in the U.S. However, going abroad was the best decision I have ever made. Even just the architecture and the landscapes can be life changing, as well as providing the opportunity to meet diverse people you never would have met otherwise. Having gone from never leaving the country to seeing some of the most historical and beautiful sights in my travels, from the Roman Coliseum to works of art in the Louvre, I know it's important to travel to see what else is out there, otherwise it's hard to know who you really are. The life experience, independence, and cultural experiences





I collected along the way are priceless attributes of my new self. I gained a confidence in myself that will never cease, an appreciation for my family and friends, and a newfound respect and love for the cultures I experienced.

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## **“Waiting on the World to Change” By Amanda Schworm (Duke Marine Lab)**

As it stands right now, I am currently a citizen of the United States of America, and proud of it. I was born and raised in Pennsylvania so some might automatically write me off as a small time country girl, but I was raised with a big time world view. My faith is my life, and through my faith I have grown to know and love the fact that we are all interconnected. Cultures and continents might separate us from other ethnic groups, but the underlying fact that we are all human remains shining like a beacon reminding us that our differences are only what we make them. We, as humans, all belong to the world in a sense making us all citizens of the world, hence the idea of global citizenship. Citizenship can be explained as a sense of belonging and when we belong to a place with have a responsibility to it. This responsibility extends not only to the place we call home, but reaches out to the entire world specifically where we might be living at any given moment, and for me last semester my home away from home was the Duke University Marine Lab in Beaufort, North Carolina.



My first couple of weeks at the Duke University Marine Lab (DUML) was a rush of new class material and people. Our classes were scheduled in block format so by the time it had registered that I was living on an island, a month later; my first class was already over. When I was finally able to catch my breath I had to take a step back and examine my role in this place I was calling home. Coming into the DUML I feared I would not fit in with the other students who probably had more marine science background than I had, but I learned quickly that with the wealth of knowledge available we all had some catching up to do. I had always thought of global citizenship on a more religious and social level promoting all of our involvement in social issues, but spending time at the DUML opened my eyes to a different section of global citizenship. Witnessing collaborative work between scientists from all over the world made me realize the importance of everyone's actions. Nature connects us all and we in so many ways



belong to nature. It provides us with life sustaining substances and it is our duty to protect these precious resources. Seems simple enough, take care of the earth around you, but the issue comes when we forget that our actions influence other people's lives.

If by chance one feels as though wasting gas today won't impact anything but their wallet then they are sorely mistaken and clearly do not understand what it is to be ecologically interconnected. Even this past summer when I spent time in the Caribbean I witnessed just how easily one mistake can travel. Lion fish were released from an aquarium just off the coast of Florida. These carnivorous fish traveled down into the Caribbean and are now disrupting the balanced marine ecosystem there. There is no predator for the lion fish, therefore its numbers are increasing, as the number of native fish is decreasing, thereby causing a collapse in local fisheries. The professors at the DUML were constantly bringing similar issues to our attention continually reminding me to be mindful of my conservation habits.



At the DUML we worked as a class to promote sustainable lifestyles first and foremost on our campus then expanded to the main campus. Creating posters and graphic designs we shared conservation facts and tips with many students. Learning how to advertise a sustainable lifestyle was truly beneficial in fully comprehending the vastness of the issue. Working with conservation efforts at Duke Main we determined what efforts had been successful and other's which had not. Some of the sustainable living ideas have actually been put into action here at Allegheny. The use of reusable cups at McKinley's and tray-less dining at Brooks are just two of the many actions which are being taken at the DUML.

Spending time at the DUML I inevitably met individuals who have invested their lives into conserving and studying life on earth. Specifically at the DUML we tended to hone in on the aquatic issues surrounding us. In my fisheries' ecology class our Professor, Larry Crowder, blew us all away spending three hours per class attempting to describe the many issues that go hand in hand with fisheries collapse. As a collective body we would attempt to determine ways to circumvent issues or alleviate the blow of certain destructive forces. Soon we were thinking outside of the box working together to construct potential plans with step by step actions. The true blessing of this class was that we rapidly discovered that each issue we were presented with depended upon the cooperation of many people not just the actions of one. In my opinion I be-



lieve this is the role of a global citizen; to act as the common ground for different nations to come together to solve issues larger than the individual.

A global citizen should be able to pass through the world interacting with the peoples of those countries sharing their accumulated knowledge. This is not to say that a single citizen should be able to cover most of the world, but rather that many, many people should find a specific area or problem on which to focus. If we collectively put all our efforts behind one global cause then we have a better chance at succeeding. My last course at the DUMML was termed “Conservation of Sea Turtles” and was taught by an amazing couple, Mr. and Mrs. Scott Eckert. These two people were an unstoppable force. Mrs. Eckert was an awe inspiring marine policy maker. She was able to flawlessly communicate the major marine environmental policy issues that made us want to advocate the legislation she was drafting. While his wife dealt with policy change, Professor Scott Eckert or Scott as he told us to call him, was all about the marine research. Scott’s main focus was on leatherback sea turtles. He has been studying these amazing creatures all over the world, but has found a home for his study in Trinidad.



Trinidad is home to multiple different nesting sites for the leatherback sea turtle. As part of our course we were “required” to spend a week down at the Nature Seeker’s headquarters in Matura, Trinidad. Nature Seeker’s is an organization which was started locally with the help of Scott Eckert. The organization is run entirely by Trinidad citizens and focuses on the protection of the leatherbacks which nest on Matura beach. While they are nesting the turtles are tagged both with flipper tags as well as PIT tags which are pea sized electronic scan tags that have their own unique serial number. The location where they nested is recorded as well as the carapace length. All of the information collected is then entered into a large database which is utilized in ongoing research.

While in Trinidad I worked on a project determining measurements for larger escape holes in trawling devices (a fishing net which tends to catch and drown sea turtles). We went out on the beach from 8pm until 2am running back and forth between turtles to take many measurements which are aiding another scientist in an ongoing project to petition the fisheries to increase the “Turtle Excluder Devices” or TED’s on trawling nets. So, there I was in the thick of a major



organization working to conserve these incredible animals when I realized that these are the



moments in our lives in which we must step out of our comfort zones and experience everything life has to offer. At that moment I was a global citizen traversing continents to better our oceans. Scott Eckert and his wife Karen have dedicated their lives to this cause. They are both close friends with many locals and have become a part of their culture while also incorporating some of themselves into the country. Each year they spend time in Trinidad bringing science to the

people in an effort to conserve what is left, sharing their passion with those around them. Now even though I know I will probably take another path in my life I know that the effort of one will continue there and I hope that I will be able to duplicate that effort in another place.

Throughout all our readings one quote stuck out to me the most, it said, “The only thing certain in life is change, and the more you can accept change in your life the happier you will be” (Paige 156). As a global citizen we are bound to meet many people, go many places, and experience new feats of nature. We have to let them influence us. We cannot stand aloof from it all because if we remove ourselves from our experiences we will never grow.

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### Nothing Better Than Abroad By Zack Honess (Australia)

My adventure to Australia and back has been a period in my life that I will cherish and talk about for the remainder of my life. There was very little there that I do not look on with fond memories. Even things such as the unreliable bus system with their rude drivers and the inflated price of just about everything make me think of the single greatest period of my college career. Never in my life have I expected so much from an experience and gotten more than I



bargained for from it.

Ever since my third grade teacher made a presentation about her travels to Australia when I was 9 years old, I have dreamed of going myself. Information wasn't easy to find about Australia and was not often reported on in the news. Despite this I maintained my interest in the country all through grade school and high school. Finally when I started applying to colleges, studying abroad became one of the top features I looked for in schools. Finally when the time came to apply I did it and when I found out I would be studying abroad, I realized I knew nothing about traveling, let alone to a foreign nation. Luckily Allegheny takes good care of its students and requests that those studying abroad read *Maximizing Study Abroad: A Students' Guide to Strategies for Language and Cultural Learning and Use*.

After looking through the book, I took the advice the course reader gave me and took some time out of my life to "learn something from those who have traveled before" me (Paige 2). Prior to my adventure abroad, I contacted many of those who had gone through the same program from Allegheny College to James Cook University. The person most helpful to me was someone I had never met before, but she worked in the same office that I did as a student worker. I began slowly introducing her to the idea that I may be going to Australia when I first applied to the program. Finally when I received confirmation that I would be going I began bombarding her with questions about Townsville and Australia in general. What I did not expect was such an equal assault of information back.

