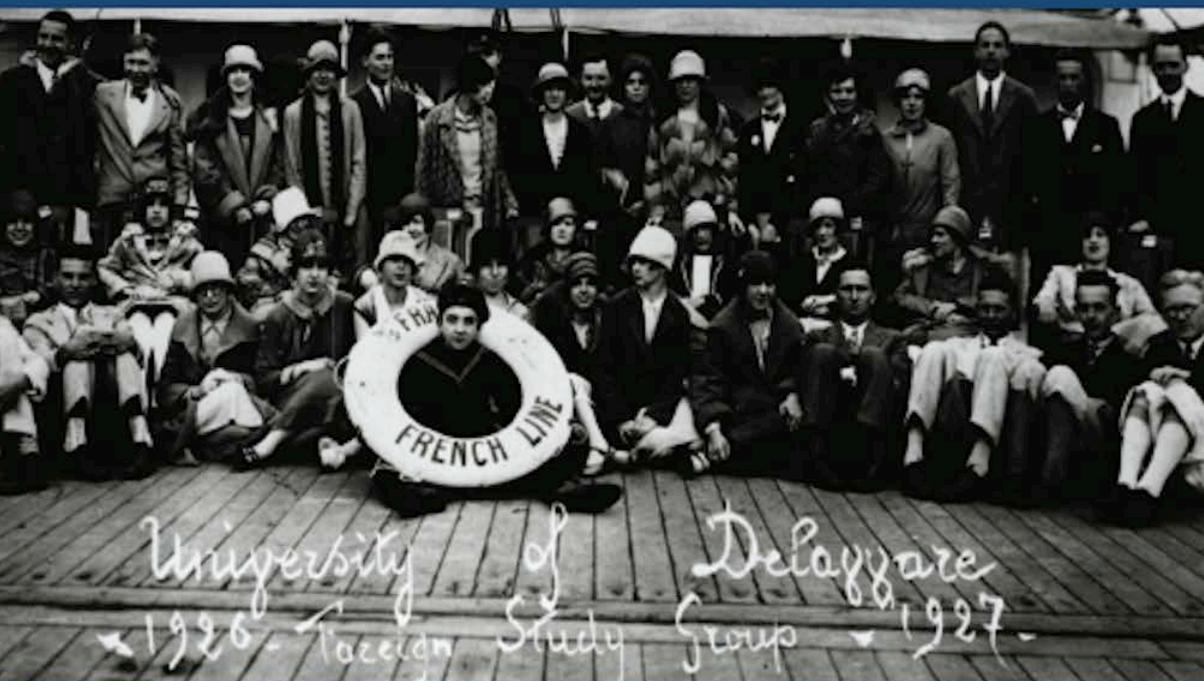




# 100 Years of Study Abroad

Reflections from University  
Students, Alumni, Faculty, and Staff

Ravichandran Ammigan, Matthew L. Drexler,  
Marie A. Gleason, and Amy G. Foley



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## **Edited by**

Ravichandran Ammigan,  
Matthew L. Drexler,  
Marie A. Gleason, and  
Amy G. Foley

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## About the Book

This volume presents a diverse collection of short personal essays that illuminate the experiences of study abroad students, alumni, faculty, and staff as they reflect on the lasting impact of their intercultural encounters and interactions in new environments and communities around the world. The stories explore themes ranging from culture shock and adaptation to resilience and personal growth, revealing how individuals gain new perspectives and develop deeper self-awareness by stepping outside their comfort zones. The authors share moments of perseverance and discovery, the challenges of building connections across cultures, and the rewards of learning and living in unfamiliar settings. Current and former students, in particular, describe their journeys of personal and academic growth through immersive coursework, internships, and community engagement, despite the initial hurdles of adjusting to new norms and expectations. This collection of reflective essays takes readers on a journey alongside those who have lived the study abroad experience while also offering insights from international educators and university administrators who design, direct, and support these programs at the University of Delaware—home to the nation's first study abroad program for over a century.

# About the Editors

**Ravichandran Ammigan, Ph.D.**, serves as Vice Provost for Global Engagement and Senior International Officer at the University of Delaware. With 25 years of experience in the field of international higher education, he is responsible for leading the institution's internationalization strategy and global engagement portfolio. He holds a secondary faculty appointment as Associate Professor in the School of Education, where his main research focuses on the academic, social, and cultural experiences of students in higher education worldwide. Dr. Ammigan has published numerous research articles, co-edited several books, and is a regular speaker at conferences internationally.

**Matthew L. Drexler, M.A.**, serves as Director of Study Abroad at the University of Delaware, an operation that supports more than 125 faculty-led and semester education abroad programs each year. Matt has more than 17 years of experience facilitating international exchange and collaboration, and currently oversees collaborative efforts to internationalize UD's campus through international mobility and internationalization at home programs. He also manages the evaluation and assessment of the study abroad student experience at UD and leverages that data to drive strategic efforts to expand and improve global programming at the university.

**Marie A. Gleason, M.A.**, is a Senior Study Abroad Program Coordinator in the Center for Global Programs and Services at the University of Delaware. During her 24-year career in international education at the University, she has coordinated over 150 study abroad programs, supporting students and faculty in developing transformative global experiences. She also administers the Study Abroad Office's need-based scholarship program and collaborates with academic departments to design and implement sustainable education abroad initiatives, including faculty-led and semester programs.

**Amy G. Foley, Ed.D.**, serves as Director for Global Outreach and Partnerships at the University of Delaware. She is the founding director of the UD World Scholars Program and oversees the strategic coordination of international partnerships and agreements at the Center for Global Programs and Services. Dr. Foley brings over 35 years of knowledge as a higher education professional. She earned a B.A. in Communications from the University of Miami, a certificate in Museum Studies from the International University of Art in Florence, Italy, an M.A.T. in Museum Education from The George Washington University, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Delaware.

# Foreword

Laura A. Carlson

*President, University of Delaware*

During my junior year in college, I was accepted into a study abroad program in Germany. The program was an advanced course of study that involved living with a host family, and it was designed for students who had already taken several semesters of German instruction. At that point, I could fluently read and write German, but was not completely comfortably conversant. I wish I could say that my study abroad experience was a transformative moment in my college career – where I developed a global perspective, honed my resilience and self-reliance skills, and earned a keener appreciation for my place and the place of others in the world. Instead, I chickened out and never boarded the plane. It was not quite as dramatic as arriving at the airport and not going through with it. Instead, after fretting for weeks and well in advance, I made the intellectual decision to stay put on campus and pursue a different enrichment opportunity (my student teaching for my K-12 certificate). But really, that was just my rationalization; the truth is that I was not yet confident enough in myself to face the unknown.

To me, that is one of the most enduring aspects of a study abroad experience – acceptance of being thrust into a different place in the world, with different customs, different food, different sounds and perhaps languages, and different norms. This forces one to confront, navigate and accept difference. I have since been to Germany many many times, as well as many other countries. And each time, I have a new appreciation for how such travel is an incredible form of experiential learning, not only about the people and culture at the destination, but as importantly for the traveler about the traveler. This collection of essays captures the link between destination and self in the traveler's own voice.

I am a cognitive scientist by training, and my field of study is spatial cognition. My research examines how we understand and represent the external world internally, the cognitive maps that we construct, and how we talk about spaces and places with each other. For just one example, some languages use body-defined directional terms (e.g., X is *left* of Y); some languages don't have such words; and some languages use features of the environment rather than the body to carve up space (e.g., X is *up-mountain* of Y). This leads to many salient questions about whether and how language and culture impact our understanding of the world. In each chapter that follows, we join students,

faculty, and alumni as they reflect on the cognitive remapping of their unique personal experiences.

Our students on study abroad programs take up this question the minute that they arrive at their host location, explicitly when they ask for directions in the new setting, and implicitly as they pick up the habits of the language that codify or not particular spatial elements. For another example, English speakers use the same word “in” for containment that is tight-fitting (i.e., key in a lock) or loose-fitting (i.e., a flower in a vase); in Korean, this dimension is formally marked with a tight or loose modifier. Understanding whether or not this feature is important in that language is just one form of confronting, navigating and accepting difference. And this difference detection is manifold across the whole study abroad experience, well beyond the domain of language.

As such, what an incredible gift a study abroad experience is. The University of Delaware was among the first to recognize this, launching the first formal experience in 1923 with a faculty-led expedition to France with 8 students. In the years since then, UD has led the way in providing global experiences to our students, offering programs of variable length across the whole academic calendar; embedding these experiences tightly within disciplinary curricula; and launching a World Scholars program with a plan of study that involves multiple study abroad experiences including the first semester of the first year. As an institution, we will continue to lead in emphasizing the importance of this type of experience, and we are committed to finding a way to make study abroad programs available and within reach for all of our students.

All of this work is only possible through the dedicated effort of our faculty who design and lead an incredible number of study abroad experiences, and our staff who are international education experts, partners, enablers, as well as advocates and confidence-builders. It is through this network of support that our students find it in themselves to get on planes so that they can broaden their sense of the world and come back transformed.

This compilation of essays gives you a sense of these transformations. Written by our faculty, staff and students, the essays provide the greatest possible testimony to the value of a global perspective, the significance of developing one’s resilience, and the importance of understanding one’s place in the world.

I hope that this book inspires you to plan your own journey to a place unknown.

# About our Sponsor

The Center for Global Programs and Services (CGPS) at the University of Delaware (UD) serves as the university's dedicated hub for international education, supporting the operations of study abroad, international student and scholar services, and global outreach and partnerships. As founders of the nation's first study abroad program in 1923, UD is widely recognized as a pioneer and leader in the field. CGPS continues this legacy by offering innovative programs that promote academic excellence, cultural exchange, and international engagement. Through immersive global learning opportunities and strategic internationalization efforts, CGPS empowers the UD campus and greater Newark community to cultivate lifelong global citizens through meaningful interactions and engagement with the rest of the world. <https://www.udel.edu/global/>

# Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere gratitude to all University of Delaware students, alumni, faculty, and staff who shared their stories as part of this book project. We also wish to acknowledge our campus and community partners—particularly the Office of the Provost, the Division of Student Life, and the UD Colleges—for their continued partnership and support of the University’s global engagement initiatives and internationalization efforts. Our profound appreciation goes to the outstanding team at the Center for Global Programs and Services for their unwavering commitment to advancing international education and for supporting our students and faculty, both near and afar. Finally, we wish to express our deepest thanks to Dr. Krishna Bista, Dr. Utam Gaulee, and colleagues at the STAR Scholars Network for their invaluable assistance and coordination in publishing this book. Their support and guidance were invaluable in bringing this project to fruition.



# Chapter 1

## UD Study Abroad: A Century of Innovation and Evolution

Ravichandran Ammigan and Lisa Chieffo

When University of Delaware Professor Raymond Kirkbride accompanied eight students to France for a year of study in 1923<sup>1</sup>, he set in motion a bold academic experiment: the first university-sponsored study abroad program in the United States. Kirkbride’s “Foreign Study Plan” transformed not only the educational experience of those students, but also laid the foundation for a century of global learning and cross-cultural exchange. For the next 25 years, his plan thrived, with 21 programs taking place in three countries and enrolling more than 900 students from 127 US institutions. The adoption of for-credit study abroad programs spread across the US and came to define the first generation of study abroad.

Today, more than 100 years later, UD’s leadership in international education continues, with over 1,200 students participating annually in 100+ study abroad programs in 50+ countries across nearly every continent. The past 21 years have seen more than 25,000 UD students take an estimated 250,000 credits abroad. Approximately 30% of UD undergraduates study abroad at least once, which is a laudable figure considering that fewer than 10% of US college graduates do so.

### Winter Session Innovation and Expansion

UD’s success in study abroad is owed in no small part to the University’s establishment of Winter Session, originally known as *Winterim*, in the 1970s. Although many US institutions have since included a “J-term” in their academic calendar, UD’s five-week winter term is unusually long and therefore allows students to earn up to seven credits. Seeing the opportunity to pair travel with on-site coursework and learning, dozens of entrepreneurial UD faculty began developing and leading programs, first to Europe and, by the 1990s, throughout the world.

While other colleges and universities offer most of their short-term programs abroad during summer, requiring students to choose between work, internships, or study abroad, UD students can now choose from about 50 programs in a typical winter session. In fact, over 1,000 students participate each January under the tutelage of UD faculty from dozens of academic departments. Over the years, winter programs were expanded to include domestic travel study (for

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1 <https://www.udel.edu/home/studyabroad100/>

example to Hawaii and the American West), recognizing that global education need not necessarily cross national borders.

### **Recognition for Technology and Infrastructure**

As study abroad programs and enrollments increased dramatically in the 1990s, UD was again innovative in developing an online study abroad application system. Arguably the first online study abroad database in the nation was developed years before similar commercial products hit the market during the internet boom of the early 2000s. After undergoing a major overhaul about ten years later, this home-grown, web-based system served as a comprehensive repository for all UD study abroad programming and participant information for over two decades, making UD's study abroad office a model of data management long before such practices were considered standard in the field of international education.

In recognition of its extensive study abroad infrastructure and programming which were ahead of their time in the new millennium, UD received two prestigious national honors from premiere international education organizations. First, in 2004 the Paul Simon Spotlight Award for Campus Internationalization<sup>2</sup> was bestowed by NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Specifically, the award recognized the study abroad office for the outstanding support provided to faculty throughout the cycle of directing winter and summer session programs—from an online system for submitting program proposals to the online database mentioned above, which enabled easy access to student applications, to an interactive and multi-page spreadsheet that allowed tracking of program expenses against budgets.

The accolades continued when, in 2007, UD received the Institute for International Education's Andrew Heiskell Award for Internationalizing the Campus<sup>3</sup>, specifically for the Advancement of a Campus-Wide International Curriculum. This award highlighted UD's success in integrating a broad array of coursework from dozens of disciplines into its study abroad programs, as well as its recognition of off-campus study on students' transcripts as fulfillment of their experiential learning education requirement. Today such academic integration is considered standard practice in the field.

In 2015, UD was among one of five US universities and colleges to receive the NAFSA Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization<sup>4</sup>, this time, again, for its excellence in integrating international education across all aspects of college and university campuses. UD was recognized for a comprehensive approach to international education guided by the 2008 Path to Prominence strategic plan, which called on the campus community to “foster

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2 <https://www.nafsa.org/about/about-nafsa/simon-award-campus-internationalization-select-ed-institutions>

3 <https://www.iie.org/get-involved/become-an-iienetwork-member/iie-heiskell-awards/heiskell-awardees/>

4 <https://www1.udel.edu/udaily/2015/feb/simon-award-022415.html>

knowledge and awareness of the economic, environmental, political, cultural and social issues that face the world, and the skills to address them.”

### **Innovating First-Year Study Abroad**

In the early 2000s, UD began developing campus programs for first-year students, including study abroad. The first “Learning Integrated Freshman Experience” (or LIFE) winter session program took place in Australia, with others to follow. As UD’s “First Year Experience” opportunities expanded, the University established the World Scholars Program<sup>5</sup> in 2015. Unique in its structure, this program provides undergraduate students with a four-year framework for global learning and engagement.

UD World Scholars begin with a semester abroad in the very first semester of their freshman year, followed by a living-learning community residential experience in their second year, study abroad for a second time in year 3, and concluding with a capstone global engagement project and a Fulbright application in their graduation year. Now more than a decade old, the World Scholars Program has enrolled over 1,000 intrepid Blue Hens, many of whom have gone on to receive prestigious postgraduate international scholarships such as Fulbright.

### **Leading in Assessment and Research**

As UD’s programs expanded, the field of Education Abroad also grew and became professionalized. Practitioners and their institutional administrations began to question long-held beliefs about the impact of foreign study on student development, which had seldom been researched in any systematic way. Again, UD assumed a leadership role and became a forerunner in a national movement to measure myriad impacts of education abroad on student participants. In the early 2000s, study abroad staff developed a survey under the vision and direction of Professor Lesa Griffiths Massarotti—then Associate Provost for International Programs at the Institute for Global Studies—to learn about students’ attitudes on a host of global themes and discovered that even a month-long program abroad can effect significant changes in participants’ perspectives. The study by Chieffo and Griffiths, the largest at the time to target short-term programs abroad, led to publication<sup>6</sup> of a seminal article in a peer-reviewed journal which has been cited over 700 times.

A decade following this success, an improved assessment tool was developed: the Global Engagement Measurement Scale (GEMS). Again, publication<sup>7</sup> in a peer-reviewed journal and numerous presentations at national conferences kept UD in the national spotlight in a growing education abroad field framed around assessment and research. The GEMS continues to be used today by UD to measure changes in students’ attitudes and perspectives as a result of their international

5 <https://www.udel.edu/academics/global/world-scholars/>

6 <https://frontiersjournal.org/index.php/Frontiers/article/view/140>

7 <https://frontiersjournal.org/index.php/Frontiers/article/view/368>

experience. And indeed, assessing program impact, a longstanding UD practice, is now considered standard in the field. As a culmination of acknowledging UD's expertise in short-term faculty-led programs, NAFSA extended an invitation to co-edit the third edition of its *Guide to Successful Short-Term Education Abroad Programs*<sup>8</sup>, which was published in 2017 and used as a textbook for graduate programs in international education.

### **Increasing Access and Diversity**

Despite the numerous benefits of study abroad, financial barriers remain significant for many students. Recognizing that study abroad comes with added expenses, the University has pursued creative solutions to enable greater and more diverse participation. Over the years, UD's study abroad office has dedicated a significant portion of its budget and fundraising efforts to need-based scholarships. Approximately 30% of UD's study abroad participants receive financial assistance from the University, including need-based awards. In addition, the Delaware Diplomats Scholarship Program<sup>9</sup> was launched in 2014 to further diversify study abroad participation. Before studying abroad, Diplomats engage in internationally-themed activities on campus to earn badges in the areas of world knowledge, intercultural friendship, and study abroad preparation. In doing so, they amass financial credit to be applied to a future study abroad program while preparing for their time abroad and making campus connections among fellow world travelers. This innovative model not only supports financial access, but also fosters a vibrant community of globally-minded students before they even set foot abroad.

