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Final Project: Draft 1

1. Final Reflection

How can a person distill several weeks of educational international travel into a brief amount of words? This was one of the biggest challenges that I encountered when I returned to the United States after my experience. It seemed as though my family and friends wanted to hear all about my experience, but I had a very difficult time mustering up anything more than “it was amazing!”. I simply could not figure out how to explain all of the eye-opening experiences over my time abroad in a 5-10-minute conversation. In addition to my “it was amazing” comment, I also remember telling people that I wish I could have been there longer and that I wish I never had to come back. I now sit and think about this comment deeper because one of the most important parts of the study abroad experience is coming back. The journey was incredible but it did not end when I left the country of Ecuador. The action of returning is just as important because I can now look back and see where I came from through a new perspective. The knowledge that I attained can now be applied to future experiences that I may encounter. I will be able to relate and share insight with those around me experiencing similar situations. Ecuador to me wasn’t simply a place on a map, but it was an opportunity for me to grow as a member of society and see things from ways I could not even dream of before.

First of all, when going on any type of trip a person experiences a variety of thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The amount of these emotions were heightened for me because not only was my study abroad a trip, but it was also an international experience. One of my most prevalent thoughts before and during the first week of my study abroad experience was that my Spanish language was not going to be up to the standard that it needed to be. I felt reassured after a week of residing in Cuenca because I had numerous people including my host family tell me how impressed they were with my Spanish speaking skills. Another prevalent feeling/thought that I had during my first week in Cuenca was uncertainty. I went from living a comfortable life in Mankato, MN for the most recent school year to being dropped into a place that was completely new to me. I remember needing to go to the mall to buy a rain jacket during my first week and I only received verbal directions to get there because my phone was not functioning without cellular data. I ended up walking for 45 minutes when I could have taken a bus that would have gotten me there in 5 minutes for a small fee of 25 cents. The final most prevalent feeling was excitement while I was studying abroad. I outlined in my competency journals all of the different excursions, museums, and cultural events that I had the opportunity to experience. Every day while I was studying abroad brought along a new experience for that day that was exciting, interesting, and thought filled. I woke up every day knowing that it wasn’t going to be anything like yesterday which is what made the entire study abroad experience memorable. This is what stuck out to me the most over the trip. I could not believe the number of exciting cultural opportunities that the small city of Cuenca, Ecuador had to offer. The culturally rich city of Cuenca will forever hold a special place in my heart. I cannot wait to plan a trip in the future where I will be able to return to the place that had such a positive impact on my education and my life as a whole.

 Second of all, over my time studying abroad I encountered numerous people from all over the world. These places included Ireland, Switzerland, England, and various states throughout the US. All of these people had different backgrounds and carried along with them a plethora of stories. There is one story that I would like to tell from an interaction between myself and a man from Quito, Ecuador. This story isn’t exactly a story that told to me, but rather an experience that had a significant impact on me. I outlined this story deeply in one of my competency journals, but it holds a great significance to me and truly was one of the highlights of my study abroad experience. When I was in the airport waiting to fly from Miami to Quito Ecuador, an elderly man sat down next to me at the gate and asked me to perform the simple task of opening up his milk bottle. He asked me this question in the Spanish language and I was able to open the bottle and he was very grateful. This interaction had a significant impact on me because it reminded me that there is still hope for society. This man went out of his comfort zone to ask a complete stranger for help, which is something that people in society today try to avoid. We have become a very independent society and believe that we can do everything for ourselves. This man also showed me that people have become more aware of cultural differences. He had no way of knowing whether or not I would be able to speak his language but he wasn’t afraid to try. This shows me that over the most recent years’ people have begun to learn more and familiarize themselves more with cultures from all around the world. This was my first experience with a person from Ecuador and it was very memorable. Throughout my study abroad trip, everyone in Ecuador was very helpful and were not afraid to communicate with someone who was different from them. I learned that it was okay to ask for help and it is okay to not always know the answer to a problem. I was very grateful for the level of kindness and assistance that I received while trying to better my education and cultural awareness while in Cuenca.