Ultimately, I had to take a wait and see approach with everything that she had to tell me about. I only had a vague idea of what she was talking about when I asked her all of these questions, but I did hold on to some of her advice. Although I did not feel entirely prepared for what I would be getting into, at the same time I felt I was ready for everything. There were so many things that could happen to me in this time period and I had to face these challenges whether I was prepared or not. I learned while I was there that sometimes a wait and see approach was not always ideal, however (Paige 35).

When I arrived I remember waiting an entire day to get my luggage and being so incredibly uncomfortable in what I had been wearing for about two full days. Of course, I was completely oblivious to what I should be doing. There was nothing that I could do to control this situation so I simply went with the flow. I numbed myself to my unpleasant feelings and did what I could. I discovered in this instance that making acquaintances with strangers became a





strong suit of mine. Gradually, I was able to integrate this trait into my every day personality. In fact by the end of my stay I loved meeting new people so much I made at least one friend everywhere I traveled.

I certainly did expect those living in Australia to have a vast difference in attitude toward life. I was under the impression that the Australian people were much like Crocodile Dundy or Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter. I figured Australians were rugged and tough and always up for an adventure. As it turns out, the people on this massive island were different than Americans, but they did not fit my stereotype. Sure their accents were similar to the famous Aussies one sees on TV, but the people I met were just regular people, with one major exception. It was as though everyone's life phrase was "no worries." Seldom a day went by that I did not see this attitude reflected in so many actions. The sink doesn't drain, you left your shoes out in the rain, the bus isn't on time, your computer crashed, no worries.



This philosophy on life took me by surprise. The people in American society often seem so uptight and rigid in their daily schedules. Americans seem to be so overcome with the mentality of getting things done as quickly as possible. It is nice to be efficient, but there are times in life that people need to slow down and take it easy. Being laid back seemed to just come to Australians without effort. This natural

Culture shock was more subtle in Australia (Paige 42). After all everyone speaks English, they have super malls, public transportation, shopping plazas, grocery stores, telephones, all the conveniences of America. One thing that did cause culture shock was the opposing views on the Aboriginal community. During all my years of schooling I have always learned how prejudice is unacceptable. In addition, attending a liberal arts school, even as small as it is, Allegheny College has many organizations that support minorities within its community. I took an Aboriginal studies class while attending University and to my surprise there were only three students in my entire class that were Australian. Later I discovered that many white Australians look at the Aboriginals living in the cities as worthless and homeless vagrants on the street.



As I continued my study of the Aboriginal culture, I came to realize that the view many of my Australian friends was very naïve. I learned much of the history of the indigenous peoples of Australia, and it seemed similar to that of the Native Americans of the United States. In my class I read a lot of literature by aboriginal Australians. In this particular class, the students were also required to attend several field trips hosted by an Aboriginal man of Townsville. From this man alone I learned the stereotype my friends had of aboriginals were completely misguided. In addition to his stories and wisdom I gained a number of insights from the required readings. I was happy to learn that the discrimination of this group of people was not to be taken lightly and neither were they.

The biggest piece of myself that I gained from going abroad is how to be an adult. Not necessarily a wise, responsible one, but just a regular grown-up; a human who makes mistakes and maybe has to pay for them. The truth of the matter is that everyone is ultimately looking out for him or herself when somewhere unfamiliar. Traveling with friends made this point crystal clear. When you are traveling with people, everyone has something he or she wants to see or somewhere he or she has always wanted to go. Even when traveling alone, you have to abide by certain procedures even if you just want to enjoy the scenery on a nature walk.

Leaving was not the hardest thing I have ever done. I had been buying souvenirs for family and friends in America sporadically throughout my stay and with all the traveling I did I never "got comfortable" anywhere I went including Townsville. The day I left I knew I was leaving and I had been preparing for a sad goodbye, but I did not shed a single tear. Instead I had a bizarre experience that I did not quite know how to handle. On the many plane rides home I would fall asleep and wake up thinking that I was on a weekend trip heading back to Townsville to see all my friends from James Cook University. For many days following my return I had an amazing time reuniting and sharing stories with my family and friends from the times I had been abroad. However, the more and more I talked about it, the more and more my mood mellowed.

I began missing my host culture. On top of that, the unrealistic thought that I was in Australia persisted. I would wake up in the middle of the night or from a nap and have to come to grips with the fact that I was back in the country I was born into.

After getting back into the swing of things of my “familiar” American life, I realized I had developed a changed view on life. Through these examples of discovering there was more to the Aboriginals than those I saw in downtown Townsville to finding out what traveling really involved, becoming a global citizen seemed to happen without me even trying. Coming back to those who had not discovered what I had in the past five months made me feel somewhat alone. However, once I stopped trying to identify with people and started simply listening to them and their lives things started to become clear. People are people and everyone is a citizen of the earth; just because they have not had the same experiences does not make them any less human. People have experiences in their lives that change them, mine happens to be my semester abroad immersion. I think my place now is to help people see that they can have an experience similar that can change them for the better.

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### A Costa Rican Lesson By Chris Wagner

Costa Rica is one of the few Latin American countries historically has remained relatively free of the hegemonic cultural influence of the United States. Other than a certain measure of economic dependence, the small nation has avoided the military incursions, CIA-sponsored coups, puppet dictators and the seemingly unending list of examples of state-level meddling that can be attributed to the US government. As a result, you don't find nearly the level of subdued animosity that you might see in neighboring Nicaragua or further northwest in Mexico. Not to get ahead of myself, there is a certain level of wariness towards tourists and anyone who the locals might refer to as being a “gringo,” a term applied to essentially any white person from the US or





Europe. It lacks the pejorative connotations found in its usage in other Latin American countries; Costa Ricans mainly use it as a shorthand way to refer to you or your nationality. Under it all though, many Costa Ricans have developed a not-in-my-backyard attitude, a nervous exhaustion with the flood of gringo tourists and snowbirds that their new development strategy has dropped on their country's doorstep during the past decade.

When I arrived, I expected to be able to hit the tarmac running. I had already lived in Mexico for two separate study periods before my third years of both high school and college. I felt very confident in my Spanish, or at least more so than my new friend from the plane. As you may have already guessed, it was not long before I found out that geographic proximity and language do not necessarily make countries all that similar to one another. Costa Rica is a few hundred miles and a world apart from Mexico.

The Costa Ricans as a people have an egalitarian ethic to their daily lives that is absent from many other Latin American countries. A lack of hierarchy in the early Spanish presence in the area gave rise to a system that lacks the intense disparity and the economic and social stratification found elsewhere in the region. On a day-to-day basis, this means that politeness and linguistic flourishes are critical. I remember gradually getting better and better responses from the people I would meet in town as I picked up more of the local jargon. Greetings and conversation in general became easier once I started speaking in the unique, more local brand of the language. The meandering, indirect delivery of much of their speech complicates conversation on a secondary level as well. Traditional Costa Ricans avoid conflict and saying “no” at all costs, which made asking questions about the country confusing early in my semester. I first thought that the responses I was getting were a problem of mistranslation or just a simple misunderstanding. I later figured out that they were just avoiding telling the pure truth. What I realize now is that my initial assumptions about transitioning seamlessly into the culture were naïve at best. Foolishly approaching my new home like I already understood it was a poor way to start off. It was not until I started to speak the local style of the language that I really felt like I was able to be a part of the place where I was living.





Integration is an important part of the transition into a new culture. In Atenas, the town that hosted the School for Field Studies compound that I lived on and took classes in, a worrisome new pattern was developing in the hills in the outskirts of town. Along the main roads, different neighborhoods and offshoot farming communities were already well established.

Through soccer games we played (read: were dominated in) with some of the locals, I became friends with the Rojas family in one of these neighborhoods. Although the section of hills of valleys that their family lived in was already cultivated and parceled-out, land developers and real-estate speculators were buying some of the fringe areas to sell primarily to retirees from the US. To preserve some of their hillsides, either as part of the Atenas Conservation Zone or simply to keep the developers from buying it up, an organization had been founded by a number of the members of the community to pool together funds to buy up tracts of land and impede the rapidly accelerating pace of construction. An elderly woman I talked with in a nursing home we visited lamented that, in that last ten years or so, the hillside visible from her patio had transformed from a half-forested mix of pasture and agriculture to a barren landscape capped by ostentatious houses.