### **Leveraging History and Building Legacy**

The impact of UD's trailblazing study abroad program cannot be overstated. The Foreign Study Plan set the standard for higher education around the globe. Since its launch in 1923, over 1,000 institutions in the US and abroad have incorporated study abroad into their curricula, tens of thousands of students have engaged in education and guided exploration abroad, and innumerable individuals have benefitted from cross-cultural collaborations and understanding. Study abroad is now an expected experience for college students and an increasingly important element in enrollment management strategies. The inclusion of learning outside of one's home country is considered a co-curricular rite of passage for many.

On a more granular level, research conducted at the University of Delaware has measured the impact of study abroad on transforming the student learning experience. Findings show that participation in a 5-week study abroad experience provides students with local cultural knowledge, openness to diversity, tolerance for ambiguity and a propensity for further cultural engagement - global competencies for academic success and career readiness.

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8 <https://www.nafsa.org/bookstore/guide-successful-short-term-programs-abroad-third-edition>

9 <https://www.udel.edu/academics/global/signature-programs/cgps-communities/diplomats/>

Building upon its legacy, with more than 200 international partner institutions, UD leads in the number of short-term faculty-led programs, developed the World Scholars Program, and is expanding access to study abroad through innovative student engagement and scholarship opportunities. UD's Internationalization Plan is transforming the institution through comprehensive strategies that impact all students.

### **What's Next for UD?**

As the field of international education evolves—amid geopolitical tensions, shifting policy environments, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—UD continues to adapt. While many institutions witnessed declines in study abroad participation following the pandemic, UD's enrollment remained relatively strong, a testament to the university's deep-rooted infrastructure, dedicated faculty, and student-centered approach. UD enters its second century of global engagement with an ambitious vision: to embed global perspectives in every student's academic journey and to empower the next generation of leaders to navigate an interconnected world with purpose and empathy.

Through comprehensive internationalization strategies and innovative programming, UD is poised to remain at the forefront of study abroad for decades to come. Hybrid models that blend virtual exchange with in-person experiences, short-term, micro-mobility, and semester programs designed to reach all students, and curriculum-integrated global learning across all majors and disciplines will remain essential. In addition, UD must continue to expand partnerships in non-traditional destinations and global south contexts, supporting students in developing the cross-cultural agility needed to engage with diverse communities and global challenges.

Advancing UD's Global 360 model<sup>10</sup> through faculty engagement and research collaborations can deepen academic impact while creating new pathways for students to contribute meaningfully to the world. As uncertainties reshape the international education landscape, UD's strategic foresight and commitment to global citizenship will ensure that its study abroad model remains not only relevant—but transformative.

The story of study abroad at the UD is one of vision, resilience, and reinvention. What began as a bold transatlantic journey in 1923 has become a globally respected model of international education. As this book chronicles 100 years of transformation, UD's chapter serves not only as a historical account, but as an aspirational benchmark—demonstrating what is possible when institutions place global learning at the heart of the academic experience.

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10 <https://www.udel.edu/academics/global/about-us/360/>

# Chapter 2

## The Impact of Short-Term Study Abroad Programs at UD: A Research Perspective

Ravichandran Ammigan, Lisa Chieffo, Meng Fan, Noel Shadowen, and Rujia Wei

In the winter of 2023, over 800 University of Delaware students boarded planes to 24 different countries to participate in faculty-led study abroad programs lasting three to four weeks. At a glance, it may have looked like a whirlwind academic vacation—photos of students with ancient ruins, meals in bustling marketplaces, and group excursions through winding city streets. But behind these experiences lay an important question: can such brief international programs really change students' perspectives or attitudes in meaningful and significant ways?

A recent study by Chieffo et al.<sup>1</sup> investigated the impact of short-term global experiences on the study abroad students at the University of Delaware (UD), an institution recognized as the pioneer of study abroad in the US since 1923<sup>2</sup>. Specifically, the authors set out to explore whether a few intense weeks abroad helped students grow in their ability to better understand others across cultures, tolerate uncertainty, and navigate unfamiliar environments. Building on previous research, they turned to the Global Engagement Measurement Scale (GEMS)<sup>3</sup>, a homegrown research instrument designed at UD to measure changes in students' attitudes and perspectives as a result of their international experience.

### The Global Engagement Measurement Scale

As interest in measuring the impact of study abroad grew in the field over the years, so did the need for reliable and valid methods to assess student learning and development in a global context. In response, UD developed the GEMS<sup>4</sup> in 2015—an innovative online tool designed to evaluate key dimensions of intercultural competence among students who participate in international programs.

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1 <https://www.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.34859.50723/3>

2 <https://www.udel.edu/home/studyabroad100/>

3 <https://www.udel.edu/academics/global/study-abroad/faculty/assessment/>

4 <https://frontiersjournal.org/index.php/Frontiers/article/view/368>

Intercultural competence is a widely used term in international education, yet educators and scholars have long acknowledged the challenge of defining or operationalizing it. There is no single agreed-upon framework for what it entails, nor is there consensus on how to measure it due to the many methodological limitations and the complex, multifaceted nature of student experiences abroad. With that in mind, GEMS was created to focus on a set of specific, concrete skills and attitudes that are likely to evolve through study abroad experiences. These include how students engage with other cultures, their comfort with uncertainty, their openness to diverse perspectives, their knowledge of the host country, and their sense of personal resilience.

The scale itself consists of 43 questions rated on a four-point scale, along with one reflective prompt that encourages students to think more deeply about their experience. These items are grouped into six categories or areas of measurement:

*Cultural engagement.* Students' openness to different worldviews and appreciation of cultural diversity

*Tolerance for ambiguity.* Students' comfort with uncertainty or unfamiliar situations.

*Knowledge of the host site.* Students' practical understanding of local history, culture, and current issues

*Diversity tolerance for friends.* Students' comfort with, and acceptance of, people from backgrounds different than their own, measured in the context of friends

*Diversity tolerance for family.* Students' comfort with, and acceptance of, people from backgrounds different than their own, measured in the context of family

*Resilience.* Students' confidence in adapting to change and facing challenges

The GEMS was designed with broad applicability in mind, with its structure allowing it to be used across many types of short-term and long-term study abroad programs, regardless of location, discipline, or duration. Though developed at UD, the instrument is publicly available to international educators worldwide, offering a practical and research-informed way to better understand the transformative potential of global learning.

### **The Short-Term Experience**

Study abroad has historically been associated with a longer-term experience, often for a semester or year overseas. But over time, universities began

offering shorter programs to increase access for students who could not necessarily take a full term away from campus. These programs were often attached to a winter or summer session and led by university faculty.

Today, short-term programs make up the majority of US study abroad participation. According to the most recent Institute of International Education Open Doors Report<sup>5</sup>, 64% of all US study abroad participation comes from programs that are up to eight weeks long. This trend is believed to be driven by factors such as affordability, shorter commitment, and the ability to fit into structured academic schedules. However, questions remained around whether these short international experiences were as impactful as longer sojourns, and, while we at UD believed in their impact, the authors wanted further evidence on the outcomes of these programs.

### **Measuring Impact**

Chieffo et al.'s study drew on a large and diverse group of students. Of the 829 students who participated in short-term, faculty-led study abroad programs in January 2023, 767 completed both the pre- and post-program assessments, giving the researchers a rich data set to work with. Students came from a variety of backgrounds and academic disciplines, with the majority identifying as Caucasian (88%), and others identifying as Asian (5%), African American (4%), or Hispanic (1%). About 74% were women, and most were juniors or seniors. Nearly all were US citizens.

The 41 programs in which students enrolled spanned 24 countries and more than 40 academic fields—from engineering and political science to education, sociology, and the arts. Some students spent the entire program in one location, while others traveled between cities or countries. Regarding accommodation, some programs housed students in hotels or dormitories, while others placed students with host families. Each group was accompanied by at least one UD faculty member who taught a course; some students also took additional classes taught by local instructors. While no two programs looked exactly alike, all shared a common goal: to immerse students in a new culture and create meaningful learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom—in less than five weeks.

The GEMS items were rated on a four-point scale, along with a reflective question encouraging students to share their thoughts in their own words. Given that intercultural competence is a complex and often contested concept, the authors focused on areas of growth most likely to emerge from the kinds of experiences students encountered abroad.

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5 [https://opendoorsdata.org/fact\\_sheets/fast-facts/](https://opendoorsdata.org/fact_sheets/fast-facts/)

After students completed the survey, the authors analyzed the changes in their scores and used statistical methods—including paired sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA—to explore whether and how students’ experiences varied based on program type or other contextual factors<sup>6</sup>. By examining these outcomes, the researchers set out to understand the value and impact of short-term programs and in turn offer insights to international educators and administrators for strengthening their programs, thereby helping students grow in ways that matter most in today’s interconnected world.

### **Interpreting the Results**

By the end of their program, the observations were clear. Students showed measurable growth in nearly every area or dimension of experience. They returned home with greater openness to different cultures, more confidence in dealing with ambiguity, and a deeper knowledge of the places (and cultures) they had experienced. For instance, one of the most significant findings was the increase in knowledge of the host site, which was not surprising given how closely these programs tied course content to local context. In other words, learning also meant lived experiences.

The participants in the study also reported increased tolerance for ambiguity, particularly those studying in countries where English was not the dominant language. Struggling to order lunch, navigate a train system, or ask for directions without language fluency forced students out of their comfort zones. It may not have always been an easy thing to do, but it was transformative. Interestingly, diversity tolerance (measured in scenarios about intercultural relationships) also grew, especially among students who found themselves as linguistic or cultural “outsiders.” It seems that navigating unfamiliar norms helped them develop empathy for people who might feel like outsiders in their own communities.

### **An Unexpected Finding**

One finding that was probably not expected was that students actually reported feeling less resilient at the end of their program than prior to departure. This was the only category that showed a negative impact. A possible explanation is that students initially overestimated how adaptable they were. The challenges of a new environment, such as navigating jet lag, unfamiliar routines, and communication barriers, may have exposed limits they did not know they had. Rather than indicating failure, this “dip” in perceived resilience might actually reflect a more accurate and humble self-awareness.

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<sup>6</sup> Acknowledgement: The authors would like to thank Kelvin Dankwah Agyei and Matthew L. Drexler for their assistance with data collection and analysis for this paper.

## Shaping Student Growth and Development

The authors also looked at how different types of programs shaped student growth. For instance, they examined whether it mattered if courses were taught in English, or whether the spoken language in the destination country had any influence on students' experiences. Some differences emerged.

Students in non-English-speaking countries showed more growth in ambiguity tolerance. Simply put, being immersed in a language one does not speak well can be disorienting—and growth might begin in discomfort. Likewise, students on programs conducted in English but located in non-English-speaking countries showed the greatest gains in diversity tolerance. This suggests that even without language fluency, being in a setting where students were the minority can increase empathy.

That said, in most other areas—including cultural engagement and knowledge of the host site—students benefited regardless of the program's structure. Whether they were studying history in Cape Town or philosophy in Buenos Aires, the short-term experience mattered.

### Why Does It Matter?

In a world where intercultural competence is increasingly essential for success in career, community, and civic engagement, higher education institutions must actively and intentionally find ways to cultivate global mindsets among their students. While not all students have the opportunity to spend a semester abroad, short-term programs can play a crucial role. When thoughtfully designed, these programs can offer accessible, flexible, and impactful experiences.

The study by Chieffo et al. affirms our expectations that short-term education abroad programs of only a few weeks can indeed impact student outcomes across various domains of intercultural and global competence, and it validates the work of faculty who spend months preparing immersive, rigorous, and reflective curricula abroad. This research offers valuable insights into the design and development of impactful short-term study abroad programs for students and provides a framework for engaging students about their personal aspirations and intellectual growth. And more importantly, it confirms a longstanding belief and tradition at UD: a few weeks abroad can change the way students see the world—and themselves.

The Global Engagement Measurement Scale continues to be used at UD and at other institutions globally for evaluating the outcomes of short-term programs. As we move into the second century of study abroad at the University, we are committed to keeping students' development at the heart of our global learning and engagement mission. Short-term programs may only last a few weeks, but for many students, the transformation they spark can last a lifetime.

# Part I: Reflections from Students



# Chapter 3

## A Journey of Growth

Amelia Lambertson

*2024 Fall Semester, Barcelona, Spain*

Studying abroad was always something I knew that I wanted to do. When I was little, my sister studied abroad in London and ever since then, I knew it was meant for me. When it came to choosing a college, the first question I always asked was “what is the study abroad program like?” After visiting the University of Delaware, I felt extremely confident that it would be my future solely because of the way they talked about their study abroad program. I based my entire academic courses on the fact that I knew I wanted to study abroad my junior year. Finally, the day that applications opened up for the 2024 fall semester, I applied to Barcelona as my first option and Sydney as my second.

I got accepted at the end of March and everything started to feel so real. As the summer went on, I felt very anxious about my decision to study abroad. I come from a very large family with lots of nieces and nephews and I was very sad to leave them. Although I knew that it was what I needed to do, I felt apprehensive about my future especially because I was not very familiar with anyone else going on the trip. Nevertheless, I packed my bags, kept my head held high, and got ready for the most incredible four months of my life.

I first flew from Dulles to Lisbon. After landing in Portugal, we took a flight to our final destination in Barcelona, Spain. While on my flight to Barcelona, everything started to feel so incredibly real. I had tears rolling down my face as I started to realize that I had no idea what was in store for me. The middle-aged woman next to me looked at me and asked if everything was okay. I told her my plans and that I was going to be just fine, but I was feeling extremely nervous at that moment. She looked me in the eyes and told me that she was so proud of me, saying, “You are so brave for doing this and you are about to have the most unbelievable and rewarding experience.” And she could not have been more right.

I arrived in Spain and lugged my bags to the *attico*. My apartment was at the very top of the building with three random roommates who were soon to

be my best friends. It took us a few weeks to warm up to each other, but by the second month, those girls had seen me at my best and, of course, my worst. We spent the weekends traveling to different countries together or separately, and would have the best debrief Sunday nights. Our apartment building was full of college students who were from all over the world. We spent our weeknights going out and sharing stories about our lives before we met. It often crossed my mind how lucky I was to meet people in Barcelona that I simply would have never met any other way.

Through all the ups, there were definitely some downs. Being in a foreign country as a 20-year-old can get quite lonely from time to time. As someone who is used to being a 90-minute drive from their parents, living a six-hour time zone and a nine-hour flight away was tricky. This forced me to grow up immensely and learn that it was completely okay to feel that way, but at the end of the day, I was lucky enough to be sad and alone in Spain. I spent my sad days journaling about how incredible my time had been in order to allow me to remember how lucky I was. Though these times could feel lonely, it was during these moments that I found a new sense of independence and resilience.

When I look back at my time abroad, I cannot help but feel so genuinely lucky. The lady on the plane next to me was right, it was the most incredible and rewarding experience. It not only expanded my horizons academically but also transformed me as a person. The memories I made, the friendships I forged, and the lessons I learned will continue to shape my journey for years to come. I will forever be grateful to the University of Delaware's study abroad program for giving me this incredible opportunity. I will always believe that choosing Delaware was one of the best decisions I have ever made, simply because of the lived experiences it gave me to succeed.

# Chapter 4

## Sisi

Catherine Osinubi

*2025 Winter Session, Pretoria, South Africa*

One goal of mine was to travel to anywhere in Africa before I turned 21. Born in the United States with parents and an older sister from Nigeria, I always felt like I was the odd one out. I still remember being teased for my English and pronunciation of Yoruba words. Now, fast forward to a 20-year-old me, after being accepted to a study abroad program in South Africa. I had to make the most of this chance. There was just one problem—reality set in, and on January 3rd, 2025, I became agitated on a 15-hour plane ride to Pretoria.

The first 24 hours of my trip were a doozy as I had never experienced jetlag that intense before. There was a sense of unfamiliarity brewing and, although I had done a fair amount of research and preparation beforehand, the culture shock was evident. I remember simply looking at the sky and commenting how clear the clouds were. Looking out into the land at how many empty fields of grass there were. That was when I realized how warped my perception of the world was, having only lived in the US. This trip was bound to broaden my understanding of life in a big way.

When we arrived at the hotel, I instantly felt a sense of belonging. The front desk employee called me “Sisi,” a sign of respect which primarily means *sister*. I had heard of this term before but did not know it would become so relevant to me. Instantly, I smiled and introduced myself. The next day when I woke up, she called me *Sisi*, again. This new name started to grow on me as a form of endearment. For the rest of the trip, many of the local people addressed me in that very same way.

While we were in Pretoria, we went zip-lining. There were two courses and four of us from the group accidentally went to the wrong one. We stayed, however, and made the best of it. Our guide, M, took us through the rules and a small-scale tutorial. I was feeling fine until I saw the height of the real deal: 20 feet in the air. I begged M to come with us. He guided me through every obstacle in the high ropes course. I remember clearly he said, “Sisi,

trust me.” I thought to myself—here goes that word, again—and I felt a sense of relief.

During our short period of classes at the University of Pretoria, we were guided by Professor G. She taught us about all the languages spoken in South Africa and took us all over campus. We got to their Student Center and were welcomed by employees at a patty shop. As I ordered my food, the professor and I noticed she was wearing the famous/instantly recognizable Delaware Blue Hen. We mentioned that it was from our school and asked where she got it. She responded that it was gifted to her, and we realized that someone from a previous UD program probably gave it to her. After that lovely conversation, I finished ordering my patty. As I was leaving, she said, “Bye, Sisi. Have a good day.” I felt the warmth of a fond farewell.