 Finally, this study abroad trip provided me with numerous learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. These experiences challenged my limits and helped me venture outside my comfort zone on a number of occasions. I learned many things about myself as a member of society, which truly helped me grow in the global citizenship competency of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I grew significantly in this competency because I was able to reflect, process, and think deeper about the cultural differences that I was experiencing in Ecuador compared to the United States. I was able to increase my understanding of the Hispanic culture by immersing myself in the churches, the local markets, the architecture, and the nature. I have grown in my ability to speak a foreign language and would feel completely comfortable being placed in any situation with a native speaker. I expanded my awareness in the culture of the language in Ecuador by learning the slang words that are frequently used. One of these words is “guagua” which is what the Cuencano people use to describe a child from infant age all the way up to about 6-7 years old. I am excited to take the knowledge that I attained in the classroom and outside the classroom when I return to school in the fall and apply it further to my Spanish studies. I will be completing my Spanish minor in the fall with my final class which is a Spanish literature course. I am hopeful that I will be able to provide insight into the culture of Ecuador if we have the opportunity to read and examine a piece of literature from that part of the world.

 Furthermore, my study abroad trip is one that I will never forget. It reminded me of who I want to be as a person and a member of this society. I will continue to share my experiences with those around me and encourage others to step out of their comfort zone when it comes to world cultures. I will serve as an advocate for study abroad because I believe that it is a once in a lifetime experience that teaches you a great deal. I am now a strong believer in discovering the world for myself and being able to find a familiarity between people from all over the world. It is comforting knowing that I will always have a family on the other side of the Equator.

1. Action Plan

 This study abroad trip was a once in a lifetime experience where I learned many things about myself and the world around me. Now that I have returned to the United States, it is important that I continue to put my new found knowledge to good use. Study abroad provided me with learning experiences in international travel, world culture, religion, and the overall intensive Spanish language experience. In order to continually seize further learning experiences, I need to set reachable goals for myself that will challenge my skills to a greater level. These goals will bring me outside my comfort zone and test the knowledge that I attained while studying abroad. Below I have included a couple of action plans that will determine step by step the process of setting goals, activities that will help me reach my goal, resources, the first step, a timeline, and when I know I have succeeded.

Action Plan Overview

1. Specific Goals
2. Activities to develop skills
3. Resources
4. My first step
5. Timeline
6. I’ll know I’ve succeeded when…

Action Plan #1

1. Make it a habit to speak only Spanish when placed in situations such as the classroom, and cultural events on campus and in the community.
2. Continue to pursue my minor in the Spanish language, practice my foreign language writing and speaking skills, attend Spanish club to further improve my interactions with others who study or frequently utilize the Spanish language.
3. Utilize my professors for reference on problems I encounter throughout my study of the Spanish language, talk to Dr. Gregory Taylor about cultural events in the community, ask my professors about other opportunities to practice the language on campus and in the community.
4. Immerse myself into the Spanish speaking community when I return to campus for the 2017-2018 school year by regularly attending Spanish club.
5. The timeline is not specifically set because this is a continual goal that I have set for myself for the rest of my life. I would like to continue to pursuing this goal vigorously for the rest of my schooling career which is from 2017-2022.
6. The people that I am communicating with in the Spanish community are able to understand me and I am able to understand what is being communicated back to me. I will know that I have succeeded when I feel comfortable attending Hispanic cultural events alone because I am confident enough in my ability to speak the language and understand the cultural processes.

Action Plan #2

1. Become a member of the board for the Spanish club.
2. I need to continue my involvement with the club, practice my organizational skills, and gain more leadership experience through volunteer work in the community.
3. Ask previous or current members of the board for advice on how to proceed, question my professors on what they think would be good improvements to the Spanish club as a whole.
4. My first step would be to apply for a position on the board in Spring of 2018 for the school year of 2018-2019.
5. The timeline follows the application deadline which is not set currently, but would be open within the spring semester of 2018. I would be elected in the Spring of 2018 and serve my position throughout the 208-2019 academic year.
6. I will know that I have succeeded when I am officially named an acting member of the board for the Minnesota State University, Mankato Spanish Club.