This influx of foreigners, the tropical shirt-wearing, sunburned baby-boomers looking for a nice place to retire, have been showing up by the tour bus load in recent years. A good many of my soccer friends were pleased to meet someone their own age with whom they could actually hold a conversation that extended beyond awkwardly stumbling through “¿Donde está el baño?” Doing my best to avoid pontificating too much, these people really bothered me. So, the more I heard about houses on the hills or gringo neighbors who had lived up the road for five years but had never bothered to stop by and say ‘hello’, the more I started to sympathize with the people from the ACA and the Rojas. Being a bad neighbor in your McMansion tucked away just outside of town is an egregious mistake, not only in representing yourself, but also in missing an opportunity that is literally just outside your door.

Interaction is not necessarily a good thing or a universal tonic to cultural contact. I mentioned before that most Costa Ricans are very nice and welcoming. I found the universal exception to the rule in tourist hotspots, the neutral ground where vacationers had homogenized the landscape with Sheratons and Subways. Different from the eco and adventure tourism that has become popular in the country’s interior, Costa Rica’s coastline is prime real estate for hotels and resort complexes. I wish anyone the best of luck in finding a smile or friendly twinkle in the eye





of any of the hotel workers. During the first night of spring break, we spoke with our waiter expecting the usual *pura vida*, easygoing attitude that most Costa Ricans have on life. Instead, he and his fellow servers were brusque towards us as well as our fellow diners. The same thing happened with the owner of the *pulpería* (a sort of general store, traditionally a public meeting place). My best guess is that they were really, really tired of dealing with tourists, the obnoxious antithesis of our global citizen.

My most rewarding, memorable experiences in Costa Rica happened when I was willing to sit down and talk on the country's own terms. Global citizenship implies that a person can take the same set of skills that they would use in approaching any new city or group in their own culture and apply them in a foreign setting. I've seen and experienced first-hand the awkwardness, the joking remarks and the overall poor reception that acting like a foreigner gets you. Successfully being included as a part of the "diverse, interconnected world" that Allegheny's mission statement mentions necessitates approaching new situations with an open mind and, equally importantly, open eyes. Personal growth while traveling is as much about your own enrichment as it is observing the way that people before you have experienced what you are seeing and learning from their experience.





## Keeping Your Eyes, Ears, and Mind Open While Studying Abroad

By Ben Hedin (Costa Rica)

*“American students who travel abroad cannot be expected to transcend historical, political, social, and global systems of power in order to become cross-culturally immersed “global citizens.” We can, however, be asked to become internationally conscious and self-aware American citizens who are responsible for thinking about those critical issues.”*



After my experience in Costa Rica during the fall semester of 2010, this quote accurately summarizes the confusion of study abroad. When I left for Costa Rica, I had a vision of interacting with a family as if I was their son, buying food in open-air, crowded markets, and successfully interacting with the general population – all of which turned out to be very optimistic expectations. I was not really prepared for how much I would stick out. First, I was naïve about the fact that until we actually get to know someone, snap judgments prove are usually the only way in interpret the individual’s behavior. In my opinion, we stereotype people precisely because using these broad generalizations, we can, to an extent, ‘predict’ people and create order in unfamiliar situations. A very easy way to make this snap judgment is on the basis of race or ethnicity. The fact that I thought I could travel to Costa Rica and integrate into the culture, particularly overlooked the obvious fact that as an American Caucasian, I would stick out like a sore thumb. Unfortunately, I think the belief that we can ‘belong’ or fit into global cultures if we try, is a common misperception held by many Americans when they travel to other countries.



No doubt, the world is becoming more and more multicultural in terms of race and ethnicity, however Americans take pride in being unique and “going against the flow”, traits of an individualistic culture, and this makes it hard for them to sit back, observe, and let other cultures first accept them. Most other countries around the world value conformity and the shared ‘we’ feeling of a collectivist culture. Community accomplishments are placed before individual achievements in these cultures. This is best represented by a Japanese proverb, “the nail that sticks up gets pounded down.” This collectivist mindset poses a particular challenge for someone who dreams of becoming a “global citizen.” As American students in foreign cultures, we are immediately judged and treated on the basis of both our whiteness and our ‘reputation’ of being arrogant and culturally ignorant. Challenging this snap judgment and fully integrating myself in Costa Rican culture would require very hard work and observation, as I would soon learn.

I went to Costa Rica knowing very little Spanish and not much about Costa Rican culture. You might say this is a sign of American ignorance, I would mostly agree with you. I accepted my linguistic disadvantage because of the amazing ecosystems and great academic experience I would gain while abroad. My communication handicap became painfully evident though, in the early days of my home stay in a small farming community named San Luis. I had very limited Spanish skills. I had been taking Spanish for the past month at a cultural immersion school, yet was still very underprepared. I had been told that my family had hosted foreign students for many years but did not speak any English. Actually, the only English I heard from them during my month-long stay with them was, “Thank you”, “Cat”, and “Do you want coffee?” Their experience with other students must have prepared them well for a Spanish handicapped student such as me.

Surprisingly, my Spanish was the least of my troubles during my stay with them. Hand signals are universal; I had a dictionary, and I could ask their grand daughter who spoke some English if I REALLY needed to say something. Unfortunately there was no dictionary, website, or person I could ask about cultural norms, expectations, or Costa Ricans’ perceptions of Americans.

Most difficult for me was finding my role in the household, and I had an especially hard time adjusting to the laid-back pace of life in San Luis. This was very unexpected, coming from a culture that never has enough free time and where people are always rushing around. And I think this is exactly why it was hard to adjust -- I have never had this much free time and being in a foreign culture, I did not know how to fill it. I also had a hard time adjusting to and under-



standing the extended family structure in San Luis. On Fridays and Saturdays and typically one more day during the week, there was anywhere from five to ten family members over to eat lunch or dinner at my host family's house.

My home stay parents' daughter also lived right behind them in a house across from the coffee field. Constantly being surrounded by family was foreign to me, since in the U.S. personal independence is glorified and kids are almost expected to rebel against parents. Also, many of my friends' home stay parents were just a few years older than us and already had kids! The young age that Costa Rican children are expected to mature at amazed me. Getting married and having kids are common for young people in early twenties. This made me feel very immature throughout the whole semester. Costa Ricans have very different ideas of personal responsibility and independence. Children were allowed to romp through the forest without supervision, and my home stay parents never objected to me going anywhere. You were mostly free to do what you wanted. This independence came with an expectation though, that you and only you are responsible for your actions. Costa Ricans seem to typically not blame others for their misfortunes. For example, we went to hot springs with water slides that in the U.S. would probably be illegal. Yet no lifeguards or personal were watching to make sure people were okay, and no one was afraid of legal trouble because of the shared consensus that everyone took personal responsibility for their actions. Without knowing these cultural norms and how to respond in common situations, becoming a true local Costa Rican would take an enormous amount of observation and work. Nothing could have prepared me for these subtleties; the only way to learn them is through experience. After noticing these cultural differences, you realize that you have to act in accordance in order to overcome the snap judgments people make of you. This cultural accommodation is an incredibly long and tedious process that requires lots of hard work and observation.

This observation and behavior modification is a process that I noticed myself go through which resulted in my blending in more and feeling more a part of the culture. Granted, I said I felt like I blended in more, I was still almost a complete foreigner. As mentioned in the quote, the fallacy of global citizenship should be replaced with cultural and self-consciousness. Immediately after my arrival at my home stay house, I attempted to modify my behavior to act more as a part of the family rather than just a visiting student. The thing I was most adamant about was helping with EVERYTHING I was able to. At first my home stay parents seemed unsure if they should let me and often did not tell me when they were going out to do chores around the farm.



It seemed like they thought I was asking just to be polite. But I kept on asking them, “*puedo hablar en algo?*” which means, “can I help with anything?” Eventually they got the point. My home stay father would wait for me to milk the cow every morning and would frequently ask me if I wanted to pick coffee, plantains, chamote...etc. I was very proud that he was okay with me helping him and thankful that he had the patience to teach me. At the end of my time he told me that many students do not help as much as I did which I found mind-blowing. The point of a home stay is to become a part of the family and as I had seen in other families, people my age were very, very responsible or even had families! Because of this fact, I felt more responsible to help around the farm and rose to the occasion.