In Cape Town, we had the opportunity to visit a group home for kids. There, we got to watch them play net ball and even joined in as a team of our own. We lost, pretty badly, but it was such a fun experience that I wouldn’t trade it for anything. The adrenaline rush and the vibe were unmatched. I was feeling pretty discouraged when the forward on the opposite team whispered to me, “Sisi, you got this.” That same old smile formed across my face.

In recollection of my journey abroad, I found myself forgetting about being the odd one out and becoming accustomed to the social culture and my surroundings. Every time I heard, *Sisi*, it felt like I belonged. Throughout the countless history lessons, cultural sites visited, and friendships made, I grew increasingly fond of South Africa and knew I would miss the experiences that I, Sisi, had encountered there and would cherish forever.

# Chapter 5

## Finding Home

Alexis Clouse

*2024 Fall Semester, Auckland, New Zealand*

Like many, the longest I've been away from home was for a couple weeks of summer spent at camps, vacations, and other outings that didn't take me that far. It was therefore challenging for me to fully process the idea of moving across the world to Auckland, New Zealand, with the University of Delaware's study abroad program until our group leader announced that it was time to head to the airline's check-in counter, coaxing us away from our parents. At that moment, I felt a rush of panic, sadness, and fear. Tears streamed down my face as I clung to my mother like a baby bird scared to leave its nest. For the first time, I would have to find a home somewhere else.

I had signed up to live in a single university accommodation dorm for the next four months. But how could a room with four blank, white walls be considered home? Unpacking my bags, I found memories of my home in Pennsylvania that I had brought with me: smiling photographs with my friends and family, my childhood stuffed animal, my baby blanket, and notes from my mom that she had hidden in my suitcase. Despite all that, this room did not feel like home, even with these photos and notes displayed and my most prized possessions at my side.

The first few days felt so unfamiliar. I did not know anyone around me besides those who had embarked on this study abroad journey with me from UD. I traveled mindlessly from class to class, from place to place, almost as if there was no purpose besides complying with my educational needs. My head swirled with the thought of why this place that was supposed to be my home did not feel like home. But little did I know this would start to change with a tiny knock on the door.

I didn't expect it at first, but then I realized that as the new international student on my residential floor, other students might be curious about who the newcomer was. Without a second thought, I leaped out of bed and opened the door to meet the various individuals surrounding the hall. All at once, we hit it off. I began sitting with the group at meals, accompanying them to the

Saturday Markets, and spending long nights dancing the hours away with them. For the first time since being in Auckland, I felt a sense of belonging; I found people to spend time with, share my thoughts with, and enjoy the same things I did. But I still couldn't call it a sense of home—something was missing and I still couldn't identify what it was.

Even when my nuclear and extended family of nine visited me over my two-week mid-semester break, I didn't feel at home, even with the closest people in my life by my side. After they left, I continued to search for this feeling of home in everything I saw. Long days turned into longer nights spent on the phone with my mom, crying, trying to figure out this feeling I desperately longed to find. Exhausted and out of ideas, my mom suggested I make the most of my time and enjoy what was around me. Reluctantly, I took her advice.

With the weather getting warmer, I planned various walks around the city and countryside on the outskirts of town. I admired the buildings, the shrubbery, the people, and all the scenery around me. I noted the names on the store signs I walked by, any rainbow hanging over the clouds, and the stars in the sky. Throughout my walks full of discoveries, I had forgotten what I was looking for altogether.

I spent the final days of my trip soaking up the sun and recounting memories with the close friends I had made, laughing, crying, and even eating ice cream together. It was then when I realized that what I was looking for had been there the whole time. My home in Auckland, New Zealand, was the fantastic people I met, the array of emotions I experienced, and the once-in-a-lifetime adventures I embarked on—and I couldn't see it until the time came to leave... my home.

# Chapter 6

## Meows and Midnight Talks

Adriana Buvac-Drndic

*2024 Fall Semester, Athens, Greece*

Starting college is daunting enough, but beginning my first semester in a foreign country, far from everything familiar, felt like diving headfirst into the deep end of change. My first few weeks in Athens, Greece, were marked by anxious phone calls to advisors and back-to-back appointments, as the stress took a physical toll. I often broke down behind the closed door of the shared bathroom, used by eight girls, but somehow my private refuge in moments of feeling overwhelmed. Yet even in the midst of that emotional chaos, I was incredibly lucky. I found a circle of reliable, trustworthy friends who stood by me through the worst days and the best. Strangely enough, many of those meaningful bonds began to take shape through a shared love of something simple and pure: cats.

We'd heard that Greece was home to plenty of friendly stray cats, but from our earliest World Scholar excursions, we had a sneaking suspicion that one particular feline had made a home at the bottom of R1 (Residential Building 1). That's how the nightly "Cookie runs" began. Soon, they became a daily tradition. Between the big, comfy couches, Cookie's oversized teddy bear, and the cozy atmosphere, I found myself eagerly anticipating the end of each day- those quiet moments spent unwinding with friends, petting the sweet resident kitty. What started as a simple, almost silly routine became something deeply meaningful. It brought me closer to my future best friends, helped me cross cultural and ethnic boundaries, and introduced me to music and interests unique to the region where I was studying abroad.

At the time, I lived just across the street from Cookie's home, so my friend who lived in R1 with her quickly became my lifeline. He endured countless texts from me - "*Is Cookie home?*"- and always kept me updated. Being a huge cat person, I even used my extra supermarket vouchers to buy food for the stray cats, though Cookie got the lion's share of my attention. At one point, I started sneaking her leftover fish from the dining hall (questionable cat nutrition, I know, but she seemed to love it and turned out just fine). This love for Cookie became more than a quirky habit; it brought me closer to my

roommates and other World Scholars. Our Cookie runs stretched late into the night, filled with laughter and conversation, bonding us over a tiny cat with a big presence.

The dorm lounge, right at the entrance of R1, became our unofficial social hub. We'd spend hours there during Cookie runs, chatting, laughing, and lounging on the couches. Because it was such a central spot, people were constantly passing by, opening the door to unexpected friendships with others who also stopped to greet the beloved stray. One of the friendships I formed didn't begin so smoothly.

A big part of my identity is being a dual citizen: Croatian and American. My parents emigrated from former Yugoslavia during the war, and since we're the only ones abroad, we often return to Croatia to visit family. Studying abroad in Athens was especially exciting because I saw it as a chance to connect more deeply with my Balkan roots - this time, through the lens of a college student. I even packed two Croatian soccer jerseys, imagining they'd spark camaraderie with others from the region. Greece, after all, felt like neutral ground.

But to my surprise, those jerseys had the opposite effect. Instead of creating connection, they became a point of division - especially with the large Serbian community on campus. Even though we spoke the same language, and despite my mom being from Belgrade, they picked up on the Croatian in my accent and used it to distance themselves. The tension escalated into open hostility, and I suddenly felt alienated in a space I'd hoped would bring me closer to home.

Andjela, along with a few other Serbian students, lived in that building and would often give me sharp side-eyes as they passed through the lounge. There was this quiet tension, like an invisible wall between us. But one evening, just as my roommates and I were getting ready to head back upstairs, I saw Andjela sitting on the couch, chatting on the phone with her mom. For some reason, I decided to push through the discomfort and talk to her. It felt silly that there was so much animosity between us - we shared the same culture, the same language, and yet we'd never even exchanged a proper hello.

To my surprise, the conversation went incredibly well. We clicked instantly. From that day on, we became close friends. We started meeting in the dining hall, going to basketball games, hanging out with her Serbian friends, and talking in our shared mother tongue. For the first time, I had a friend group that could actually pronounce my last name and, more importantly, one where I could be unapologetically Balkan.

Having both an American friend group and a former Yugoslav one was incredibly fulfilling. It made me feel like I could fully embrace both parts of my identity without choosing one over the other. And the funny part is, if I hadn't been loitering in that downstairs lounge. If it weren't for Cookie and our little nightly tradition- I might never have spoken to Andjela, and we might never have formed the meaningful bond we share today.

Spending time in the R1 lobby and leading our nightly Cookie runs gave me more than just a reason to leave my dorm room. It gave me unforgettable experiences and meaningful connections I never expected. Beyond the friendships I formed, I gained a deeper understanding of my host country's culture. The RAs on duty downstairs often played Greek music or streamed local broadcasts, sparking conversations and introducing songs that made their way onto my playlists. In the end, it wasn't the landmarks or lectures that defined my time abroad; it was the laughter, late nights, and one unforgettable cat.

# Chapter 7

## Alongside the India-Nepal Border

Claire Reader

2024 Winter Session, India (*multiple cities*)

At 7:43 a.m., we were greeted by stray dogs the second we hit the street. We were already running late. Time's eternal in India and our study abroad professor had to tell us about her superstition over driving with bananas. Situated upon the mystical Himalayan foothills, placed physically on the edge of abyssal beauty, we rumbled through the winding roads of Darjeeling and the surrounding villages.

Animated by the air of adventure and copious amounts of green tea, we approached the oldest monastery in Darjeeling, the Yiga Choeling Monastery, established in 1850. The temple was adorned in paintings of dragons, flowers, sail boats, and intricate patterns. A single monk monitored the temple softly. The shadowy building was lined with statues, images of the current and preceding Dalai Lamas, tea candles, and countless offerings. Statues of the Buddhist mudras struck me, and Karma, our tour guide, explained the meanings of the ancient hand positions. Karma hurried us along, as our journey had just begun.

The destination was over an hour away. We darted down scenic, rural roads. Driving in India is a perilous feat, but to our guides, it was another day in the life. We finally reached the starting point of our trek, a quaint village along the border of India and Nepal. The Nepali people on the other side of the border were the same as those of the West Bengal side; they hung out clothes to dry, decorated their streets vibrantly, and carried out their lives with equanimity. The only forces dividing them were the guards arming the crossing and a complex political history of border disputes, which seems to be an inescapable global theme. Before embarking on our 13 kilometer trek, we were given bags filled with our fuel: tomato soup flavored chips, a Mango Frooti, a chocolate Moon Pie, and a handful of chocolates.

The first kilometers of the hike were the most grueling. We started up a steep incline on a path engulfed by ancient trees. The crisp mountain chill turned into sweat and shedding layers. The foothills, decorated with villages hanging

off their edges, stretched seemingly infinitely. Hiking through clouds, a sensation of being on top of the world lingered. The Sleeping Buddha, Mount Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world, was tucked away in his arctic grace beyond the skyline. Greeted with sweet milk tea, we took a rest at a trekker's hut. We moved onward; the wind whipped through faded white prayer flags that were once of traditional colors. Even in the isolated glory of the hills, tradition reigned. We were cautioned about shortness of breath from altitude sickness, but my breath was only taken by nature's unparallelled mysticism.

A few more kilometers up, we encountered two burly guards at one of the several border checks. They approached us from a vast base wrapped in barbed wire, along with a wolf-like dog. The guards asked us if we were married, and we asked them what their dog's name was. One replied "Sheru" and the other "Faltu", which we'd come to learn are the hindi words for "lion" and "useless." Sheru stayed with us for the remaining eight kilometers. He would dash ahead of the group, and just when we thought we had lost him, he would pop out of the yellow shrubbery that was once green. Sheru guided us past cows grazing among the barren trees, past elderly village ladies who spoke the native tongue and hauled huge branches downward, and through the pervasive, misty fog. He waited outside while we stopped in a village of less than a dozen buildings where a local woman prepared a delicious lunch of brothy Tibetan noodles, two potato dishes, and some chicken.

Our trek continued along the India-Nepal border. We passed the timeworn, stone border markers and buildings placed precisely across the line. Just when I thought the scenery could not get any better, the clouds fell over us, and then beneath us, into the space between hills. Limitless mountainous views were only interrupted by the feathery clouds that covered the scenery yonder. Thousands of feet above sea level, white wild flowers cut through the golden grasses. Guided by Karma and our new companion Sheru, the lion dog, we pressed through our fatigue and through the thin air. We walked among terrain so heavenly that you could not help, but to float into existentialism.

After a laborious final stretch, all seven of us and Sheru made it to the peak of our trek, 13 kilometers from where we had started. Tibetan mastiffs, the village's guard dogs, greeted us in a fury. We continued past them, before settling into the Tonglu Trekkers Hut for the night, on a small hill on top of the "hill" that we had just conquered. Standing next to historic burial sites, the sun peeked out from beyond the clouds. Sheru ornerily darted around the horses that grazed freely on the crown of West Bengal. Weathered prayer flags whipped in the wind, sending their blessings down the mountains to the villages below. The red sun began to set over the distance we had just

traveled. We piled into the hut, where we started our well-earned feast with Tibetan corn soup. After a night of storytelling and laughing in the freezing hut, the seven of us attempted to sleep in a wonderfully dusty room.

Over 7,000 miles from my home, above 11,000 feet in altitude, the world melted around me. I could have never dreamed of experiencing life and this planet so fully. I shed the same tears today in my reflection, as I did upon reaching the peak of the trek. All the silly moments along the way – conversations with the guards, singing songs, scarfing down Moon Pies and milk tea – were just the building blocks of a larger experience churning within.

On this day, I formed friendships that will last a lifetime, indispensable memories, and a replenished lust for life and experiential learning—an experience that underscored how studying abroad empowers college students to grow academically through new perspectives, socially through cross-cultural connections, and personally through newfound independence and self-discovery.

# Chapter 8

## Running After It

Caroline Stone

*2024 Fall Semester, Copenhagen, Denmark*

*2022 Fall Semester, Rome, Italy*

“Lame! Learn to be spontaneous!” Jakob yelled at me, perched in his windowsill while looking out at the moon. I sighed, exasperated, because I never thought I’d have to explain to a 23-year-old Austrian that I do *not* want to run at 1:00 in the morning. “I am a woman,” I’d calmly pointed out. “I don’t run in the middle of the night.” “Why not?” he asked innocently.

“Are you stupid?” was the only response I thought of at that moment. I looked out his window, and I’ll admit, it was a beautiful night. I shouldn’t have been awake, and I didn’t want to be awake, and I was at my wit’s end. With a hospitalized girlfriend 6,000km away, a seemingly-endless stack of missing homework, and a loss of inspiration in my new home abroad, I wasn’t in Jakob’s room to be spontaneous. I stared at my laptop until my vision went blurry. *What did I have to lose?* “Put your sneakers on, we leave in five,” I insisted suddenly and turned on my heel to go get my sneakers. I slammed the door to the sound of Jakob laughing.

Two months into my study abroad program in Copenhagen, Denmark, I realized that all that I love about learning overseas was being challenged. I was no stranger to living an ocean away from Delaware, as I spent my freshman fall in Rome, Italy, too. Now, I was in Europe again, somewhere new and fresh and different, and I loved it. I enjoyed meandering through the bike traffic for my commute to school; I loved the openly gay community’s immersion in the local culture; I loved the quiet disposition of Danes; and I just loved Copenhagen. I always will.

But time had not been kind to me by the first week of October 2024. Back home, my partner who had suffered a life-threatening emergency has since made a full recovery, but my anxiety was getting the best of me. Reflecting on this challenging period, I couldn’t help but point to my Austrian bestie’s support.

Jakob and I had only met a few weeks prior to this night. He was a master's student at the University of Copenhagen, in his first semester, and happened to live right across the hall. We had met in the hall's communal kitchen in our *kollegium*, which we shared with 18 other people. Jakob and I grew very close, very quickly. It was primarily our love of food that brought us together in the beginning—we would cook meals together, realizing our schedules were coincidentally quite similar, running into each other in the 3A kitchen daily. Meals together turned into leftovers in each other's fridges, turned into the text message, *Hey, I stole your milk*.

So when my world stopped spinning on its axis while the rest of Denmark kept time, Jakob swooped in with everything I could have needed. A shoulder to cry on, an encouraging GIF, three meals a day together, pink tea, and the motivating reminder that he did not find me to be spontaneous. I didn't knock when I went to get Jakob out of his room. "I'm slow" I warned him with an angry defensiveness.

I was promptly shushed, and we bounded down the stairs. No music, no pepper spray. I brought with me my Apple watch and a man whom I'd convinced myself could double as a bodyguard in the event I needed one. Unlikely? Maybe. But so seemed my newly bogged-down demeanor. I'd begun to fail to see the color in Copenhagen by this point: the bustle, the towering buildings, the rolling canals. But alas, I ran. In the black of night, I followed on Jakob's heel *left, right, left, right*, my sneakers? pounding the pavement until my breathing was more distracting than the width of the Atlantic Ocean.

I began my running journey just before I left for my semester abroad, vowing to train enough to finish the Skagen 10k, which I ran while I was there. Most of the miles I'd tracked toward my training prior to the race were run in Copenhagen, just a few steps from my back door. When I was running, there was a consistency to my steps that matched the cadence of running anywhere in the world. I became in tune with my body and my brain, in a way that I never had before. Those Danish summer sun-rays would fall to stars with each passing step, until the Scandinavian air was cooler than the sweat on my face. Running helped bring me belonging to Denmark, and it was spontaneity – and Jakob – that reconnected me to this feeling and this place that had become so ingrained in my being.

We'd hit mile two of our run and I swear it was as if I'd emerged into a new person. On a beautiful bridge over a glimmering canal at Islands Brygge, Jakob was about 10 paces ahead of me. We reached the end of the bridge, my eyes glued to the water-color lights pressed on the city's buildings, when Jakob turned around.

“We run faster back,” he panted, grinning. I found myself grinning back, somewhere between numb and filled to the brim with adrenaline. He jumped up on the elevated, dividing wall in the middle of the bridge’s two bike lanes, and sprinted down the aisle, rolled out for him like a red carpet. I followed and reluctantly gave in to the joy that existed there, with me, even so many miles away from home. We ran like children, our different life experiences, genders, studies, and cultures transcended by existing there together. It was as healing as it was freeing. I learned that being spread thin across countries wasn’t so bad, after all. The people I love on the East Coast and the place that I call home are part of my world, yes, but my world is bigger, and how lucky am I to exist in more than one space!

# Chapter 9

## Finding Family in Recoleta

Jack Mullarkey

*2025 Winter Session, Buenos Aires, Argentina*

*2024 Winter Session, Granada, Spain*

The week before my flight to Buenos Aires was filled with immense stress. Between working every day up to the day of my flight, summer internship interviews, and seeing friends and family before I left the country for a month, I started to view my upcoming study abroad in Argentina as another stressor rather than an enriching opportunity. After the 13-hour flight and long drive from the airport to my apartment in Buenos Aires, I was especially stressed and exhausted. Upon meeting my host mom Dolores, however, I soon learned to have a new outlook on my experience.

Dolores grew up in Recoleta, one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the city, known for its European-inspired architecture. On my first day in Buenos Aires, Dolores immediately treated me as if I was one of her own children rather than a guest in her home. One particular memory I have of Dolores is when she asked me to help fix her Wi-Fi just five minutes after meeting her. After hours of travel from the US, I remember feeling too exhausted to even speak Spanish at that moment, but I agreed to help her. Looking back now, I realize that it was the first connection I made with somebody from Argentina. The fact that Dolores initiated a casual and close relationship as if I had been living with her for years made me feel more comfortable about the month that I would spend there. In reality, something as commonplace and insignificant as a Wi-Fi connection allowed me to create a social connection within a country that I had never visited.

When my laptop screen cracked just three days into the program, I reached a turning point. The entire computer shut down and now I found myself in an unfamiliar situation, with no immediate access to a computer. Immediately, I was overwhelmed with frustration, stress, and worry, trying to sort out how I would manage my classes without this crucial resource. Dolores immediately gave support, offering nearby alternative repair stores and even offering me access to her iPad if I ever needed to use it. Her generosity was something so innate and natural to her. It did not come from a place of obligation as

my caretaker, but as a true act of kindness extended to someone trying to navigate a foreign environment despite the challenges faced. From that moment, I knew I could trust Dolores to always look out for me.

Throughout the weeks of living in Dolores' apartment in the heart of the city, I took every opportunity to be a sponge. I would spend hours after dinner conversing with her to practice my Spanish, from listening to the memories of her childhood living in one of Buenos Aires' most lavish neighborhoods, to the time she spent raising her family in the northern province of Tucumán, and to asking her about the years she spent living in the country under the military dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s. After my daily classes on the Universidad CAECE campus, I would visit the museums and restaurants she recommended so I could go home to tell her about my experiences at the end of my day. Although I never spoke to Dolores in English, we still formed a bond that made me feel like I could embrace the culture. Her ability to make me feel comfortable not only speaking Spanish and asking about her life, but also comfortable enough to make mistakes when speaking the language, really allowed me to embrace my time in Argentina.

Leaving Buenos Aires was the saddest day of my entire study abroad experience. Before boarding the bus to the airport, I gave Dolores a hug and said "Adiós mamá." After sharing in Spanish how much of an impact she had on my experience, she lit up upon hearing me refer to her as "mamá." In true Dolores fashion, she welcomed me to stay at her apartment again the next time I visited Buenos Aires. Her selflessness and hospitality were invaluable to me, and her efforts to make me feel at home in her country allowed me to return to the United States with a strong connection to Argentine culture and society.

The relationship I formed with Dolores is just a snapshot of Latin American culture and attitude. Throughout the eight years that I have spent diligently studying the Spanish language and Latin American history and culture, one of the biggest lessons I learned is that the generosity of its people is overflowing. Despite the challenges various Latin American countries have faced and may continue to face, I have always had a deep respect for the efforts of their people to build and grow community and family. Whether it was my Spanish professor sharing her experience about immigrating to the United States from Cuba, my Latin American Politics professor sharing his take as a political protester during college in Peru, or even my friend sharing her fondest memories visiting her family in El Salvador, the pride that these communities have is something that I have always admired.

Growing up in a white suburb of Philadelphia, I lived in a bubble for a majority of my life. Through the life-changing experiences of studying abroad during college, I have learned that there is something so profound historically, culturally, and socially about the Latin American region. Dolores gave me a new perspective to live in the moment and be grateful for every moment I had in Argentina. What started off so simple as asking for help with her Wi-Fi blossomed into a special relationship that I will always remember fondly.

# Chapter 10

## The Tiramisu Tales

Jaimee McEntee

*2025 Winter Session, Rome and Florence, Italy*

When I first left for Italy, I thought it would be the art, architecture, and history that would leave the biggest mark on me. I imagined being fascinated by the vastness of the Colosseum, the beauty of Vatican City, and the talent behind Michelangelo's paintings and sculptures. And while all of those things were incredible, I never expected that the one thing I'd keep dreaming about after I left would be the tiramisu. From the sweet, creamy mascarpone to the coffee-soaked savoiardi, I was hooked with every bite.

In a cooking class in Rome, I learned that tiramisu isn't just a dessert, but a reflection of Italy's immense regional diversity. Our instructor explained that different areas of the country have their own spin on it, depending on what ingredients they have and the traditions they've grown up with. Some places use more mascarpone, while others prefer more egg. Some add a splash of Marsala wine or rum, and others stick to the classic coffee. It was clear to me there's no "right" way to make tiramisu, and that's what makes it so special. Every version has its own personality, just like the people who make it, and that's what makes it so beautiful.

As I made my way from Rome to Florence, tasting tiramisu everywhere I went, I realized how unique each one was. In Rome, it was bold and intense, packed with more mascarpone and coffee, and denser than I expected. It felt like it matched the big, lively, and full-of-energy city. But then I got to Florence, and the tiramisu was completely different. It was lighter, fluffier, and more delicate, reflecting the peaceful elegance of the Tuscan countryside around it. Each bite seemed to tell its own story, and I began to realize that I was experiencing Italy in a much deeper way, one that went beyond just seeing the sights as a typical American tourist.

In Italy, food is everything. It's passed down from generation to generation, and it's part of what makes people who they are. The way tiramisu changes from place to place is a lot like how people adapt to their surroundings. It got me thinking about my own background and how I've always felt a connection

to my family's food and traditions. Like my favorite Italian dessert, there is no "right" way to make a meal in my house—just our way, shaped by where we were and what we had on hand.

Tiramisu, I realized, is a lot like life. No two versions are the same, just like no two people are the same. We all grow, change, and adapt, and there's no such thing as the "perfect" version of ourselves. The beauty is in the differences, in the way we evolve with time. Tiramisu isn't just about following a recipe, but about telling a story, about being shaped by the hands that make it, just like we're shaped by the experiences we live.

Now, as I sit here thinking back on my last tiramisu in Italy, I'm amazed at how something as simple as a dessert could change the way I see things. Just like tiramisu keeps evolving with each region and each cook, so do we, shaped by our history, our surroundings, and the people we meet along the way. Italy taught me that there's no "perfect" recipe for tiramisu, just like there's no perfect version of ourselves. It's all about the journey, the layers of experiences, and the willingness to keep evolving.

And to be honest, that's what I'll remember the most. Italy wasn't just about the beautiful architecture and art, or the immense history within, even though those were all unforgettable experiences. For me, it was more about the moments I spent connecting with all aspects of the culture on a deeper level. Everyone can experience the tours and site visits, but I was lucky enough to see and understand the local culture and traditions far more—through a dessert. In Italy, everything tells its own story, and tiramisu revealed a story that I became infatuated with. The pictures in my camera roll will get lost, but the tales told by tiramisu will live on forever in my head and my dreams.

# Chapter 11

## Scuffs On My Shoes

Elyse DiPisa

2023 Winter Session, Athens, Greece

2022 Winter Session, Florence, Italy

I see my parents' faces peeking over the top of the divider between security and the walkway to baggage claim. *Are they as worried for me as I am for myself?* In fact, I had been reassuring myself throughout the few weeks leading up to my journey that I was being anxious for no real reason, and that yes, this was my first time traveling this far alone, but everything would go just fine. I placed my sock-covered feet on the foot-shaped outlines of the ribbed mat in the X-ray body screening machine. I stepped through, and I didn't look back. After I scrambled to reclaim my items and rushed to shove my feet back in my sneakers, I felt a brief vibration from my phone - a text from my mother. *I thought you were going to look back and wave goodbye.* This text was a confirmation that they were concerned, because they knew I was worried.

The Philadelphia International Airport was uneventful; the bleak hallways were empty on this Saturday morning. My first flight was from Philadelphia to Atlanta, Georgia. I went through the mundane steps of boarding the plane, finding my seat, struggling to haul my carry-on bag into the overhead compartment. The flight will be quick and - thank God - uneventful.

Upon my arrival in Atlanta, I had just about five hours to kill before embarking on my next flight to Paris. So far so good with all of the timing of my flights. I boarded my flight and impatiently waited for the people to come sit next to me and squish me for the eight hours that followed—but no one arrived. It was a blessing that I could stretch my extremely long legs and use the space next to me to breathe. It was easy. *Too easy.* I spent the majority of my eight hours staring aimlessly at the map of where our flight is within its journey. Somehow, time flew by and we landed. Once again, it was uneventful.

“Welcome to Paris.” The pilot announced our arrival after the jolting touch-down, and proceeded to tell us that there was no open gate for us and that we would have to wait on the tarmac. I checked the time again. Beads of

sweat immediately appeared on my freckled forehead. I knew I was already tight on time with a one hour and fifteen minute layover before my next connection. I repeatedly consoled myself in my head, taking deep breaths as I went. After an additional thirty-minute delay, the suction-sealed door to the plane opened. At that moment, I started shoving my way through the crowd to get off the plane and into the terminal. I lightly jogged up the unsteady, cold, metallic ramp with my heavy duffel bag slung over my shoulder. I had no idea where to go. The language barrier combined with the humongous airport were just two of the many obstacles about to be in my way.

Then came a checkpoint, which meant that I had to go through security again. *Shoot!* I had not anticipated this time-wise. I checked the clock—thirty minutes remained until my flight’s scheduled departure. *No, I can make it.* I stood nervously in line for screening, which thinking back now was probably not the best idea to show nerves in line at a security checkpoint. A young woman about my age with two dark braids, a purple scarf, and a black dress stood in front of me, seemingly nervous as well. Next, she turned to me.

“Did I hear you tell the attendant you were going to the gate for Florence, too?” Abigail asked. We talked about the stress of making this flight in an attempt to ease our nerves.

Time was ticking as I completed the security check. I watched my belongings go through the X-ray scanner and rolled their way to me... until the attendant grabbed my backpack. *Come on!* Everything that could cut into my time to make this flight was happening, of course. The lady searched through my backpack in what felt like slow motion. She even opened my miniature wallet, which I found unnecessary, but as it turned out, I forgot to empty out my big bottle of water in my rushed panic.

“I’m about to miss my flight, you can just throw out the bottle. It’s ok. I have to go,” I said. My \$40 water bottle did not seem worthy of missing my last leg on my journey. “No, it’s ok. I got it.” She takes my water bottle off to a room behind the security desk and empties it and returns it to me. It was kind of her to go out of her way to do that for me, but at this moment every second was costing me more anxiety, and potentially my connecting flight.

I sprinted the second I received my backpack. We had to go through a quick passport and customs checkpoint, too; no big deal, just something else I had not anticipated. Abigail and I looked overwhelmed as we frantically tried to get through to the gate. We did make it exactly at the departure time, but the gate was closed. My heart sank. I received a harsh pointer finger from the Air France customer service desk instead of a verbal response. After some time

working through the language barrier, I was all set to fly out on the next flight to Florence just a few hours later... minor hiccup, but solved.

Fast forward a few hours and I am touching down at the Florence Peretola airport. Although it felt like it would finally be smooth sailing, my checked bag never came out of the baggage carousel... just to add to my already rough journey. After what seemed like a lifetime of a day, I sat down in the taxi for the final leg to our hotel. As the taxi driver whipped the car through the city of Florence, I looked out the window, took in the views, and reflected on what I had just experienced over the past 24 hours.

I was huffing and puffing as I paused my stair-climbing and looked to my left. Florence is just so beautiful, I thought. I stared at the views of the city with each passing step. Breathtaking is the only word I could think of to describe these moments. The Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore was absolutely beautiful, and made for such a serene monument to pass on my daily walks while living in Florence—and for that, I was eternally grateful. Climbing to the top of the Duomo seemed to be something we all had agreed as classmates or, I rather say, friends now looking back. 463 was such a large number, but we all agreed to power through the stairs for that once-in-a-lifetime mental snapshot.

The damp, narrow, concrete stairwells were not forgiving during the climb. The echoing of my friends' chatter about our bodies beginning to feel tomorrow's pain filled the space, the sound concealing that of my heavy breathing. Eventually, we managed to see the light at the end of the tunnel, or stairwell I suppose. What a surreal moment in my life. I lifted my (now slightly scuffed) New Balance tennis shoes one after the other off that final step and up onto the marbled roof of the dome, and I breathed in the fresh air in an attempt to refill my lungs. The views of the city at that exact moment were not yet 'home' (little did I know what was to come so shortly after this experience). I could not do anything but simply hold on to the clammy metal handrail and quietly stared off into the distance. I took out my phone to record the views, knowing that a mere video would never truly capture that moment as it felt right then. The recording of the city view had the background noise of my still then heavy breathing. It did not matter. That moment was worth every single step and every single labored breath. The reward here whole-heartedly outweighed the 'risk' as that one phrase somewhere describes.

For lack of a better word, getting to Italy was an absolute nightmare for me—emotionally and literally. Things went wrong. It was not easy; but this crazy nightmare of an experience taught me more about myself than any class lecture, or any moment in my comfort zone back home. Being an anxious person, I plan in my head before I commit to things. I think up (almost)

every possible outcome and/or risk and do my best to plan solutions to address possible issues. To say that I was prepared to miss a flight and lose my luggage on my first real journey both by myself *and* overseas, is certainly an overstatement; but, living through this, working through it as it all happened, proved to myself that I can handle unforeseen circumstances like these and work through uncomfortable situations on my own.

Sitting in the taxi after my journey, I said to myself, *I finally did it*. I took this attitude with me into my three short, but surreal, weeks in Italy. I am going to take in every single moment, experience every little thing whole-heartedly. No more allowing fear to control what I partake in. Just like with climbing the Duomo, the obstacle of the exercise and claustrophobia that it entailed might have held back the old version of me. I would have overthought it. I would have ‘sat this one out.’

I am so proud to say that in my brief 20 days in Italy, I refused to sit anything out. The Elyse that is returning to the US will be different. The appreciation I have for this amazing study abroad program is going to continue to shape me as a person throughout my life. I am forever grateful. Thank you, Italy. Thank you, Air France. And thank you, UD.

# Chapter 12

## Wisdom of a World Scholar

Analise Riera

*2024 Fall Semester, Athens, Greece*

I made my way into the dining hall where I found the familiar faces of other University of Delaware students. Since my allergies were a factor of concern for the food on campus, I ended up having to meet the head chef to navigate the situation. Typically, this is my least favorite part of going somewhere new. I have always hated the “special attention,” especially having to acknowledge that something as small as a peanut could kill me. Despite this, I’m so eternally happy that I was forced into that interaction, as I met one of the most pure-hearted persons I have ever known. Making sure I was okay every day, keeping up with my travel plans and all of my schoolwork, and even knowing my order a few weeks into the semester, Kostas changed my life for the better. He treated us as if we were his children, and not a day went by I was not excited to see him and his heart warming smile. Saying goodbye at the end of my trip was one of the hardest days, but he reminded me that while we had a great time in Greece and will always miss and cherish our time there, new and better things are always ahead.

Walking through the main area on campus, I saw a flyer broadcasting free Pilates classes twice a week. I always enjoyed going to the gym, but I wanted to incorporate something new into my schedule. I told my friends about it and we all started going every week. Our Pilates instructor, Sofie, nurtured us and showed us positive perspectives on everything. Every week, we would wait to all meet in the locker room and goof around in the studio 20 minutes before class even started. She pushed us mentally, physically, and even helped us open up emotionally, as we turned to her when times were hard during our time abroad. Her office became our safe space, her voice and teachings our comfort. Towards the end of the semester, she hosted a white elephant gift exchange for after our Pilates class. Everyone went around and chose their gifts. Coincidentally, Sofie and I ended up with each other’s gifts. I received an evil eye artifact, that I still hold and cherish with me now, that always reminds me to think optimistically and clear my mind of all the things outside of the here and now. On our last day of class, I could not help but shed a tear looking at how much I grew through her classes and

guidance. Expressing that she would miss us, Sofie urged us to leave, as she lamented that change is difficult but necessary, and we can never grow when too comfortable. She knows we are the future, and I can do anything with her support and encouragement.

One day in the gym, my friend and I were approached by a student who was in our Greek Mythology class. We all introduced ourselves and started talking about our lives and experiences. He lives in Athens as a student, with his family residing in a nearby city, Nafplion. Throughout the semester, we would go to the gym with him and sit with him in the dining hall, most of the time not taking anything seriously. Panagiotis is to this day one of the most important people in my life. Now, even as we are separated by the Atlantic Ocean, I think about him every day. Inviting me further into Greek culture and being an added support system, I was always happy to see him. I remember the day he left, my friend and I spent the day with him and then walked him to the bus stop, where we shared our final goodbyes. My friend was crying, but I held it together and wished him the best, not letting him leave without a good hug. Our walk back to the residence was quiet and solemn, reminiscing on all the amazing memories we had made together. Once we got back to the apartment, I got a voice message from him. He said he was going to miss us so much and thanked us for everything, wishing us luck on our future journeys. My guard wore off, and I cried in the middle of the kitchen with my friend, so sad to see him go, but hoping we will see him again in this lifetime.