My family also treated me as special, and at times I felt like a tourist in their home. I would eat first, they would offer me more food, and for the first few days they even did my dishes. In my attempt to fit in, I would wait until they had food (sometimes for a while), ask for less food, and did my own dishes. I also found more traditional Costa Rican ways to fill my time. Rather than being on my computer or sitting in the corner of my neighbor’s field for the internet (the only place I could find it), I was constantly outside. Working on the farm, exploring the nearby woods, and reading were activities that filled most of my time. For the first time ever, I was on a minimal schedule that only included classes on only one day a week. The rest of the time was mine, and although I had to study and carry out an independent study, I became much more comfortable doing things on my own. I am very glad I have brought this newly acquired confidence back to the U.S.

Additionally, I tried to culturally fit in my everyday experiences. This was as intense as forcing myself out of my comfort zone and using my broken Spanish to talk to street vendors. This was difficult for me, but street vendors like when tourists make the effort to learn how to interact using local rules and the language. Cultural learning was sometimes as simple as being able to ask for the non-tourist price on beer at the bar, knowing what things on the menu meant, or knowing where to walk on the road. Finally, it also meant not being an obnoxious American. That really ticked me off, when you could obviously spot an American or hear them. Again, most countries are collectivist cultures, where stand-out behavior is looked down upon. Loud and ignorant Americans were embarrassing so I cannot even image how negatively they were viewed by Costa Ricans. Because I kept my eyes, ears, and mind open, I adopted some traditionally Costa Rican habits, some of which are still with me today. I attempted to be very self critical to try and modify my behaviors to fit in.





I was glad to be an Allegheny Ambassador and thought I did a pretty good job in not giving off the ignorant American vibe the whole time. I am also proud to be able to share my experience with others in the Allegheny College community and hopefully to inspire others to study abroad. Although I may never be a global citizen, I know I will never be an ignorant traveler and continue to be internationally conscious and self aware of my place as a traveler and guest of the world.



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## **A Clash and Resolution among Two Cultures: The Kata Tjuta/Uluru Experience**

**By Julianne D'Amico (Australia)**

*We live it. We are surrounded by it. What is it? Culture refers to values, beliefs, attitudes, preferences, customs, learning styles, communication styles, history/historical interpretations, achievements/accomplishments, technology, the arts, literature, etc. – the sum total of what a particular group of people has created together, share, and transmit. Understanding culture does not simply mean knowing a list of values that a culture ‘has’. Culture is a system . . . The key to understanding culture is understanding the system of decision making – what value or rule comes out on top in specific situations. (41)*

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Studying aboard at James Cook University in Townsville, Queensland, Australia and specifically the three days spent discovering the secrets of Kata Tjuta and Uluru has shown me how



two cultures that have clashed in the past have negotiated an understanding of a 'shared' national culture to teach visitors how one can work towards building respect for difference and embracing this painful history in order to move towards a mutual resolution.

Waiting at the hostel, in Alice Springs, for The Rock Company to whisk me away on my three day adventure to Kata Tjuta and Uluru I was full of excitement to finally be able to see the world's largest natural phenomena. Before the van arrived I met a woman whose first words to me were asking where I was from. I replied to her that I was from the United States but have been living in Townsville for the past five months and then proceeded to ask the same question to which she replied she was from Canada. At this time the van arrived and we sat next to each other while talking about our travels across Australia.

By the time we were on the road everyone who had come together was talking in quite whispers while those who had come alone started out the windows. After thirty minutes of this our tour guide Dave announced over the microphone that we would all take a turn at introducing ourselves to the rest of the van. There was a family from France and two couples from Scotland and one from Ireland, there was a pair of girls from Thailand and a pair of men from Germany, a man from Italy and one from Australia, a woman from Austria, another from China, and another from Italy and of course there was Mandy from Canada and myself from the States. After the introductions the van fell silent again, except for an occasional whisper from one of the couples, until we reached King's Canyon. Throughout the first day I observed that beside Mandy and I becoming friends everyone else who traveled alone remained in their own thoughts while those who traveled together were reluctant to talk to anyone else other than the person they came with. That night while sitting around the camp fire there was more conversation but it was among those who shared a similar culture and not with anyone else.

The morning of the second day I took these two pictures after Mandy pointed out the scene taking place before us. The picture below on the left shows our group divided into those who share similar if not the same culture: since Paul was the only Australian man he stood by himself while the Germans, the Austrian, and the younger Scottish couple talked together, the two women in the back were from France and China only spoke for a few minutes. The picture below on the right is of Mandy and I, the only two people from North America.



On the second day we hiked around Kata Tjuta and walked a short trail along one side of Uluru. That night we watched Uluru change colors as the sun set behind us and on our drive back to the campsite we sang old American classics and continued our singing around the campfire until late into the night. It was this night alone which showed me that although we come from different countries and follow different cultures we can still forget about our past and come together as one unified entity where everyone has equal power and equal happiness.

According to the definition of culture clash, it is: “when one or more cultures are integrated into one environment, causing disruption and challenging contemporary traditions often occurring in multi cultural societies.” The last day of the trip was spent at Uluru itself. In the afternoon the day before we were told how Uluru came into Aboriginal ownership once again. The Aboriginal tribe who lived on the land originally owned the land before the Australian government claimed it for themselves (just like the first European settlers claimed Native American land upon their arrival in the New Country). The Australian government then declared Uluru a National Park and permitted tourists to not only walk around the rock but to all scale the side of the rock to reach the top. This caused severe distress among the original owners of the land, the Aboriginal tribe, for it was a violation of the sacredness associated with the rock itself. The Aborigines incorporated Uluru, Fulu, and the salt lakes into their creation stories, moral teachings, and had sacred sites which restricted members of the female sex from seeing them, so that there were stories passed down from generation to generation about the sacred sites, and if these

sites or stories were ever revealed to members of the female sex it would be breaking sacred laws and violating cultural taboos. These religious rules were unknown to tourists, and the Aboriginal culture was disrespected since tourists were taking pictures of the sacred sites and then posting them on the web for all to see. Since there was only one bathroom, visitors would treat the watering holes, both on top of the rock and beside it, as their own personal bathroom and trash receptacles thus leaving the environment polluted and the Aboriginal tribe angered at the violation of their land and culture.



Figures 1 and 2: Our tour guide Dave teaching the group about the Aboriginal cave paintings found on Uluru.

The Aboriginals were finally able to repossess the sacred sites on condition that they lease the land from the Australian government . Since the completion and enforcement of this arrangement the Aboriginal people have been working with tour companies in order to education tourists about the Aboriginal culture. Tour companies, such as the Rock Tour Company, have hired Aboriginal people to act as guides and to train other guides on the indigenous culture in the hopes that tourists will one day respect the Aboriginal culture.

The Kata Tjuta/Uluru experience has made me more aware that not being sensitive to learning about cultures has led to devastating wars and mass murders across the world. Culture separates us as human beings because we place too much emphasis on the fact that our differences are a problem. However, at the same time, as our desire to travel abroad demonstrates, we all appreciate the beauty of diversity in the world and so it is essential that we need to learn how to respect other cultures in order to keep the peace.

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### Learning About Education While Abroad By Lauren Farruggia (U.K.)

As the prospect of my study abroad experience approached, I was giddy and elated. I had the highest expectations for my excursion to Lancaster, England, and could hardly wait until the end of the summer when I would ship off across the pond. I was prepared for homesickness, but thought little of the culture shock discussed in the study abroad sessions – after all, the cautious side of me had se-



lected England as my destination of choice because we shared a common language and cultural customs. I never expected, however, that my inherent Americanness would be such a point of difference, or that it would seriously effect how others perceived me before I even opened my mouth. I was naïve to overlook these potential challenges.