From the moment I got to the residence halls on my first day in Athens, I met Eleni, who was in charge of student services at the university. Assuming she would be some strict authority figure that would be breathing down my neck, I did not pay any special attention to her role. However, within the first week of being in Athens, I knew she would be the hardest person to say goodbye to when the time came. Eleni was there for us in every way a person could be for someone. As a fresh 18-year-old, first-year college student, across the world, without my family, she was my Mother figure. With unlimited wisdom and support, willing to drop anything to help me through a panic attack when midterms got too stressful, to make sure I had no allergy concerns on campus and on trips, and to always make sure we knew we were loved by her. Nothing could have replaced the significance of the relationship that was created in Greece. After hauling all of our heavy suitcases, with our lives packed in them, we arrived at the bus that would take us to the Athens airport, where it all really started. I stayed back once everyone got on the bus and gave my last hug to her, one that I will cherish forever. I got on the bus and watched her get smaller and smaller as we drove away, tears streaming down my face. I miss her hugs and comfort every day, but I cannot wait until the day I see her again.

# Chapter 13

## Finding Myself

Heena Kataria

*2025 Winter Session, Granada, Spain*

Every time I travel by air, it feels like the universe is conspiring against me. I can't help but wonder what kind of trouble I'll face this time. True to form, another adventure awaited. I woke up to a beautiful sight: the first snow had blanketed Delaware, creating a serene but misleading scene. I set off for the airport on time, and everything outside sparkled with winter's magic. However, upon arrival, I was met with the usual news of delays. My plane was stuck on the runway, unable to leave.

Eventually, I made it to London but the delays caused me to miss my connecting flight. I was rebooked on another plane and I finally landed in Madrid but unfortunately, I missed the 5:30 PM bus to Granada. I held onto the hope of catching the 6:30 PM bus, but it seemed like fate had different plans for me. My luggage was missing.

Finally, I boarded a later bus, without my bags. In an attempt to stay hopeful that everything would work out, I reassured my parents not to worry since I had arrived. However, as I stepped into the streets of Granada at 1:00 AM, a wave of fear hit me. The Spanish language, which I once spoke at a basic level, felt foreign, leaving me speechless. However, just when I was about to panic, a kind girl offered to help me find my way to my host family's home.

Once I stepped into my host family's home, everything transformed. The weight of my previous experiences lifted, and I felt a surge of excitement to explore and embrace the adventure ahead. Yet, amidst my enthusiasm, a flicker of apprehension remained: Would I be able to connect with my roommates, who had already formed their friendships? I worried that making new friends would be challenging, especially after my initial struggles as an international student at the University of Delaware. However, I soon realized that all I needed to do was to be myself, and an extraordinary experience awaited me.

Before long, I found myself forming bonds of friendship with new faces, including the welcoming locals, and developing a special connection with my host grandmother. She was truly remarkable—one of the kindest and

most uplifting souls I had ever encountered. Every mealtime, without fail, she would look at me with warmth in her eyes and say, “You are so tiny and skinny; you need to eat more.” Her words, rich with genuine intention, enveloped me in a sense of care that felt reminiscent of my own grandmother, who always insisted on feeding me until I was full. Despite her limited command of English and my rusty Spanish, we communicated effortlessly, fostering a comforting sense of home—especially since I hadn’t been back to my own home in over a year.

As this feeling of home deepened, I noticed my host grandmother’s uncanny ability to recall the smallest details about my life, such as my preference for soothing tea before bed and my fondness for mango yogurt over strawberry. With her nurturing presence and the support of my incredible roommates, who often translated her loving words for me, I began to feel like the cherished “baby” of the house, shedding the insecurities that had weighed me down. My initial doubts about connecting with my roommates soon disappeared as they revealed themselves to be some of the most wonderful people I could imagine. We quickly became inseparable friends. Their laughter echoed throughout our shared space, and they often exclaimed how funny I was, leaving me to wonder about my true sense of humor. Each passing day filled me with a deeper sense of joy and belonging, transforming my fears into gratitude for the remarkable connections I was forging in this newfound home.

As my study abroad program came to an end, I realized that Spain and the people there had taught me invaluable lessons: to slow down, take a deep breath, and appreciate where I am and who I am with. I learned that it was okay to pursue my goals at my own pace, pausing occasionally to reflect on how far I’ve come rather than only focusing on what’s next.

Sitting on the plane in London, I never imagined this trip would teach me so much, let alone take me to Spain after all those delays and missed flights and buses. Not only did I learn Spanish, but I also discovered a new way of living that brings me happiness and appreciation for the simple things in life. By the end of the trip, I had found myself again. I rediscovered that child within me who would be proud of who I am today.

Just as I thought my journey was coming to a close, the universe had another challenge in store for me. My flight back to the US was delayed by another five hours. Instead of stressing out this time, I focused on all the positive aspects this trip had taught me: the enriching academic and personal experiences I had, the friends I made, and the profound lessons I learned. Embracing these moments reinforced my belief that this journey had forever changed me, and made me realize how truly grateful I was for every step along the way.

# Chapter 14

## The Grocery Store Conundrum

Marissa Hurley

2024 Fall Semester, Rome, Italy

Between language barriers, long flights, and finding comfort 4,500 miles away from anything you had ever called home, studying abroad is certainly not for the faint of heart. As my friends and I discovered, there are some things that help, such as coming together through what we deemed our “family” dinners. To make the transition of moving to Rome easier, almost all 20 of us would get together, play music, and eat a meal that someone in the group had prepared or ordered from their favorite places—so we could share a little bit of ourselves with each other. While it was an amazing time, it was certainly not without some challenges.

To set the scene: It’s Thanksgiving day. In my family, holidays are very big events, so spending this one away was something I had to prepare myself for. To do so, I invited friends whose families were also unable to visit during the holiday to have dinner prepared by none other than myself. The morning was going great—after a rather long walk, I had made it to a little shop that I had always wanted to visit. “*Okay, I’m actually doing good on time for once,*” I said to myself. I was fairly confident about how the day was going so far, which was probably the beginning of my downfall. I left a few minutes later than I had intended and had to make a quick pit stop, but I was still in high spirits. With my list in hand, I began my weekly mantra as I made the 17-minute walk to the infamous Conad, the only Italian grocery store I knew how to get to. *I got this; it’s JUST the grocery store,* I told myself before I let the anxiety build a dam inside just waiting to burst. By this point, it was November, and I would seemingly know my way around the grocery store. But that was not the case. My first task was to gather enough potatoes to make homemade mashed potatoes. *Done. Continue.* Next were the yams to make sweet potato casserole; as I would later discover, I accidentally bought way too many yams—but that is a story for another time. *Complete. Continue.* The grocery store run is seemingly going well.

*Wait. Pause.* Where is the cinnamon? And the green beans? Cue the panic. Objectively, it wasn’t a big deal, but not being able to read any of the labels, already running a little late from leaving closer to 11:00 a.m. instead of 10:00

a.m., and still needing to cook, it quickly became extremely overwhelming. Running from aisle to aisle in the grocery store, with no cell service for the translator app, even when I find the spices I can't read which one is cinnamon, and I still can't seem to find the green beans. *Where could they be, where could they be?* I asked myself amidst the panic rising from my chest. Scouring the vegetable section many more times than one, and attempting to smell each of the spices, all packaged in plastic.

As I began resigning myself to fate and thinking of giving up, I tried my last ditch effort of asking a store assistant. Any Italian I thought I knew went out of the window and he couldn't speak English, so it's no use. I chose to look through the vegetables one last time, and came across an older couple, who asked for my help in English to work the orange juicer. I smiled for the first time in what felt like years but it had really only been the past hour that I have found myself lost within the depths of Conad. *This is something I can do.* Even if I could not find my groceries, at least I was able to help others. I began the process: grabbing the bottle, placing it under the spout, showing them how to turn on the machine, and then how to label the bottle for checkout. This process was no different than any other time I went to the grocery store. *Complete. Continue.*

We talked, and I learned that they lived in Canada and were vacationing here in Rome. Suddenly, I was not so stressed anymore. These people, from a completely different walk of life than I, were in a similar situation. They were lost in the same grocery store, at the same time. *This is a sign—I can figure this out.* As I turned and looked to my right, I noticed my holy grail. “**GREEN BEANS,**” I shout in my mind so as not to appear crazy in the center of Conad. Another look through the spices and I managed to figure out which one was cinnamon. Maybe it wasn't so hard after all, and surely not worth giving up. Maybe, I just needed a little kindness to feel calm. Because the reality was that I could do it; I simply needed someone to show me that. I ended up making it home in time for dinner and cooked for four hours. It was all worth it.

It is no secret that studying abroad has many ups and downs, especially when figuring out your way around in a new area (particularly the grocery store) while trying to manage your studies. However, even during the difficult moments, the people I met and the experiences I had created a lifetime of memories for me. I am able to say that the heart of Rome, Italy, truly became my home away from home in many ways, from the people I met to the places I discovered. It is difficult to ever fully understand how an experience like this can impact a person until you are thrown into it during your first semester in college—just like my friends and I who decided to begin our academic journey as World Scholars abroad. I will forever be grateful for this experience.

# Chapter 15

## We Are More Alike Than Different

Annelise Lakatta

2022 Fall Semester, Athens, Greece

Prior to September 5th, 2022, I had never left the country. I had never even been on a plane before. So despite the excitement of choosing to be a World Scholar at the University of Delaware, you can imagine the anxiety, fear, and panic that raced through my head as I was driving to the airport, about to move across the globe for four months in my very first semester in college.

Deciding to study abroad my first semester of college was probably the biggest risk I had ever taken. When making my college decision (after getting waitlisted from my top school), I realized I was going to have to take a risk if I wanted to experience life outside of my small hometown. The World Scholars Program at UD was a clear opportunity for me to do this. The months leading up to my journey were filled with excitement. Friends, family, neighbors, and everyone-in-between commended me for my bravery and told me how happy they were for me. I, too, was proud of myself. I finally made the choice to step out of my comfort zone and see the world. These positive feelings drained from my body the day it was time to leave. A million thoughts raced through my head. Among them: *“What have I gotten myself into? What if I hate it there? What if everyone at home forgets about me?”*

Suddenly, this exciting and life-changing opportunity felt like I was being asked to pick up the gauntlet. I felt like I was losing my mind. Having never stepped foot onto a plane, it would be my first time going through an airport as a passenger. What was I doing? Why couldn't I just start in a normal program like every other freshman? As we approached Newark International Airport, my nerves got worse. I was moving 5,000 miles away from home. I was going to a whole new world.

Thankfully, my time in Greece was some of the best four months of my life. I finally learned independence and how to live together with five other students whom I had never met before. Two of them ended up becoming my best friends. During my program, I was privileged enough to travel to five other countries: England, Germany, France, The Netherlands, and Belgium. I

met some of the greatest, most kindhearted people I have ever encountered. I found my favorite gyro place and ate there weekly. I danced the *kalamatianos*, a traditional dance holding hands in a circle with the local people. I learned how to communicate with strangers in the downtown square. I bought Greek antiques from a busy flea market. I learned that the Greeks believe in *agápi*, universal love amongst everyone—I experienced this when a stranger gave me his metro ticket when mine stopped working, or when a classmate consoled me in a time of crisis. Most importantly, I learned a valuable lesson: *we are all humans*.

Before I arrived, I thought that living in Greece would be like living on another planet. I did not know what to expect, fearing that people would be so different and that I would not know how to function in a new society. But I was wrong. No matter where I traveled, people shared many of the same common traits, regardless of language, cultural or nationality barriers.

In Greece, I would sit on a rooftop with my resident assistant and admire the sunsets while listening to Greek music. In England, I watched a mother read a Christmas book to her young daughter in a quaint bookstore. In France, I heard teenage siblings bickering on the metro while their parents reprimanded them. In Germany, I sat next to a group of friends having a toast in an old tavern. In Belgium, I watched a boys high school graduation ceremony outside of the Grand-Palace. In the Netherlands, I saw an elderly man purchasing a tulip bouquet for his wife. These moments created lasting memories for me and reminded me that some experiences are universal. Emotions and feelings have no boundaries. We all feel love, fear, happiness, anger, and sadness. We all watch sunsets. We all fight with our siblings. We all love one another.

Through my experience abroad I learned that, in so many ways, people are just... people. I find so much comfort in this—while I may be 5,000 miles away from my house, I can still feel like I'm at home. There is so much beauty in sharing basic human emotions with everyone around the world, even if our lives may seem completely different.

# Chapter 16

## Nine Thousand Kilometers Together

Caroline Ziluca

*2022 Fall Semester, Athens, Greece*

One of the first Greeks I met while abroad started our friendship by telling me she thought I was “really mean.” She was in my environmental issues class, and pulled me aside one Thursday after lecture to ask if I’d like to hang out with her before my next class. I agreed, and we sat outside on a bench by the library. We started off asking the typical get-to-know-you questions, which I had become well versed in after so many introductions those first two weeks, connecting pretty instantaneously. I was excited that we were the same age because I hadn’t found any students less than two years older than me so far, and we both had plenty of entertaining stories to share.

It was in the middle of one such story that she caught me quite off guard. We had been laughing as she was ducking behind me to hide from a family friend and teacher walking by, when she sat back up and told me “I thought you were really mean when I first saw you.” Cue a barrage of questions on my part as I tried to figure out how I could’ve possibly given her that impression—especially since we hadn’t even spoken before today. Eventually, after several flustered attempts at explanations that barely formed complete sentences, I realized she meant she’d assumed I was mean because of stereotypes and my behavior in class so far.

After I asked her to elaborate further, she explained that she noticed how dismissive I seemed whenever I raised my hand to answer a question. To be fair, those first two weeks were a whirlwind of nonstop activity that left me exhausted, so I can only imagine how disdainful and indifferent I must have looked while trying not to fall asleep. It did prompt me to try and look more engaged in class from then on, as I didn’t want to look rude, but the second reasoning she provided for her initial judgment was far more entertaining. At first, I thought she meant that she was taught to believe all Americans were mean, and that it was a generally accepted stereotype among all Greek people. If that was the case, I was in for a very interesting semester but fortunately, that was not the case. Rather, her prejudice was formed from the

fact that she had just watched *Mean Girls*, and she thought that because I was blonde and American I would instantly be like that character.

This exchange brought me to think deeper about my interactions with people from that point forward. I began analyzing how I thought they felt about me, not so much as a person but as an American. Did they disapprove of Americans in general, and would I be furthering that notion?

A lot of Googling and plenty of advice from friends before I began studying abroad indicated that Greeks were generally very nice people. It turned out to be very true. I had thought it might be easier to connect with other study abroad students, as we would share a similar situation, but the Greek students that I met on campus were all so nice that I was hard pressed to not bond with them. Despite constantly acting like a hopelessly confused tourist, any Greek person I talked to in a store or asked for help on the street was incredibly pleasant, welcoming, and happy to talk to me. Occasionally, I would be embarrassed to elaborate when telling stories because, although I knew that other Americans wouldn't bat an eye, I couldn't quite tell what the line was between "normal" and outrageously American from another culture's perspective. However, any judgment I perceived could certainly be attributed to my own insecurity in this, since I never encountered any outright negativity. Even if there was hostility toward Americans, it would be pretty unfounded considering the level of similarity that I found between our two cultures.

As I went through the local neighborhood, I couldn't help but notice how "early 2000's" some things were. When I shared this observation with my friend, she replied, "*Yeah, as proud as we are of our culture, we really want to be you, too. We're just a little behind.*" I found more instances of truth in this statement, but I also found more similar aspects that showed a sense of shared culture—rather than Greece following America's lead. I was introduced to the school's student-led social media page, on which various anonymous comments would be posted. I was already following a similar page for my college back home, and I saw so many parallels in the comments and responses made on it.

I wasn't actually nervous at the prospect of studying abroad, but the experience was even better than I had hoped it could be. It impacted me in much deeper ways than I would have thought possible. Some of the closest connections I made were the most unlikely friendships, like with the restaurant owner at the end of our street. We established that she was my "Greek mama" and she would help me with anything from homework, to navigating the neighborhood, or introducing me to one of the school faculty members,

with whom I would hold the most intense back-and-forth, high-energy conversations possible daily. Just as I was surprised by the connection I made with my classmate when I thought we could have nothing in common, I was constantly amazed at how many foundations I had for friendship with other college students halfway across the world. Despite being 9,000 kilometers apart, we were aiming for the same goals. We were all people looking for community.

# Chapter 17

## Lorenzo and Us

Anna McShane

*2024 Spring Semester, London, UK*

*2022 Spring Semester, Rome, Italy*

As a World Scholar at the University of Delaware, I had the opportunity to spend my first semester abroad in my freshman year. Although the idea of leaving the United States to spend four months in Europe sounded like a dream, I was extremely nervous. I was expected to study in a foreign country that I had never been to, knowing little about the place, and almost no one in my class. As an American student, I felt as though I was going to be an outlier amongst everyone throughout Italy despite all the preparations, orientation programs, and resources that UD provided to me before my departure. After spending four months studying abroad, however, my perspective changed.

It all started when I met a student named Lorenzo. He happened to be a degree seeking Italian at the same university I was attending in Rome—John Cabot University. Lorenzo approached my group of friends during orientation week and was overwhelmingly excited to meet everyone that had arrived for the semester. We invited him to get dinner with us at the end of the day, and from then on he became “one of us.” Lorenzo not only joined us on our daily adventures throughout Rome, but came on our weekend trips to many of the cities throughout Italy. Consistently, on a daily basis, Lorenzo enlightened me and my friends about everything there was to know about Italy and Italian culture. From learning about the history of ancient Rome to how to identify the most authentic gelato, he helped us understand local traditions day-by-day. He made Rome feel like a second home and, to this day, I could not be more thankful to have met him.