I arrived at Manchester International airport on August 18<sup>th</sup>, exhausted, but thrilled. I found the train station after purchasing an Orange sim card for my cell phone (funny how communication with friends and family back home was my first priority upon arrival) and purchased a one-way ticket to Lancaster. I was not alone, but accompanied by a fellow Gator from home, whom I did not know very well at the time. We took turns marveling at the quaint, rain-soaked countryside ,while the other caught a few moments of precious sleep – we were petrified of missing our stop. That is, however, exactly what happened: only we did not sleep through it. We took so long trying to get our massive bags down from atop the trolley provided that we could not get out in time. Fortunately, a few kind Scots noticed our plight and told us to get off at Oxenholme,





the next stop on the train, and explain to the conductor that we were trying to go to Lancaster. We followed their advice and eventually made it to our destination, cold and bewildered.

I felt incredibly embarrassed after the near disaster on the train. I remember thinking to myself: “of course, the two American girls *would* miss their stop because their bags were too heavy to lift.” The incident became a metaphor during my first months at the university. My heavy bag represented all the cultural baggage I had brought with me from America, and all that I could not bear to abandon. It prevented me from breaking out of my comfort zone. I clung to my preconceived notions about the United Kingdom for that first month – I voluntarily maintained a distance between myself and my host culture. I was not the only person to do this. The other Americans enrolled in the International Summer Programme had adopted the same tactic. We clung to one another and forged fast, sloppy friendships looking for the comfort of home. We complained about the food, the weather – anything to get our minds off of how much we missed the U.S. This was, interestingly, the first of the lessons that my study abroad experience forced me to confront -- the challenges of a diverse, interconnected world. I had to acknowledge how difficult a task overcoming cultural differences would prove to be.

In her essay, “American Students Abroad Can’t Be ‘Global Citizens’,” Talya Zemach-Bersin states in response to her own study abroad experience:

American students who travel abroad cannot be expected to transcend historical, political, social, and global systems of power in order to become cross-culturally immersed "global citizens." We can, however, be asked to become internationally conscious and self-aware American citizens who are responsible for thinking about those critical issues. (3)

Talya’s words aptly summarize how I felt about my situation as an American student traveling abroad. There seemed to be an enormous amount of pressure from my parents, my friends, and the Allegheny community to “get something” out of my experience that would “transcend” my expectations. I learned that this was difficult to do once British (and other) students joined the few Americans of the International Summer Programme on Lancaster University’s campus in October. At first, I was incredibly amused by the impressive array of accents and personalities that I encountered on my daily walks throughout campus. I failed to comprehend, however, that the funny accents were not just representative of the quirky British culture I had seen represented in Hollywood movies – these accents were *real*, steeped in political, regional, and class-based



history that I could not possibly begin to put straight. I became self-conscious of my own accent, for it was the first thing that set me apart from my English-speaking companions.

I never thought much about the American accent, or what it must be like to hear it with a British ear. My accent was received with amusement on occasion: my flatmates first thought of me as simply a comically less ‘civilized’ version of themselves. But on other occasions, my accent was used to imply that America is a nation of inherently racist, uneducated, Walmart-shopping country folk with little knowledge of the global community. I loathed these exchanges when I found myself apologizing for America’s damaged international reputation more than I could defend it. Though I believed myself to be an “internationally conscious, self-aware American citizen,” suddenly words failed me when I was confronted by a list of American atrocities in the world.

Eventually, once I gained confidence, I realized that those who felt that my accent represented ignorance were ignorant themselves. I acknowledged that their arguments were simply one point-of-view and accepted that by choosing to study at an international university, I had to overcome the stereotypes that were being thrust upon me. I began to explore more of my surroundings, I tried new foods, and I spoke to new people. My flatmates and I became good friends and soon they began introducing me to British culture as they knew it. I wanted to share American culture with them, too, and hesitantly brought up the idea of a Thanksgiving dinner in the beginning of November. They loved the idea, and together we created a massive British/American feast for twenty-five people. It was a wonderful occasion that, to me, epitomized what was supposed to come from my study abroad experience. That night we all sat around the table as human beings and shared bits of our lives and, without really knowing it, we hurdled the mental barrier that prevented us from understanding one another before that moment. Even now, I look back upon this occasion fondly.



My British flatmates and I became close after our Thanksgiving dinner. We were aware of the dwindling time we had left together and tried to enjoy each other’s company as much as possible. We spent much of our time discussing various differences between American and British society, including accent, popular culture, and politics. I knew very little of British politics



before coming to England, which was embarrassing to admit; especially considering how much my flatmates knew about the American political system. They educated me about various controversial policies that were sweeping the nation at the time – for instance, the raise in tuition prices. The increase seemed tiny to me (Allegheny's tuition is not exactly low) which I attempted to explain as politely as I could. They were outraged by the prospect of having to pay more, because secondary education had always been regarded as a citizenship right in Britain, and had been historically low in cost. An increase in tuition, they argued, would severely downsize the population of eligible university students. This seemed absurd to me – since although tuition is high at Allegheny, I certainly do not have to pay all of it. Most of my British flatmates were paying their own way through school, I could rely on my parents and scholarship money. I later realized that unlike America, not having access to higher education would keep lower classes imprisoned in a very rigid class structure. Like the situation with the suitcase, I became embarrassed by the privilege that defined being an American student. I had taken my study abroad experience as well as my tuition scholarships and financial aid for granted as something common to all students in the industrialized world. This was clearly not the case.



As my date to fly home approached, I began reflecting on my study abroad situation. I did not leave England, I think, with the same innocence with which I had arrived in August. I was almost apprehensive about my return back to the land of Big Macs and Starbucks, despite how eager I was to reunite with friends and family. I will not say that I became used to a simpler life in Lancaster – the town and university was just as well-equipped as any American one – but I had become more comfortable with the (for me, revolutionary) notion that America was not the center of everything. I was not, of course, so naïve in the past to think that America was the only country that mattered, but I left Lancaster with a greater appreciation for the world at large. I just did not know how to articulate that when I arrived back home.

I was met with the usual whirlwind of questions upon reuniting with my friends and family. And, as I have heard from others returning from their own journeys, I did not know how to answer the questions I kept receiving. Yes, I had a wonderful time abroad. Yes, I learned many new things, met many new people, and seen a lot of amazing places. But my experience was so much more than just a four-month long academic stay in Lancaster, England. I had forged a life



abroad. I had developed an identity different from the one I display at home. I had opened my mind to America's 'home' culture, and left a little bit of myself in the hearts of my friends, as they stay in mine. How did my study abroad experience prepare me for challenges in a diverse, interconnected world? It introduced me to the challenges of thinking in complex ways about how my experiences compared with those in other cultures, and therefore compelled me to consider the ways in which money and access to opportunities can sometimes be made invisible. I will never be able to look at the privilege I have as a given for everyone else. My study abroad opportunity opened the doors for appreciating new experiences even if they were painful at times, and they also made me appreciate what I have at home.

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### Discovering New Worlds by Maranda Nemeth (Costa Rica)

Traveling to the School for Field Studies (SFS) in Atenas, Costa Rica last semester presented with new experiences and allowed me to learn about issues from a whole new perspective. Throughout the semester, new challenges arose and I was forced to confront them. Since I have been home for the past 3 months, I have realized how my time in Costa Rica has reshaped me for the better. I feel as though this experience has further prepared me for the diverse and interconnected world that exists within and outside of the Allegheny College campus. These were unique experiences that could never be replicated on this campus and thus, I would have never gained these skills without study abroad. One example took place during our directed research, which happened over the last three weeks of the semester. My group and I encountered various challenges in collecting our data. Despite the hardships, we pulled through, which showed me that I can adapt to any situation that arises.

For the directed research we were divided into various groups to work alongside the professors and we, the students, voted and chose the project we were most interested in to work on for the three weeks. For my research, I choose the assessment of macroinvertebrate communities and palm mortality rates. I was very excited for we were traveling to two different locations in the



I beg young people to travel. If you don't have a passport, get one. Take a summer, get a backpack and go to Delhi, go to Saigon, go to Bangkok, go to Kenya. Have your mind blown, eat interesting food, dig some interesting people, have an adventure, be careful. Come back and you're going to see your country differently, you're going to see your president differently, no matter who it is. Music, Culture, Food, Water. Your showers will become shorter. You're going to get a sense of what globalization looks like. It's not what Tom Friedman writes about, I'm sorry. You're going to see that global climate change is very real. And that for some people, their day consists of walking 12 miles for four buckets of water. And so there are lessons that you can't get out of a book that are waiting for you at the other end of that flight. A lot of people - Americans and Europeans - come back and go, "ohhhhh!" And the lightbulb goes on.

Henry Rollins

Caribbean lowlands. The project demanded a lot of on-site data collection over a very short duration of time. This combined with other factors created a somewhat difficult research agenda for the research group and myself. One challenge was while completing the tract lines from the edge of the forest inwards. We were recording various attributes of the palm trees and one was the height. Granted, it was the end of November which is the beginning of the rainy season on the Caribbean Coast and thus, we suffered torrential downpours that particular day. We were on the second to last tract line when the real rain began. Bushwacking through a tropical rainforest is already hard enough, but now we were all soaked from head to

toe and the rain was making it difficult to see. Furthermore, the rain was very loud and we had to communicate the data to each other, yelling out the numbers until our voices were hoarse. Then, for the taller palms, we had to count the leaves and measure the height with a specific tool, which required you to look skyward. This was the real challenge since the rain drops were so big and filled our open eyes so that it was painful collecting these data points. To top it off, this was research I had never conducted prior to this experience so I had not been completely prepared. In the end though, we acquired all the information we needed for our research project and from my perspective, it was because we had all worked together and adapted to the situation.

From this specific experience in the field, I quickly realized that I can be flexible in difficult situations. In a world that is constantly evolving and changing, I think that this skill is completely vital to have. As a team, we communicated through the rain and recorded our data points. In actuality, we ended up having more fun with the field research because of the rain. Having a good time and laughing about the situation motivated us to push through the challenge and complete our goal. I feel that the communication and team skills I learned and exercised could easily





apply across other situations, whether it is a summer internship back in the U.S. or meeting a new person in a professional setting.. This was just one example where I practiced the skills that made me step back from the individualism that I have become used to practicing at home and to trust in collaboration. All it takes is assessing what is occurring then adapting oneself in order to move forward, so that one is learning all the time.



Another experience I had while abroad in Costa Rica was volunteering with my group from SFS at a local school in Costa Rica. The school was for younger kids who were at the elementary school age, and prior to the school visit, we designed a lesson plan for the hour or so we would have with them. While at the school, we also worked on revitalizing some classrooms with some fresh paint. The school was located in a poor, rural community, which in Costa Rica is not that uncommon. The country itself is considered a ‘developing’ country and typically when I heard that word, I automatically pictured a struggling and illiterate community that desperately needs help. Thus, I had this image in mind prior to the volunteer project day. We arrived at the school and began our lesson plan which comprised of a small lesson on recycling and conservation of waste, and the rest were small little fun activities. The schoolchildren had little to no English skills, so that we had to exercise our Spanish skills. As we began with the icebreaker activities just to get the kids warmed up to us and become comfortable, I started to think that despite the huge cultural gap that existed between us, we were still able to forge a connection. Here was this group of American students who were also learning from the school children at this school, which must have been an interesting observation for those children, I’m guessing. All of us had taken the time to learn Spanish through classes and to practice back at campus, so we were able to communicate rather well with the children. As we moved on through the day, we got to the environmental lesson. This was the lesson I had helped design and once we began to cover the topics of waste and the importance of reusing and recycling, I was taken aback at how much

these children already knew about the topic. They were fully aware of the implications of human waste on the environment. This was a complete contradiction of what I had originally assumed. Seeing how knowledgeable they were about local sustainability issues, I realized by the end of the day that we had actually learned more from them, than the other way around.

This volunteer experience in Costa Rica helped open my eyes to the realization that we often go in with all kinds of preconceptions when interacting with different cultures. It can be hard to erase the previously developed opinion regarding a specific culture but once you immerse yourself in it, you have to be open to revising what you thought you had known. I think it is also important because of the world we are living in now, where there is the mixing of so many beliefs and cultures, that it is important to take some time to get to really get to know the positive value of our differences. I also think it is important to always keep in mind the fact that while there may these vast differences between regions and people, there are also many similarities. The school children reminded me of that. In the end, everyone wants to connect and learn about each other. All it takes is to reach out and find what you have in common with the community and make connections with that base to form a relationship. As Carolyn Smith realizes about her own travel, "...for an experience so ideologically grand, it was really quite simple" (Smith 76).

For me, the point was just that simple -- sometimes the key to understanding and appreciating cultural differences or figuring out how to connect or where our similarities lie, can be as simple as listening -- which is what we had done with the school children.





This study abroad program has provided me with so many experiences that will prepare for the challenges that are ahead. During my time there, I gained multiple skills such as intercultural interaction, communication, adaptation, and motivation just to name a few. I expanded my Spanish speaking skills as well, and with this language growing so rapidly in the US and the world, I am excited to have this skill for the future. I realized the importance of connecting what you are doing to the community around you. When you living in a new area, for even a short period of time, I think that it is important to participate in the host culture. This was my first time traveling for such an extended period of time and I think it has inspired to me to explore more areas and cultures in the world. People learn best first hand and through real life experiences, which are unique and unpredictable. Only then can someone develop the skills to respond to the incredible diversity across borders, and connect with others in meaningful ways.

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### Unlearning Culture By Nate Summers (Lancaster, U.K.)

Before one is forced to leave one's native country, it is easy to make generalizations about the world. Just as it seems easy and obvious who is right when only one side of a story is told. It can be tempting to simply overlook the other side without ever giving serious merit to any other perspective than what we have heard and accepted as 'common sense'. Such was my background when I got on a train heading from Paris to Amsterdam. I had only left the U.S. twice prior to this -- once to travel to Guatemala with my family on a mission trip, and once to see Niagara Falls in Canada. I had rarely left 'my side' of the story. As far as I was concerned, the United States had always been on the right side of history. Democracy (as defined by us) was clearly the best form of government, and it simply did not make sense why any other country would even attempt any other system of government. After all, hadn't America already solved that problem for the world?

However after studying abroad, and especially after two particular instances during this time in Lancaster, England, I learned that my view of the world was not only one of many, but not necessarily the best. I had to learn that, as Paul Pedersen has observed, "two persons can disagree without being right and the other wrong—when their arguments are based on culturally different



assumptions” (120). Only after my time abroad was I able to acknowledge my assumptions, and learn to interact with the world being conscious of my biases. For after one becomes aware of personal biases based on one’s place in the world, these cease to be a hindrance and become devices with which to destabilize one’s world.

As I said earlier, before going to Lancaster I had had very little experience truly interacting with people from different cultures. Of course as an educated person, I knew that there were people who did not speak American English, or who did not view America as the beacon of hope and freedom in the world, as I did. However, since I had only had exchanges with Americans during my sheltered travels, I had yet to get an opportunity to see what the rest of the world really thought about my country and my countrymen. Thus while I was abroad, I took every opportunity to test how ‘outsiders’ would view me. I finally got this opportunity while on a fifteen hour train ride between Paris and Amsterdam. There I was sitting in my sleeper car when a young Iranian couple entered the compartment. They had just finished visiting friends in Paris and were headed to Amsterdam. I had studied the conflict between our two nations in classes back at Allegheny College, and more importantly had a certain understanding of the situation based on American media reports, so I wondered how our conversations over the next fifteen hours would go. I was pleasantly surprised when the husband, realizing I was American, introduced himself, and casually added “I don’t think our Presidents like each other.”

This comment threw me off for two reasons. First, of all the openings I was expecting from an Iranian, humor was not one of them. I had expected either to be screamed at for attacking their way of life, as I had seen other Iranians do on television, or extolled for aiding his country in efforts to establish a working democracy. Second, I had never actually thought of the President of Iran as an actual political figure. As far as I was concerned, there was only one President in the world, and he resided in the White House. My Iranian friend must have sensed my hesitation, and we quickly got into a conversation about what life is like in Iran.

The first thing he wanted me to know was that despite what our news stations say (he was quick to point out that all of our news stations were guilty of this, not just the conservative Fox News) Iran was a place where it is in fact possible to live a free life. He explained that in Iran people have television, read books, and have fun just like he expected people in America do. It was a strange concept, thinking of Iran, the country whose very name can at times instill fear, being described in terms that made it seem just like my homeland. We entered into a



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AMERICA STRONGER

MICHELLE OBAMA

conversation covering where we lived, what we liked to do, and what we thought of each other's country and I realized that this man was actually a good deal like me. He too came from a rural background, enjoyed hiking and taking nature walks, and loved to fish. We swapped fish stories the rest of the afternoon, and I realized that maybe my fear-provoking image of Iran had been so easy to construct because I had never really thought of Iranians in human terms.