Lorenzo left a tremendous impact on all of our lives and our overall experience abroad but it was not until our last week in Rome that I began to realize that the feeling was just as mutual. When Lorenzo was getting ready to leave Rome for summer and head back to his home in Venice, his parents came to pick him up. He asked if we wanted to come get lunch with them, as he had told his family so much about all of us. Through the looks in his parents’ eyes when Lorenzo introduced us, I knew that we were not just his

“American friends” but a group of people that changed his life. I spoke to his parents myself, attempting to express how thankful I was to have met Lorenzo. Their response was about the impact *we* had made on him. They explained that Lorenzo has not always had the easiest time making friends at the university, as students come and go on a semester basis. They described that, through our friendship, Lorenzo had improved his English speaking skills and that was evident through his schoolwork. We had inspired him to want to visit the United States and to further his education there. At that moment, my perspective on studying abroad changed completely. Many American students, including myself at first, thought that going abroad would change their lives. Although that could not be more true, the study abroad process can also affect others along the way.

Lorenzo is a prime example of how studying abroad could impact so many people in so many amazing ways. By becoming friends, we enlightened him on our perspectives as American students both inside and outside the classroom. One of my most memorable moments with Lorenzo was when I walked into his apartment to say hi while wearing a pair of sweatpants and a loose shirt. As soon as he saw my outfit, he laughed—which took me by surprise. I simply stated that everyone wears clothes similar to what I was wearing where I go to school in the US. He then explained that generally in Europe, it might be considered inappropriate and frowned upon to dress in baggy clothes out in public. At first, I thought he was joking, but then I began to see that he was right. I realized that I was the only one wearing sweatpants and a loose t-shirt as I walked around the city. In that particular moment, Lorenzo and I were able to educate each other on differing fashion trends and expectations that exist in Italy versus the US. Without his help, I probably would have gotten many strange stares throughout the rest of my stay. When he comes to visit me in the US one day, I will be sure to style him in the coolest Nike sweatpants that exist!

To conclude, I truly hope that everyone gets the chance to study abroad at least once during college—not only to change their perspectives, but also to impact the lives of everyone around them. By taking the opportunity to be a World Scholar and to study abroad, I was able to change my view on life and those around me—thanks to Lorenzo.

# Chapter 18

## Wandering to Self

Faith Bartell

*2022 Winter Session, Florence, Italy*

The sun was a dollop of soft, yellow paint that colored the sky with strokes of peach. There must have been some other color on the canvas first, or else how could the yellow have made orange. I don't understand how art is created – I've never known how to draw or paint, – but for that, I can appreciate art even more. It's not just beauty, it's mystery.

The mystery of this work of art, this summer's sunset over the beach near my home(?) in Corona Del Mar, shut out all else in the world. I watched the sun paint closely, leaving more and more for the eye to see before receding behind her stage's curtains to reveal only her finished work. My roommates next to me ceased to exist. Until one of them tapped my shoulder and asked, "Ready to go?" It didn't upset me because I actually was, though I got the feeling that she didn't see the same show that I did.

I got up, thanking the sun before turning my back to her already-weathered masterpiece. On the car ride home, I wrote a poem for the first time in a while. It'd been a long time since I'd been inspired, and I missed it. The poem I wrote later helped me come to terms with something about myself I'd been struggling with for a while. The experience truly connected me to myself. I felt aligned. Grounded. Whole.

I thought that feeling would last longer. But since that sunset in July, I've spent a difficult couple of months with myself. When looking at the alignment between my body and myself, I feel like a moving photograph taken at a slow shutter speed; a body laying down on the ground, slightly off from the tape of its outline. And I don't know how to move closer, to fill the outline. When I was at home, I thought that Florence itself would be my answer. Specifically, I planned to find meaning at the top of the Duomo.

It was the beginning of our trip, and I was antsy with anticipation. The Duomo felt like the perfect place to recreate my experience at Corona Del Mar. My classmates and I even booked our tickets to the top for sunset. I

opened a new note on my phone, ready to be inevitably inspired. Ready to connect with myself again.

I don't remember being tired. I actually don't remember a lot about the over 400-stair climb, other than the fact that my classmates were in both the front and the back of me, and I thought to myself that if they weren't there, I would've taken more breaks.

The view from the top of the Duomo could not disappoint. The city looked orange, I think. But maybe, I'm just remembering the view from pictures that I took, which were tinted orange by the setting sun. Or maybe, that was the filter I used.

I don't remember much, except for the fact that there were pictures to take, people I barely knew to socialize with, and the voice of my classmate saying, "I think we're done up here. Want to go down?"

This time, I wasn't ready to go. I let my classmates climb down before me as I hurriedly looked out at the city of Florence, desperate for my "Corona Del Mar moment." Time was running out. The sun was bright, and I couldn't look right at it. The buildings looked pretty. I begged my mind to wander, to wonder, but it wouldn't. There was no mystery. It wasn't art. And then my last classmate began her descent. Time ran out, and my moment didn't come. Begrudgingly, I followed her down.

When you're at home – stuck in a rut, quarantining for fear of Covid, wholly disconnected from any version of yourself you'd recognize or want to be, it's easy to idealize what you'll be like in Italy. I thought Florence would bring me back to the feeling that I had in Corona Del Mar and maybe even make it last. Yet, there were multiple points along the trip when I found myself wondering, *When did this trip become about something other than me?*

Climbing to the top of the Duomo was the first time I questioned this. So, near the end of our stay – at 8:00 a.m. on January 25th, to be exact, – I decided, in a last ditch effort to accomplish my almost-unbearably cheesy goal of 'finding myself in Italy,' to do it again. This time, by myself. For myself.

Motivated by the fact that I pre-paid twenty euros a few days before, I gathered my clothes and put them on as quietly as I could in the bathroom. Evidently, I wasn't quiet enough, my roommate woke up before I was able to slink out the door. I told her that I was going on a run and left her to go back to sleep.

It was about 30 degrees, and immediately upon walking outside, I was uncomfortable. I was also early, so I circled the Duomo twice before the side

door opened for the first time that day and I was allowed in. I was the only one there.

The 463-stair climb to the top was tough on my own. After the first ten flights, my legs started to burn. After the first twenty, my lungs followed suit. At one point, I checked my heart rate, and it was 189. I stopped multiple times to catch my breath – there were more stairs than I remembered.

Throughout the walk, all I could think about was release. Release of the tension building up in my legs, from the burning of lactic acid. Release of the air in my lungs without quickly gasping for its return. Release of the pressure that I had put on myself to become self-actualized – to grow completely, to heal, to become whole – in a mere three-week period. *Why the hell did I put the weight of this goal on myself in the first place?*

The final stretch of stairs was the steepest, and it scared me. I climbed them quickly. My entire body burned, but as long as the sky was visible from the stairwell, I couldn't stop. On the last step, I took off my hat, a matter of both courtesy to my favorite artist and protection from the wind's thieving fingers. I finally returned to her show.

The air was crisper at the top than it was on my walk there, but somehow, it wasn't as harsh; it was cold, but it didn't hurt me. One of two people up there – a security guard and myself, – I let my mask down to breathe it in deep. The rising sun illuminated the morning's fog and veiled the scene in translucent white. Smoke drifted upward from terracotta roofs, and I heard dogs barking in the distance, though from where, I couldn't tell; it was a mystery.

I first took time to circle the dome and note all of the places I'd been on the trip thus far – the Uffizi Gallery, the Basilica di Santa Croce, the Medici Chapel, the Boboli Gardens. I couldn't see the Arno River, but I decided where it must be and traced the Medici family's tunnel from their second house back to the Palazzo Vecchio. From there, I was able to figure out where Ponte Vecchio was hiding.

The view was picturesque, but this time, I didn't pull out my phone. I didn't want to cheapen it. Instead, I sat on every bench lining the dome to capture it for myself. Well, all but the one lit by the sun. The security guard and his book, which he read out loud quietly under his breath, occupied that bench themselves. It sounded like he was studying something, and I wondered what it could be. He was lucky – as the sun rose higher, the blanket of her warmth grew, wrapping his bench tighter and tighter. I wondered how he didn't get tired from studying while laying in bed.

I couldn't help but think that I was lucky too. Lucky to have gotten such a beautiful morning. Lucky to have been the only one up there – to have had the chance for such a personal moment. Lucky to have truly seen the sun's display of talent once more.

When I decided to descend the Duomo, it was because I was okay with leaving. I said my personal goodbyes to Florence – I had a suspicion that this would be the last time I could be alone with her. I paced my walk down, not allowing myself to get too tired and taking in what slivers of the view I still could see from the small windows carved into the stairway's walls.

I didn't rush to write a poem or have a life-changing epiphany at the top of the Duomo. And I'm okay with that. When I climbed the Duomo on January 25th, it was because I felt like I was running out of time to find myself. But it was crazy of me to put a time limit on that goal in the first place.

I thought that "Corona Del Mar moments" could be planned, that they were formulaic. They aren't. Sometimes, you see something beautiful that isn't art. And sometimes, you see art and it doesn't make you feel how you expected it would make you feel. But maybe there's beauty in the mystery of what will impact you and of when you will find yourself in moments of growth. I don't understand how art is created and I don't know how exactly to connect with myself, but for that, I can appreciate those surprising moments when I do even more.

# Chapter 19

## Flamenco: A Passion for the Mundane

Eliana Baker

*2023 Spring Semester, Granada, Spain*

*2021 Fall Semester, Madrid, Spain*

I walk out of my dorm in Granada, Spain at 6:40 every Tuesday and Thursday evening. I don't even have to think about where I am going. My body has memorized the route to my flamenco studio. Flamenco is a style of dance and music that has developed over many centuries. The art form has mysterious origins with many stating that it comes from India while others state that it comes from the Caribbean and Latin American countries. The Roma, nomadic people who reside in southern Spain, incorporated elements from many regions and countries to create their own style of music and dance that has developed into the artistry of Flamenco that we see today. No matter where this form originates, flamenco is a crucial part of Spanish culture and the fusion of different cultural influences creates the captivating art form that attracts tourists and locals alike. If you ask a Spaniard to describe flamenco, more often than not they will use the word "*salvaje*."

This Spanish word translates to "savage" or "wild" in English. After dancing classical ballet for many years, I can confidently say that this is the perfect word to describe flamenco. Ballet is the daughter of dance that is delicate, gentle, and follows all the rules. Flamenco is her fiery sister that is passionate, independent, and free-spirited. Although one learns crucial steps and can practice the placement and movement of the arms for a lifetime, many times the audience does not know that when a dancer is performing, it is mostly improvised. The beauty of flamenco is the relationship between the dancer and the musicians. A guitarist watches the dancer intensely throughout a performance to look for certain cues in the dancer's arms or steps to begin a certain melody or rhythm. Likewise, the dancer listens to the music to determine the attitude of the dance or the intensity of the steps.

My flamenco class perfectly illustrates the mixture of cultures and backgrounds. In my class, I am from the United States, another girl is from the Czech Republic, another from Poland, and others native to Spain. This blend of backgrounds shows that no matter where you are from, dance is

something that brings people together and creates a bond between people from all over the world. This dance form shows the bond, especially, not only between those dancing but also those watching. If you go to a *Tablao de Flamenco*, a traditional tavern specifically for flamenco performances, the audience will be drinking, eating, talking, and yelling the occasional “olé” or “anda” to encourage the dancers and musicians. After being accustomed to a dance performance in which the audience stays silent, it was very strange to be introduced to a dance world where staying silent during a performance is seen as strange.

I believe another word to perfectly describe flamenco is “mundane.” Many associate this word with a boring outlook on life or something that is day-to-day. However, when I see this word, I think of something that is raw, earthy, uniquely human - passion. That is exactly what flamenco is. Flamenco tells a story of what it means to be human, and although it might not be considered a beautiful form of dance, each person that performs or watches flamenco feels a passion that is unique to the human experience. It has been so special to me that I get to learn something so important to Spanish culture while also doing something that I love.

The opportunity to study abroad in a country with such a rich history has shown me that there is so much to learn from other cultures and that each culture has its own customs. However, it has also shown me that the people I interact with in my gym, in my academic classes, in my flamenco classes, stores, or even on the street are not as different as one might think. Throughout this experience, I have learned to appreciate the mundane - the deeply human moments - and to understand that passion does not necessarily mean chasing your biggest dreams, but being passionate about everything you do in your daily life. It's the *salvaje* of the mundane.

# Chapter 20

## A New Motivation

Carolyn Williams

*2025 Winter Session, Melbourne, Australia*

Synchronized skating is my whole life. Ever since I was a child, my life has revolved around training for the sport and working to improve my skating. When I reached college, I was incredibly delighted to be able to skate on UD's synchronized skating team. Our training season spans most of the academic year and runs from August to March, culminating with the National Synchronized Skating Championships.

I always knew that I wanted to study abroad at UD, and when the chemical engineering department began talking about the study abroad program to Australia for winter 2025, I knew I had to take the chance. I was worried about going away and continuing my training, so I began making a plan. I found a rink near where we would be studying in Melbourne, and immediately contacted their synchro coaches to see if I could attend training with the team. The coaches responded quickly with excitement, and we planned a date early within the term where I would go skate with the team!

When the day finally came, I awoke excitedly and took our group's rented bike down to the rink. It was about two miles from where we were staying, and the short ride was very pleasant in the summer breeze of the morning (oh to experience summer in the middle of January!). I arrived at the rink, and excitedly joined the other skaters. There were 16 girls on the team, all around high school age, who were very excited to meet someone from the US. I learned the routine, and talked to the girls about their skating and what synchro was like in Australia. The team was preparing to go abroad to compete in Europe, which was very cool because US teams don't compete abroad until they reach the highest levels. The team told me all about how skating worked at their rink - public ice all throughout the day, with figure skating and hockey training only in the early mornings. This was a shocking difference for me as, back in the US, public skates are typically only on the weekends or during a few short hours during the week. Skating was a common activity even in the summer for people in Australia.

Not only did I go skating with them almost every day before classes, but I also befriended the skaters on the team and went on to meet their other friends who didn't participate in synchro. Some of the skaters asked for advice on their jumps, and I began acting as a pseudo-coach to help them make great strides! They also gave me Melbourne recommendations. Nothing beats Hot Jam donuts, which one of my new friends, Caitlyn, put me on. I ate them almost every day after.

After three weeks, our UD group left Melbourne and journeyed together to Sydney. The best synchronized skating team in Australia was based in Sydney, and as it is my dream to skate for a senior (highest level) team, I was delighted when their coaches welcomed me into practice! Although the 5 a.m. start time was quite daunting, I joyfully went to the address, and was shocked to see that the rink was located inside a mall. I had never seen a training rink inside a mall before and I was delighted to have the opportunity to skate on this hidden gem.

When I sat down with the team to lace up our skates, not only was I met with a wide range of ages, but also a variety of backgrounds. The first girl I met had just moved to Australia from Berlin, where she had previously skated on the senior synchro team of Germany. The second girl I met was from Hong Kong, and was attending the University of Sydney as an international student. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth people I met were not girls - the team had four boys! In the United States, boys in synchro were extremely rare, so to see a high level team with not only one boy, but four of them, was completely new and exciting!

We got on the ice and began doing warm up drills, and I was greatly challenged by the complicated steps of the team's choreography. Everyone was so motivated to work hard, and we all built off of each other's speed to keep pushing throughout the long practice. I learned how to do a new move called a death spiral, done in pairs where one skater holds another skater's hand as they spin them in a circle where their head nears the ice. It is typically only done by senior teams, so I had never tried it in formation with a whole team. It was amazing!

After the practice, the skaters all stretched together, showing a continued push and desire to get stronger as a team. I had never been on a team with such a high level of drive, and I was completely taken by it. I knew that this was the kind of team I wanted to be on after college.

I had never been someone who completely solidified one possibility for life. It took me months and months to decide on a major, and even after choosing,

it took me at least a year to be fully sure that it was the right choice. Giving up skating after college was never a part of my plan, but until studying abroad, I wasn't sure what my skating journey would look like. Now, I did. The girls from Melbourne inspired me to want to coach. The joy I got from helping them was immense. The team from Sydney inspired me to want to skate on a senior-level synchronized skating team. Their challenge and the drive were unmatched. While life is unpredictable, these experiences abroad made it clear that I will make new dreams come true because they are exactly what I want. I just needed new motivation.

# Chapter 21

## Send me Back Where I Belong - Everywhere

Sophia Kaplunovich

*2025 Spring Semester, Limerick, Ireland*

*2022 Fall Semester, Madrid, Spain*

Nothing could have prepared me for this experience. At 18, packing up my suitcases and leaving the place I knew as home for four months is an experience I could not have imagined I would ever have. I signed up for this program on a whim, no thought process, no idea what it was actually going to be like.

The feeling of leaving did not feel real. Walking around the streets of Madrid didn't feel real. I felt like I was walking the streets of any other city in the US. Then, the whispers in Spanish and the smell of patatas bravas would cue me into my reality: my location 4,000 miles away from my friends and family with a 6-hour time difference. I was starting my college life, and I was doing it in Europe. Even though it was all new, it felt comforting. The feelings of overwhelm were in the shadows of excitement. I liked waking up knowing that no matter what I did that day I was going to learn. I started off by navigating the metro, then discovering a random park that became my favorite place, then coming across museums I would spend half my day exploring. Nothing could have prepared me, but nothing could have taught me more - and enlightened me - as much as this experience.

*“Buenos días. Dónde está el jabón?”*

“It's over there in the back,” was the response.

A crude shock went through my body. I knew Spanish. By no means was I perfect at it but I knew enough to get by. Knowing three languages, my accent was good and my Rs rolled off my tongue like honey. However, when I asked a simple question about the location of a product at the store I was met with English. In moments like those I wanted to not be American. I wanted to be a person with whom locals felt comfortable talking in their language. I hate how people felt required to change to English once they assumed I was American. I hate how, on their land, they felt compelled to change themselves

for me. I would go on to grab the soap from the shelf, check out, and walk outside to once again be immersed by Spanish culture. Street life was not dependent on me, I could observe people in their natural state and enjoy the beautiful lightness of being of the Spaniards.

Traveling is something I never knew I needed until I did it; it unlocked a part of my brain and being that up to then lay dormant. I was told I would experience a huge culture shock abroad, yet I didn't - or at least not in the ways I had been told. I welcomed everything. I wanted to soak in everything I saw and witnessed. I traveled a lot, getting to know the nooks and crannies of Spain and various parts of the world. In every place I ate at small restaurants I stumbled upon in alleyways, talked to taxi drivers, missed bus stops for an extra 5 minutes of conversation with a local. I wanted to live the life that was custom for the natives. Learning the more affectionate, down to earth, and organic ways of the Spanish felt natural.

Coming back, I was warned of reverse culture shock. This, I did experience. Being on the UD campus felt more foreign to me than living in Spain. I found myself having less to relate with the people around me. I felt an eagerness to see the world that my fellow students seemed to lack. Oh, how my heart aches to go back abroad!

# Chapter 22

## Two Peas In a Pod

Anna Strikovski

*2025 Spring Semester, London, UK*

*2022 Fall Semester, Auckland, New Zealand*

For me, friendship was something that came and went. Growing up, moving around, and growing apart brought many new friendships, but also ended most. If you had told me a year ago that I'd meet my best friend, Charlotte, in New Zealand, I would have never believed you. Following her on Instagram a week before flying across the world together couldn't have foreshadowed our friendship, even a little bit.

Last year, I decided to spend my first semester of college in New Zealand, a tiny country made of islands in the southern hemisphere, eight thousand seven hundred and three miles away from home. I couldn't tell you what made me decide to go there, but that decision was the easiest one I had made in a while. I knew I wanted to get far away from home because I had nothing to keep me home. No major relationships, friendships, or responsibilities. I had nothing to look forward to besides college and this move. I felt like I was lacking something in the life I had—a best friend. I was beyond excited for the opportunity to change my life, and that I did.

Leaving the United States on July 11 was the most emotional but freeing experience I had ever had. I was sad to leave my family and friends, but I had no idea how indescribable the next four months would be. Eighteen other World Scholars from UD were also heading to Auckland and, after only meeting them for the first time that day, I already felt more connected to them than any of my friends at home. That was likely the case since we were all embarking on the same adventure, eager to share the same unique experience together.

Before that day, I had only talked to one other student, Charlotte. These brief, surface-level conversations about our majors and what sports we played in high school could have never foreshadowed the most beautiful friendship I was about to gain. I think after seeing each other cry as we hugged our moms goodbye, we both mutually claimed each other as best friends. Seeing

each other at our lowest and saddest states upon that first interaction made it easier to talk about how much our lives were about to change, and how different we would be when we came back home. Talking with her for hours in the airport, and texting on the entertainment monitors during the 18-hour plane ride made me feel less alone, and it was the same for her. It was comforting to know that we weren't alone in this, and that someone felt the exact same way about the life-changing journey we decide to go on.

On the first day in New Zealand, everyone was a wreck, Charlotte and I included. Everyone was quiet, teary-eyed, exhausted from the long plane rides, but also exhausted from our emotions. I think we were all also tired of being sad because the second day we were there was one of the best. Despite the torrential downpour outside, walking around Auckland and taking in our new home was the most exciting thing we ever did together. We took a ferry to the closest major island, Waiheke, got to experience the native Māori culture, and explored the most beautiful place I had ever seen. Even in the midst of winter, the island was full of life and color. The water was perfectly clear. You could see every fish and seashell. The black volcanic sand was as soft as silk. The grass hills were lush and home to hundreds of sheep. And at the end of every street, there was a view like no other I had seen before. You could see the skyline of the city, fields of grapes in the vineyards, and an ocean that looked like it had no end.

Each day got better and more interesting. Getting closer to the Americans, the Kiwis, and Charlotte made this strange new place feel like home. Charlotte and I became inseparable. We were a package deal, and still are. We did everything together. On the first day of classes, she got up at seven in the morning to eat breakfast with me before my 8 AM class, even though she didn't have class until 11. And I did the same for her the next day. We became, "those two American girls that are always together." We made the same friends, went on the same weekend trips, stayed in the same sketchy Airbnbs, and even the people we dated were a matching set of best friends.

We packed as much fun and stupid decision-making as we could in the four months we had. If I could go back and change anything, I wouldn't. There's nothing I would do differently. I had never had a person I could talk to about anything. The highs, the lows—I knew she was always feeling the same way, and when we weren't, we would bring each other out of whatever funk we were in. When we had bad days, we would meet after class, go on midnight runs to the convenience store across the street, and make ramen at 3 AM. We were always there for each other. We still are.

Going through something as new and different with someone you've never

met before, will make you click instantly. We have the weirdest things in common, like being in Italy one summer at the same time, living abroad as kids, and having foreign dads. We have in common the most unique things about ourselves but on the surface we're so different. We have different styles, have different hobbies, but once you get to know us and see us interact, we are the same exact person. Honestly, I don't think we would have been friends in high school, but those unexpected friendships always turn out to be the best. If it weren't for Charlotte, I don't think I could have been eight thousand miles away from home for four months. I think my time in New Zealand would have been cut short by loneliness, stress, homesickness, and all the other emotions I felt during that semester abroad.

Friendships can transform the study abroad experience, turning moments of uncertainty into opportunities for laughter, support, and shared growth that make a foreign place feel like home. There's no doubt in my mind that Charlotte and I were brought together for a reason, and if we ever part ways for some unforeseen reason, I truly believe the universe will put us back together. We're two peas in a pod, and together is how they're supposed to be.

# Chapter 23

## Cobras, Crooks, and Crossroads

Abigail DeWese

*2024 Fall Semester, Rome, Italy*

While my 2024 fall semester took place in Rome, Ryan Air took me under its wing and allowed me to travel throughout Europe and Africa. When describing my trip to Marrakech, Morocco to family and friends eager to hear of my travels, I note that it is the most different, and therefore enlightening, culture I have ever experienced. Being an American citizen, I have seen and heard about diverse cultures, yet I was never truly immersed in those as dissimilar as this one.

As the plane landed in Marrakesh, I noticed the flat, dusty terrain and setting sun. The warm air hit my face, and my group entered a sprinter van to take us from the airport to the city, but that was not nearly the end of our journey. The van stopped at a busy intersection, and we were instructed to get out and follow our guide, however, this was quite a treacherous road, and I remember the fear I felt commanding the cars, people, carts, and wagons to stop as we crossed. I even recall pausing to follow, then receiving a confused look from our guide, a common theme throughout the trip. We walked through the labyrinth of streets, which were enclosed corridors, lacking any navigational info, which caused us to lose our bearings a few times. Upon arriving at the luxurious hostel, we were greeted with cats, a shallow pool, and French primary school students on an educational excursion, who were quite loud throughout the night, especially since the walls were paper thin and the doors were loose on their hinges. This detail stuck with me especially, because it was bewildering to see young students on school outings to a different continent, much less country.

One of the pivotal experiences I had, on our first full day, involved dining at a small restaurant for lunch. A friend and I ordered the chicken tagine, a classic Moroccan recipe filled with delicious and aromatic spices, worth a fortune to import to the US. I still describe this as one of my favorite dishes. However, we forgot to take cash out of the ATM and did not have enough money to cover the bill. We hastily explained the situation to the owner, who luckily spoke English, and even offered euros instead; however, they surprised us.

The kind family explained that we could simply walk to the ATM, which was at least a half mile away, and come back to pay. We left the restaurant in shock and attempted to find the ATM and somehow navigated back. Finally we were able to compensate for the meal, still in awe of their blind trust in us.

Further exploration led us to the city square, which still raises the hair on my arms, even being thousands of miles away. As we entered the packed and lively stone yard, I spotted live snakes and monkeys on display for tourists to take pictures with. These animals made my heart stop, looking as if they were ready to strike, but they were not even the scariest part. The hagglers and tourist-trappers who grabbed us and tried to apply henna were ferocious and fearsome. That seriously scared us, not knowing what could be next. Luckily, we made it out OK to tell the tale and only spent about two euros.

I will never forget the best tastes and flavors imaginable in every stage of the meal, especially the freshly brewed tea, sounds of clatter, yelling, carts, and music, and the aromas coming from the spice and perfume shops. While this city seriously spiked my cortisol levels, I found that I learned a great bit about myself and was able to experience this beautiful culture as much as I could. The feeling of taking that first step across the busy road and asserting myself into the lane stays with me in every decision I make, as does my great leap of faith in holding one of the furry monkeys on my arm. Confidence is a learned skill, and the events of this program taught me the importance of being assertive with others and yourself in order to grow as a cultural learner and ambassador—showing how studying abroad fosters self-confidence by pushing you to navigate unfamiliar environments, communicate across cultures, and trust your own abilities in moments of uncertainty.

# Chapter 24

## My Sunday with Sheep

Natalie Fournier

*2023 Fall Semester, Madrid, Spain*

I've always thought American traditions were extravagant. My winters had been filled with lavish wrapping paper, almost perfect gingerbread cookies, and Santa's sleigh rides in the snow. My springs consisted of collecting plastic eggs scattered in my freshly mowed lawn, from the department store, and looking out for the life-sized white bunny. My favorite American pastime would have to involve the saying of thanks and the golden array of pies handmade by my mother and me. The celebrations of American culture will always be something I value. However, it wasn't until I made my journey abroad to the rich, staggering country of Spain that I would realize how different and exhilarating the customs of other cultures around the world would truly be.

The Sunday of October 22, 2023, was picture-perfect as I strolled through the streets of Madrid with my pack of other Delaware students. The cobblestone streets were covered in water marks from the avid street cleaners, making the city seem clean and refreshed. The crisp leaves danced through the sky and I pulled my European trench coat closer to my chest, a clear indication that fall was approaching. The aroma of freshly baked chocolate croissants and freshly brewed *cafe con leche* wafted through the air as we passed our favorite spot in all of the city, *Levadura Madre*. My travel companions and I excitedly made our way down to the metro station leaving behind any of our exhaustion, excited to join in on the Spanish festivities. The screeching metal carrier came to an abrupt halt as the metro doors began to squeak open. Trying to avoid getting lost in a sea of Spaniards, we held each other tightly, keeping our pockets fastened and out of the way of any suspicious pickpockets. A mother held her child firmly in her lap as he sang a sweet Spanish melody, his three-year-old manner much more civilized than American children I had known. As we approached the *Banco de Espana* Station, our hearts filled with excitement as we patiently waited on the escalator, eager to participate in *La Fiesta de Trashumancia*.

The Trashumance Festival was an untouchable custom I had read about in high school, heard stories from past students, and had only ever seen blurry pictures online. The entire city would line the streets of Madrid as sheep migrated their way from the Northern regions of Galicia towards the warm Southern Coast. While I had thought American customs had been unique, Spain definitely knew how to take the cake when it came to this celebration. As my friends and I left the crowded and humid metro station, we began searching for our familiar American pick-me-up location, Starbucks. While I had attempted to blend into my new European society, something about a freshly brewed chai latte with oat milk had complete power over this American girl. My hands cupped the white paper cup as I watched as yellow and red flags soared through the air while approaching my lookout spot.

My friends and I happily waited for the streets to become engulfed by fluffy white sheep, led by the people of Galicia. A bell, as loud as an airplane struck, and a white sea began approaching us. Hundreds of sheep inched their way closer down the *calle* and my excitement only grew. Small Galician children acted as their sheep dogs by ringing cowbells, creating the path. The children were dressed in beautiful garments with an array of colors and beading. The sheep finally reached our spot, and we carefully held our hands out to brush them as they passed by. Rams with thick and intricate horns blended into the sea of animals making themselves hard to distinguish. I examined the sheep's fluffy, blanket-like wool as they paraded around us, unlike anything I had seen in a petting zoo.

After about twenty minutes, the parade of sheep had finished their route and it was time to board the metro, leaving behind muddy tracks on the pavement, and a barnyard stench. My mind swirled with thoughts about what I had just witnessed. Did I just watch hundreds of sheep walking through the city streets passing by McDonalds and other Americanized delicacies? This experience would never not be mind-boggling. The immersion into Spanish culture was not only something that I had dreamed of, but had somehow changed my entire perspective on celebrations and community-based gatherings.

Experiencing *La Fiesta de la Trashumancia* opened my eyes to how traditions—no matter how different—bind people together through shared joy and cultural pride. While American holidays have always filled my heart with comfort and familiarity, Spain showed me that the world holds countless other ways to celebrate life, gratitude, and togetherness. I realized that the true beauty of any culture lies not in how extravagant its customs are, but in the sense of belonging they create. I now understand that traditions—American or Spanish—are universal languages of connection, reminding us of the value of community and the simple joy of being part of something bigger than ourselves. My Sunday with the sheep will forever be one of my favorite memories and I will silently celebrate this holiday in my own country every October.

# Chapter 25

## My Host Family in Siena

Kristina Smyth

*2025 Winter Session, London, UK*

*2024 Winter Session, Siena, Italy*

This past January, I had the opportunity to spend a month in a small town named Siena located in the Tuscan hills of Italy. This experience changed my life as I met two amazing people, my host parents, Ilia and Marcello, who did an amazing job teaching and immersing me in their culture. Ilia and Marcello are an elderly couple, who have lived in Siena their entire lives. They raised their two sons there, and now have four granddaughters. Their strong passion for traveling is why they host many students from all over the world. During my stay with them, Ilia and Marcello shared the different experiences they have had traveling. They have been to so many different counties, they have lost count. Ilia and Marcello explained to my roommate and me how those experiences have shaped them into who they are today. They shared that to them spending time together in new places and seeing new amazing things has been such a gift.

We were fortunate enough to share dinner with them every night. In Italy, family dinner is something extremely important and valued. This was something somewhat new to me. Even though I am very close to my family, we are all usually so busy and have such different schedules now that my brother and I are older. Due to this, family dinners are not necessarily part of my everyday routine. What I enjoyed about these family dinners is that no matter what kind of day I had, or what might have been making me anxious or sad that day, I could walk into a home and talk about the good, bad, and everything in between that was on my mind. Ilia and Marcello always applauded my roommate and me for all of the hard work we put into our schoolwork. They explained that hard work is what allowed them to live such a fulfilling and enriching life. We learned so much about their past, and they even told us about how they met while dancing with one another at a local restaurant years ago. Their ability to always have fun with one another is what has made their relationship stay so strong after all these years. Although they

did not speak any English, we were able to have the most wholesome and fruitful conversations.

I have found that something I constantly struggle with is living in the moment and not getting overwhelmed about the “what ifs” in my life. I think this is something that changed for me because of this trip. Ilia and Marcello did not have it easy, even though it may have seemed that way. On the outside it looked like they were a perfect couple with a beautiful home and family in such an amazing place. While that may be true, living with them allowed me to realize so much more. Marcello had a handful of different doctors appointments each week and both of them had numerous health issues that they struggled with. I would have never known there was so much going on because each day they had such a bright and positive attitude. Instead of stressing about these things that were outside of their control, they just made the most of every single day they had. It was truly inspiring to see. They helped me realize the importance of being where my feet are, and focusing on only what I can control.

Our host mom, Ilia, was extremely wise. She reminded me so much of my Nonna back here in America, and she served as a comfort person in my life. After a long day of classes, or traveling on the weekends to other cities, it was such a relief knowing I had a safe home to return to at night. One thing Ilia and Marcello constantly did was remind us about the importance of family. In Siena, all residents are born into something called a *Contrada*. There are seventeen *contradas* throughout the city. When they originally explained the meaning of a *Contrada*, I was confused and unsure of exactly how these groups created such a large impact on so many people. *Contradas* are districts within the Italian countryside. After spending a month in this city, and meeting several locals, I now understand that these *Contradas* mean so much to these people because they truly value the people in their lives. Although the people in their *Contrada* were not blood relatives, they explained that what really makes someone family is the way they care about those around them and the bond and connection they make with each other. By the end of my month in Siena, I felt like Ilia and Marcello were part of my family.

I noticed such a shift in my point of view of life after this trip, and I believe that my host family had so much to do with that. I think a constant stresser in my life is the thought of growing up, and the change that comes with it. Ilia and Marcello showed me the positives of growing up and experiencing life. They reassured me that it was not something to be afraid of, instead it is something to look forward to. Living with a host family gave me an authentic window

into another culture and taught me the value of connection, adaptability, and empathy in ways that no classroom ever could. Ilia and Marcello taught me to never take anyone for granted, and to value those who have been there for me through it all. They reminded me to never be scared of new things and places, because for all I know those new things entering my life each day could be the best things yet. Although Ilia and Marcello are older now, they do not let that stop them from fulfilling their dreams of traveling and helping others around the world do so with their generosity. They value the importance of making genuine connections with other people. My experience studying in Italy was amazing, but the biggest impact the program had on me was meeting my host family. I will cherish these memories forever.

# Chapter 26

## In the Eyes of a Spanish Physician

Julia Sayco

*2023 Winter Session, Merida, Spain*

During the 2023 winter session, I had the opportunity to shadow Spanish physicians and observe their day-to-day routines within a variety of specialties in a public hospital in the Extremadura region of Spain. This clinical shadowing experience lasted 3 weeks and each week was dedicated to a specific specialty assigned by the host organization staff. I was able to shadow within urology, gynecology, and internal medicine, along with featured specialties including ophthalmology and rheumatology. I wore mint green scrubs provided by the hospital while shadowing in the hospital. The practical attire made me feel much more acquainted with my surroundings and in touch with the people working there.

After receiving my acceptance letter for this study abroad program and preparing for months prior to departure, the day had finally come for the first day of shadowing within the hospital in Spain. Feeling nervous, I had no hard expectations for what I would learn on a day-to-day basis; but little did I know, this experience would drastically change my life for the better. The first day of shadowing consisted of a brief orientation for all of the students to understand the map of the hospital and learn which departments were on each floor. Immediately following orientation we were let out into our designated specialties. I was assigned to shadow the Urology Department for the first week of the program. After knocking on their office door, I met Dr. Carlota, an attending urologist and the first-ever doctor I shadowed in Spain.