This was the first big step in my journey to becoming a global citizen. I was starting to learn that just because a person lives in a different place, and has different customs, does not make them better or worse than you. In fact I had more in common with this man from half way across the world than I did with many of my peers at Allegheny College. I was able to see that my stance on Iran had come from a cultural bias. I was making decisions

about how I felt about an entire country without having met a single person from that country. And, in meeting this couple, I was able to step outside of my cultural prejudices and see my new Iranian friends as people I could relate to.

The second awakening I experienced actually never should have taken place. In the final few days of my time in England, I had traveled down to London and was patiently awaiting my plane ride home. Having been gone for so long, I was ready to get back to my family and friends (and an accent I didn't have to strain to understand) but felt as if I still had yet to learn my final lesson from study abroad. Heathrow Airport must have felt the same way, as it shut down for three consecutive days before I gave up and decided to travel south to Southampton in an attempt to get off the island. When I arrived at the Southampton Airport it was around seven in the afternoon, and my flight was scheduled for six the following morning. I had planned on simply staying the night in the airport terminal, thinking that since I had already done that for two nights, a third night couldn't hurt. Unfortunately, what I soon realized was that the airport shuts down at nine at night and does not allow passengers to stay on the premises overnight. Suddenly, I found myself homeless in a city that did not seem to have any vacant hotel room. After walking





through downtown, I stumbled upon a building with the word “Hostel” written across the top. Excited at the chance to lie down and rest, I entered the ‘Hostel’, but soon learned that it was not exactly what I had in mind. This Hostel was actually more of a halfway home for disturbed youth. The gentleman at the desk informed me that the establishment was akin to what YMCA does in the States, letting young adults who have nowhere else to go stay for a few nights to get back on their feet. I informed him of my situation and he graciously offered me a cup of tea and a couch for me to spend the night.

I later learned that the man’s name was Abdule, and that he had come from Ghana to Southampton to attend the university there. He was one of the most intelligent people I’ve ever met, and he explained to me in detail his plan to bring what he had learned in Southampton’s managerial school back to Ghana to help his country develop economically. I was moved by what Abdule had to say. Up until this point, the idea that a non-American would help me in a foreign country had never even crossed my mind. Abdule was so determined, and seemed so set on achieving his goal, that I was deeply moved by what he said. We discussed the problems of Ghana, and other African countries, and he explained that he was convinced that the only thing that needed to happen to bring his country out of its current state was for people to start caring. I am by no means an idealist, so I was not initially convinced by this. Surely funding, international aid, or some sort of monetary assistance was needed first. However Abdule stuck to his belief, and insisted that while money is important to fixing problems, unless people genuinely cared about their country and their countrymen, nothing would change.



I left Southampton the next morning with a new purpose, and have since been in contact with Abdule about ways I can participate in his cause. He has since held multiple phone interviews with the outreach coordinator of my church in Atlanta, and we talk regularly on Facebook and via email about his plans, as well as my plans to leave my legacy at Allegheny College through my service in the Allegheny Student Government. Abdule taught me that no matter where a person is from, the emphasis should be that people come first. Abdule had a view of the world that was trans-national; he did not see me as an American, or himself as a Ghanaian, but



instead he saw us both as just people, people who want to make a difference in the world. This is the greatest lesson I will take from my time abroad: that I must transcend my cultural biases, and while it may be impossible to ever fully put them by the wayside, I will try and view every new challenge in this adverse, interconnected world as a starting point for unthinking what I believe I ‘know’ and opening my mind to new learning. We are citizens of a global society, and we have to see one another as members of the same community in order to overcome our stereotypes and work together in building a better world..

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### Speaking French With A Foreign Accent By Nikki Similak (France)

My study abroad experience in Angers, France was so much more than just traveling and having fun. I learned about many aspects of different cultures as well as aspects of myself that I never knew existed. It would be quite challenging to discuss all of the changes I underwent while living in France, so I will just be discussing a few main points. I gained many different skills while abroad that I know will help me navigate our complex and interconnected world. I have found that I can be very adaptable, open, and comfortable in new and challenging situations now that I have had time to reflect on my experiences. I feel that these are three very important traits that can help anyone deal with difference without shutting down their hearts and minds to what at first seems strange, uncomfortable, or even stressful.

The first trait that I had to acquire while living in France was the ability to adapt to new situations. Upon arriving in Angers, the anticipation at meeting my host mom was almost unbearable. I had no idea how I should act around her. For instance, should I hug her? Kiss her? Shake her hand? Needless to say, I had no idea what to expect and there have only been a few instances in my life when I have been that nervous. When she finally did come to pick me up at the train station, she went ahead and gave me those legendary kisses on the cheek for which the French are so famous. It was very odd for me at first to be getting so many kisses every time I left or came home, but after a few weeks it became completely normal. Even now I am realizing



the extent to which I truly enjoyed that part of the French culture. Another part of life in France that was amazingly different from the United States was the mealtime ritual. Most stores around Angers were closed from noon until two in the afternoon because every person would leave so they could enjoy meals with their families or friends. I find myself thinking now and then that the stores will be closed at noon-time, but then I realize that I am not in France anymore. As Americans, we are always on the go and eating in a rush, but in France, it was the complete oppo-



site. Dinners with my host family lasted about two hours on average every night. It was a time to come together, unwind, and talk about the day with loved ones. At the first dinner with my host family, I was completely taken aback by the time I was expected to spend at the dinner table. I kept thinking about all of the other things I could be doing with my friends. It was something completely new that I hardly ever experienced with my family in the United States, except during the holidays. I adapted quite well to this aspect of life in France so that in fact it is now very difficult for me to eat quick meals and continue doing everything ten times faster than when I lived in Angers. Reverse -adaptability or getting used to being back home has ironically been a greater culture shock than the newness I encountered when I was abroad. I believe this is also because what I miss most are the opportunities for real human connection and intimacy, and slowing down to relish life -- something we rarely do in the States because time is measured differently back here.

The next skill that I developed was my ability to be open to new people and situations. While studying in Angers, France, I was enrolled in the international program which consisted of about four hundred students within our French university. Thanks to this program, I had to opportunity to meet people from literally all over the world. This was one of the most rewarding parts of my entire experience abroad. Not only did I have the chance to meet French students, but also Taiwanese, Chinese, Canadian, Japanese, Russian, Mexican, and too many other nationalities to be listed here. Before studying abroad, I had always thought it would be interesting to meet people from other cultures, but only now do I understand just how fortunate I was to be able to meet and befriend so many different types of people while abroad. During our Language



class, we did a section on important holidays in France. One of these holidays was Christmas and we all discussed what this holiday was about. Growing up as a Christian, I was familiar with the holiday and I guess I took it for granted that most people would know about it as well. I was quite taken aback when my Chinese friend Feng turned to me and had absolutely no idea what it was or why we celebrated it.



Before going to France, I had never even thought about the possibility of people not knowing the same types of things that I had known all of my life. It made me realize that everyone is not like me and that it is important to embrace those differences no matter what they may be. I also became very good friends with a girl named Yang who is from China. She was in a few classes with me and we ended up spending a lot of time going to the market, the movies, and just being together. It was absolutely amazing to talk to her and hear about her family, life, and goals for the future. We always found ourselves having a great time and exchanging jokes *in French* and realizing with amazement that we needed this foreign language to communicate with each other. Suddenly English was the foreign language to me, and French became the common ground for all of us to talk with one another. That truly shook my assumption of what a global language is.

The third aspect of studying abroad was that it has helped me feel confident facing new and challenging situations. Before coming home to the United States for Christmas, I decided to visit my close German friend who had been a foreign exchange student in my high school a few years ago. On the train to Germany, I met a French girl around the same age as myself who was traveling alone. I invited her to come along with my German friend and me so she could see the city with us. This does not seem very interesting except for the fact that my French friend only spoke French and German, I only spoke English and French, and my German friend only spoke German and English. Needless to say, the three of us did not have any common language that we could use to hold a shared conversation. It was quite an interesting challenge to use three different languages to have a conversation between us, but it is an experience that I will never forget. Even though I was nervous at first about the three of us spending time together, we had an absolutely amazing time. If I had not learned to be more comfortable in new and challenging experiences, I would not still be friends with these people or have had such a great story to tell.



Another way in which I have become more comfortable with new experiences was through our international night at our university in Angers. All of the different cultures were represented in some way and I was able to learn about music, dance, and traditional costumes from many diverse places. For instance, we had to an opportunity to learn about South Korea and its geography as well as its government and traditional costumes. The ability to be comfortable in new situations is a very important skill for coping with a diverse and connected world because it is necessary to be able to feel at ease in any situation.

I understand what Barbara Kappler meant when she writes:

When I left Malaysia I was a bit wiser. I walked to my favorite places and sat and absorbed the sights, smells, and sounds of that amazing country. I spent an evening with my Malaysian friends having a relaxing dinner and talking about the past few months. I felt I was just getting to understand this tropical place of contradictions. Even though I was not ready, I left in peace, having said my goodbyes, promising myself and others to return (72).

I feel that this quote captures my feelings as I approached the day when I had to return to the States. Like Kappler, I felt I was just getting to a place where I was starting to understand the complex details of the culture that tourists would never get. I was ready to bring my exciting insights home to share with others, and confident that one day I would return to continue my journey in this country I had come to love so much. Studying abroad has been vital in shaping who I am today. I would never have been able to appreciate what we mean by cultural diversity if I had not had the opportunity to go to a different country and learn to be at home there.

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## Through Different Eyes By Wenonah Echelard ( Spain)

“Señoras y señores, Bienvenidos a Madrid Barajas. Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Madrid, Barajas.” And, so it began. My multi-lingual, multifaceted study abroad experience that provided me with all that I could have ever expected from a year overseas, and more. The spring semester of 2010, I spent in Sevilla, Spain at a private Spanish-language learning program where I adopted the exotic lifestyle in Southern Andalucía. For the following fall semester, I ventured northward to Angers, France where I spent half of the summer and the entire fall semester in l’Université Catholique de l’Ouest in an intensive French language-learning institution. Thanks to my various intercultural experiences, I returned from my year in Europe not only tri-lingual and culturally enriched, but also with a new understanding of the world and my place in it as a global citizen.



My immersion in the various subcultures and lifestyles within both Spain and France was given added depth by my experience of living with host families. Not only did each of these families provide me with meals and lodging, but they were important sources of insight into the culture of each country. I was truly fortunate to have two welcoming and kind families who were eager to help me learn about and appreciate the little-known details of everyday life and to share their lives with me, so that I would have a better understanding of the culture on a day-to-day basis, and not imply from a tourist’s limited view. Over the course of many conversations and following their patient responses to my endless questions, I was soon able to discover and interpret the gestures and rituals that suddenly made me feel familiar and at home in my new surroundings.

Before my study abroad, I discovered this tip in the *World Citizen’s Guide* under “#8. Save the lectures for your kids” :

Whatever your subject of discussion, let it be a discussion, not a lecture, and try to leave right and wrong out of it. Justified or not, the U.S. is seen as imposing its will on the world. Try to show willingness to understand other viewpoints.

By adopting and practicing this approach, I was able to see and discover each country and its diverse cultural values from a broader, more tolerant perspective which is the way in which I know



this experience has prepared me to face and overcome the challenges we face as global citizens in a diverse, interconnected world.



Conversations with Spaniards and French, particularly my host families, allowed me to learn about and better understand the country as well as the people with whom I was living. Questions helped me to initiate interesting and complex conversations. The inquiries typically started with simple questions such as: “How did you make this dish?”, “Why doesn’t anyone smile at me on the street?” or “Why didn’t you participate in the strikes?” However, as my language skills improved, and I became more culturally ‘greedy’, I began to provoke more in-depth discussions that stemmed from larger questions like “Why do the French have laws protecting their language and culture?”, “What is Spain doing to adjust to the influx of African immigrants?” or “How did the tendencies and actions of Colonial France predict its current diplomatic position?” It was from these conversations that I was able to get at the more ideological foundations of the cultures.

One experience in particular precipitated reflections on the foreign culture and introspections on that of my own. One night at dinner, my Spanish host mother, Ana voiced her concern about a story she had seen on the news about an American woman who would be put to death for the premeditation and murder of her husband. Ana asked me something to the effect of, “How can you people, a country that the whole world is presumed to follow and imitate, continue this practice? America is essentially putting itself on the same level as this murderer. Killing someone to punish a crime is a primitive practice that hasn’t been accepted by us since the Guillotine in France...” It was not the actions of the woman that appalled Ana, but the response of our government. Too shocked by her confrontational and brusque approach, I could only listen to her critique of American practices and her support for her own cultural values.



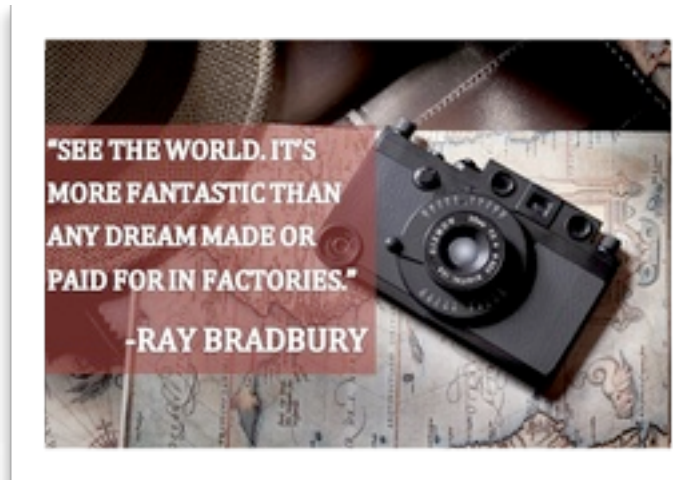
After a long rant, she demanded of me, “How can *you Americans* accept murder as a legal sanction?” I was speechless. I had two options: retaliate or surrender. Despite my desire to broaden her perspective, I knew her cultural predisposition inhibited my ability to enlighten her. Therefore, I took a step back and remembered my first commandment: “Try to show willingness to understand other viewpoints.” I decided to listen to what Ana had to say, and decided to inquire about how the Spanish viewed the Death Penalty and the history of capital punishment in Spain. Throughout our exchange, she offered insight into the Spanish belief system from which I was able to discover what made our countries differ politically, religiously and culturally. As I am from the American mid-West where the death penalty is illegal in almost all surrounding States, I am neither versed nor active in the debate on Capital Punishment. However, Ana, by confronting me on a moral and cultural difference between our countries forced me to overcome my apathy and begin to compare Spain’s stance on the issue with that of the U.S. and to think about whether support for the death penalty was a contradiction of our religious and democratic ideologies back home. It definitely made me unsure about what until then had been my sure stance on moral issues. Suddenly, the moral was political as well, and given our deep discomfort with politics in the U.S., I had never learned to speak about politics as I now did talking with Ana.

This conversation as well as the thousands of others with people of many nations, cultures and backgrounds provoked recurring reevaluations of my own cultural perspective on many issues and I started to see my homeland from a new perspective. After spending time immersed in two unique cultures, I was able to make cross-cultural comparisons and start to appreciate that not everything was black or white. There could be multiple perspectives on an issue and they could all be equally ‘right’ depending on where you stood and how it effected your life. From these new understandings, I began to then re-examine, in the same way how I had interpreted these foreign cultures, through the lens of my own culture. Now removed from my own society, I was able to see what had once been foreign from a more informed point-of-view and through my own experiences. I realized too how bizarre, ignorant and even immoral the cultural practices and norms of my homeland can appear to a foreigner.

This active participating in a foreign culture through interactions and conversations with locals from different cultures, backgrounds and norms excited me because in any single place I could receive numerous and different points-of-view based on the person's class, gender, race/ethnicity, and even age. It has made me see that as national borders have opened up and people



flow across them, whether as workers, immigrants, or tourists, we have the opportunity to benefit from a diversity of ideas and backgrounds if we learn not to fear difference but to view it as an opportunity to learn about one's self through the eyes of others.



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