Dr. Carlota barely spoke English, requiring me to pull some of my background knowledge of Spanish to communicate and facilitate conversation. Luckily for me, this particular cultural transition was smooth. I started studying Spanish at a young age, and was currently enrolled in the Spanish for Healthcare minor. My background in Spanish served me well. I remember Dr. Carlota asked me what I knew about urology, to which I laughed and responded “*nada*,” translating to “nothing.” We sat down at her desk where she opened up the *Campbell-Walsh Urology 12th Edition* and drew out the basic renal physiology on blank sheets of paper for me to interpret. She held a constant warm smile and was patient in allowing me to learn more about her specialty. Since my first day of shadowing was her office day, I only saw her finalizing medical charts for her patients. However, the next few days were filled with a whirlwind of surgeries, I never thought I would have the chance to see up close.

While shadowing in Urology, I witnessed both major and minimally invasive surgeries, including anastomotic strictures, hydrocelectomies, orchidopexies, nephrectomies, vasectomies, laparotomies, and transurethral resections. A vivid memory I had while watching an anastomotic stricture was when a fourth-year Urology resident pointed at the surgical display monitor to state that there were tumors growing. I sat in amazement as I watched the attending physician work on these newfound tumors by utilizing surgical instruments and electrocautery. I asked the doctors how long they knew those tumors were present, to which they responded that they were discovered at that exact moment. The idea that the doctors identified something potentially cancerous within a short amount of time and while performing this procedure was incredibly eye-opening.

After observing many urological surgeries within the operating room, I transitioned into shadowing the gynecology unit for the second week in Spain. Gynecology and Obstetrics had always been my dream specialty, so learning more about their typical working day was something that excited me the most. The gynecologists began their day by having a roundtable discussion to update each other on any changes involving their current clinical cases. It was a daily endeavor of, quite literally, a circle of healthcare professionals putting their heads together to give the best advice and offer early solutions to rising health problems. Forever ingrained as core memories in my mind, I will never forget seeing beautiful and healthy babies being born on two separate occasions: one through a natural delivery and the other through an emergency cesarean section.

The exhilaration and thrill of the hospital staff rushing through the swooping doors of the delivery room was a feeling I've never quite felt before. I felt the whole shift of happy energy throughout the room. I heard the ob-gyns calmly saying "*sigue*" (translating to "go on") to the mother as she pushed with full and mighty force to finally meet her baby. Low and behold, a baby boy was born and whisked away, where he was taken by the nurses to be washed and swaddled in soft white clothing. After the birth, the ob-gyns worked quietly and swiftly. Within minutes, life was brought into the world; and in my heart, I knew deeply that I would find joy in helping facilitate smooth procedures like this.

Despite the happiness brought by a successful newborn delivery, I realized that being within the obstetrics department is not all sunshine and rainbows; with life, there's also hardships and even death. A few days later, I watched an emergency c-section. In contrast to the natural delivery, I embraced the drastic shift in energy and understood the urgency as the nurses began their preparation in laying out the metal forceps, needle holders, and retractors on two tables. This feeling was of panic, frustration, and sadness.

Shadowing in the Spanish hospital altered my life in the best way possible. Allowing me to view healthcare through a different lens broadened my perspective. With every single moment spent within the walls of that hospital, I grew a stronger appreciation for their healthcare team and a fervent need to pursue my dream of practicing medicine. I have seen, in the eyes of a Spanish Physician, that saving lives is no easy feat.

# **Part II:**

# **Reflections from Alumni**



# Chapter 27

## Study and Revolution in 1968 France

Bonnie Robb

1967-1968, Caen, France

In the distinguished 100-year history of UD Study Abroad, my own unforgettable experience came at about the 50-year mark, in 1967-68. A French major, I had lived in *La Maison Française* on campus and had worked in summer 1966 (as a chambermaid) in the French-speaking canton of Valais, Switzerland. At that time, UD did not have the vast array of study abroad options that exists today; however, the opportunity to spend an academic year in France presented itself thanks to the dedicated initiative of our professor from the Department of Languages and Literatures, Dr. René Coulet du Gard, who recruited students from UD and several other universities. We crossed the ocean on the glamorous SS United States! Arriving in Le Havre, we traveled by bus to *l'Université de Caen* (Normandy), to be welcomed by the director of the *Cours pour Etudiants Etrangers* (CEE). While waiting for new dorms to be completed, we happily settled into a cozy family-run hotel in downtown Caen for the first semester, soaking up the atmosphere of the city and walking through the grounds of William the Conqueror's château on our way to classes!

We were immersed not only in French culture, but also in a broad international community. Indeed, a wonderful feature of our CEE courses in French language, civilization, and literature was that we were in classes with students from all over the world. Even outside class, French was our only common language, promoting fluency and cross-cultural friendships. We took meals together in the *restau-u* (*restaurant universitaire*), with occasional invitations from host families to elegant home-cooked cuisine. At the CEE, we were tested to determine placement at level *élémentaire*, *intermédiaire*, or *supérieur*, and I was glad to be placed in the *cours supérieur*, a curriculum from which all classes transferred to UD as 300/400-level courses, and which even included two advanced grammar courses with native French speakers. (We felt abashed when the CEE director told us he had requested kid-glove treatment for us in the latter, since he had noticed that foreign students—Americans, in particular—were accustomed to more personalized attention

from professors than was generally given in France!) Our professors were encouraging, but demanding. We adjusted to the French 20-point grading scale and were subjected to the French system of final exams in two stages: first *l'écrit* (written exam), which one had to pass in order to be admitted to the second part, *l'oral* (oral exam), where one could earn honors (*mention bien*) or high honors (the coveted *mention très bien*).

Our experience was enriched with excursions—to Mont-Saint-Michel abbey, perched amidst dangerous tides; to Bayeux, with its magnificent tapestry depicting the 1066 Norman conquest of England; to Rouen, whose cathedral Monet painted in ever-changing light, centuries after Jeanne d'Arc was burned at the stake in the Place du Vieux-Marché; to the D-Day beaches where Allied forces landed in June 1944. To us as baby-boomers, World War II seemed long ago, but actually we arrived in Caen little more than 20 years after the war; we were students in a city that had endured German occupation, severe Allied bombing, and heavy civilian casualties. That time was still present in the minds of the French families we met, and our perspective broadened as we learned from them and about them—and about ourselves—during our stay.

Like all study abroad students, we were seen as representatives of our country. In 1967-68 Caen, we were viewed, in a way, as descendants of the American GIs whose liberating role was respectfully remembered. Still, the 60s had issues we were pressed to explain: JFK's assassination, the Civil Rights movement, and—during our very time in France—the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968 and of Robert Kennedy in June. Learning of these through French media, we looked at our country from abroad, expanding our worldview and encountering diverse worldviews. At a student gathering, I was challenged by a North Vietnamese student to justify America's role in the war in Vietnam—this at a time when America was very much questioning itself. Nevertheless, international friendships thrived, in and out of class: among my many indelible memories is that of a late Saturday night when six of us—French, Swedish, Dutch, Syrian, Malian, American—spontaneously headed for Paris in a Citroën 2CV, singing Beatles songs!

Then came *Mai 68*! The French—and we—were suddenly in the midst of a revolution. A student revolt had begun in Paris Nanterre University and the Sorbonne, followed by worker strikes, riots, and violent confrontations with police, with nationwide repercussions. Students in Caen went on strike; classes were cancelled. At a gathering of international students, four of us were delegated to attend a university-wide meeting, charged with declaring our “*solidarité*” with striking French students, but requesting that we be given final exams in June in order to present grades to universities back

home. While French students had no exams that year, effectively losing a year of their studies, it was moving to witness both students and university officials at that meeting vote graciously to accord final exams to international students.

In the month preceding exams, many traveled. With French public transportation on strike, the Eurail Pass luxury enjoyed during our spring break was unavailable but we improvised. A French friend drove me to the outskirts of Caen, whence I hitchhiked to Vienna, Austria, lugging a suitcase laden with textbooks, to visit an Austrian friend of my family whose career in the U.N. I greatly admired. We all arrived back in Caen to take challenging, two-stage final exams. Then, rather reluctantly, we boarded the SS United States for the return voyage.

It was a life-changing year. Studying in Caen prepared me for the rigors of masters and doctoral studies, and inspired me throughout my career as a UD French professor. I later returned to Caen as a study abroad program director—a joyful homecoming allowing me to see the transformative experience of study abroad through the eyes of a new generation of UD students.

# Chapter 28

## From Faculty-Led to Taking the Lead

Bianca Mers

*2019 Winter Session, Budapest, Hungary*

*2018 Winter Session, North Island, New Zealand*

As an International Relations major, I had always planned on studying abroad, but the seeming inevitability of my experience did nothing to diminish the impact or importance. After two study abroad experiences, I was motivated to organize my own independent international research trip, all of which continues to inform my personal and professional trajectories.

I studied abroad during the winter sessions of both 2018 and 2019. Having participated in the Delaware Diplomats, a program that awards scholarships based on student engagement at international events on campus, I was able to put my scholarship toward my first study abroad in 2018, which was a program that offered two Communication courses and took place on the North Island of New Zealand. Led by a UD faculty member from the Department of Communication, we studied public speaking and the art of happiness, as observed through the lens of the values and lifestyle of New Zealand and the Maori people. My second study abroad experience was during the following winter session in Budapest, where I took a 400-level public policy course taught by a faculty member from public policy that compared the policies of Hungary and the United States. Though vastly different and unique experiences, the lasting effects of the programs were similar.

The skills, awareness, and confidence I gained through study abroad shaped my experience at UD far beyond the programs themselves. I was able to strengthen my cross-cultural communication skills by interacting with the speakers, guides, and friendly folks we encountered in our host country. My awareness of the values and lifestyles of communities outside of the US. was heightened. Perhaps most importantly, my trips abroad gave me so much more confidence in my ability to interact with new people and travel to new places. Each of these aspects would become key motivating factors as I organized my own independent, international research experience.

In Summer 2019, I went to Buenos Aires, Argentina for a 2-week independent research experience to work on my undergraduate thesis. My field research in Buenos Aires focused on the applications of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I selected Buenos Aires because it was a major city in South America that had made notable commitments to the advancement of the SDGs. Using observational research, my goal was to understand how Buenos Aires operationalized the SDGs and to see what impact, if any, they had on the lives of people in Buenos Aires.

I relied on a network across the University of Delaware that was supportive of my interest in pursuing international research. As a McNair Scholar, I was supported in pursuing research full-time during the summer. I worked with my professors in the Spanish department, many of whom have strong relationships and connections in Buenos Aires, to set up my accommodations with a host family and coordinate on-site programming through an independent tour guide. I was also awarded an Honors Enrichment Award through the (then) Honors Program, which funded my expenses for the research trip. My thesis advisor was a constant advocate, approving my trip, writing letters of support, helping me navigate the administrative and international research process, and, most importantly, empowering me to pursue this experience. The resulting trip was not only the highlight of my thesis, but has continued to inform my personal and professional pursuits.

My field research in Buenos Aires was also one of the most impactful experiences from my time at UD. While in Buenos Aires, I attended *La Rural*, an annual agricultural and livestock show, visited a local clothing company that goes to great lengths to source their wool responsibly, and viewed sprawling informal settlements. Between formal events, I worked with my local guide to gain insight into local happenings, set up tours of relevant neighborhoods, and viewed some of the major cultural landmarks of Buenos Aires. While my trip was modeled off of the organization and structure I had seen through my past study abroad experiences, it was incredibly rewarding to be able to put together a program that was entirely focused on my research and personal interests. It was also a personally empowering experience. From writing an application for funding to applying my Spanish in the field, I had new and challenging experiences unlike anything I had done before. This confidence, combined with the passion I have for the sustainability of the built environment, were two of the key factors that motivated me to pursue a Masters degree in City and Region Planning at Georgia Tech.

After UD, I continued my education to build off of my passion for the built environment and international research. In graduate school, I furthered my understanding of how broader policies were implemented at the local

level and the impacts these policies have on people's lives. My final studio experience was with a community group in Ponce, Puerto Rico, which we visited during our spring break, to support their advocacy efforts around youth empowerment and communal infrastructure improvements. As a working professional, I continue to draw inspiration from my academic and international experiences to provide a different perspective.

Through my study abroad and independent research experiences, I was exposed to other ways of living a "good life," which not only informs my personal choices, but has empowered me to challenge systems and norms in the US to improve quality of life for all. The opportunities I've had to meaningfully engage with new people and places continue to shape me into the person I am and will be.

# Chapter 29

## A Lifelong Journey that Began in Cairo

Catherine Zimmerman

*2013 Spring Semester, Cairo, Egypt*

The day of my 30th birthday, I found myself on a restaurant terrace overlooking the Auckland harbor with a group of first-year UD World Scholars. We were celebrating the end of their first semester abroad in New Zealand with a final dinner before embarking on the 36-hour journey back to the US. The students had written letters to themselves at the beginning of the semester and as I passed those letters back to them, I watched as they sat around the table, laughing and crying and thinking about how much they had changed in the past four months.

This bittersweet moment brought me back to 10 years prior, when I was preparing to embark on my own study abroad journey. I spent a semester living in a middle-class neighborhood in Cairo, taking classes in Arabic and politics, and experiencing the simmering of post-revolutionary Egypt. Although I lived with other American study abroad students, our program matched us with “language buddies,” Egyptian students from local universities who were interested in getting to know us. We went on excursions with our language buddies and met periodically in our apartment for discussions on topics like gender, class, and religion. As we grew closer with these Egyptian students, they became much more than language exchange partners - they became our close friends. We were invited to weddings, birthday parties, family dinners, and holiday celebrations. They took us to restaurants and neighborhoods we never would have discovered on our own, encouraged us to try new foods, taught us slang and even how to use the Arabic chat alphabet to communicate via text and social media. I remember having movie nights in our Dokki apartment, our friends Youssef and Mahmoud putting on a classic Egyptian film and periodically pausing it to explain the jokes, references, and double meanings. It was because of Heba and Menna that I tried sheep brain and liver for the first time (and probably the last time, but it will always be a fond memory). I learned to better understand the country as a whole by looking at it through their eyes, and also began to understand my own identity and how different facets of it can come to light when placed in a new environment.

These perception and identity shifts were not always comfortable. Adjusting to the gender dynamics in Egyptian society was one of the more challenging ones. All of the women in our program struggled at one point or another with the ever-present street harassment and the cultural norms that prevented us from existing in the public sphere in the way that we were accustomed to at home, sometimes wearing on us so much that the thought of leaving our apartment felt impossible. This was the first time in my life that I ever had to confront my sense of identity as a woman. I see these identity shifts in my students, now, too, both international students in the US and American students abroad - those who find themselves standing out as a foreigner for the first time in their lives, or being seen through the lens of gender, language, ethnicity, or religion in ways they never had before. The deconstructing and reconstructing of one's sense of self is confusing, sometimes painful, but this is what people mean when they say study abroad is life-changing. You will never see yourself or the world in the same way, again.

When I returned to the US, I got involved with the UD English Language Institute as a Peer Mentor, where I helped international students adjust to American college life and the Newark community. Helping international students find their footing felt like a way for me to pay forward the kindness my Egyptian friends had shown me, and I found myself appreciating my home in new ways through the eyes of those seeing it for the first time. I remember walking through White Clay Creek with a group of Chinese students who were amazed by the natural beauty of a landscape I took for granted. "The trees are so tall and straight!" one of them exclaimed. I still think about that comment when I am out in the woods and now have a newfound appreciation for the towering maples that I would not have given a second glance otherwise.

I eventually returned to work full-time for UD, first at the English Language Institute and then at the Center for Global Programs and Services, where I work currently as a coordinator for the World Scholars Program. I try to create opportunities as often as possible for students from different cultures and backgrounds to connect with each other. One of my current roles is to oversee the iHouse Living-Learning community, a residence hall community for students interested in building international friendships, developing intercultural skills and broadening their global perspectives. Monthly culture nights allow students to come together and celebrate their cultural heritage, try new foods, dances, or crafts, and connect with students who share similar interests. These interactions help students understand themselves and others on a deeper level, fostering mutual understanding and empathy.

One program in particular that feels like an echo of my own study abroad experience is the American Host Partnership Program (AHPP), a program that pairs international & domestic students for cultural exchange and friendship. AHPP provides a unique opportunity for students to engage in cross-cultural dialogue and to reflect on the process of building and maintaining intercultural friendships. It is unique in that it is not a mentoring program. Although American students are expected to take a leadership role as “hosts” in their own country/communities, both partners are teaching and learning from one another as they build a friendship. Structure and support are provided to give partners a chance to reflect on their experience and get help with any issues that may arise, but pairs are also given the freedom to be creative. Students have invited their partner over to their apartment for dinner, or even brought them home for the holidays. Many keep in touch long after the program ends.

Reflecting on my journey from being a student abroad to helping facilitate these experiences for others, I have witnessed firsthand how cross-cultural interactions can profoundly shape one’s identity and worldview, and how a semester abroad can launch a transformation that lasts well beyond the four months of the program and continues to impact, not only the students who participate but, those around them. I may have returned home from my semester abroad long ago, but I will always be on that journey of transformation and self-discovery.

# Chapter 30

## Merged and Centered

Melanie Mitchell

*2005 Winter Session, Pretoria, South Africa*

*2004 Winter Session, Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji (multiple cities)*

*2002 Summer Semester, Paris, France*

Cultural exploration is woven into the fabric of my being. I am the product of a mother and father who exposed me to two different worlds. My mother was born in Germany and raised in Munich. My father was born in Alabama and raised in Orange, New Jersey. From the time I was a little girl, I recall my mother sharing her love of languages and culture with me. Prior to college, I traveled to Europe (France, Germany, and Spain) often to visit family and develop meaningful memories with them. Looking back now, these formative experiences are how my passion for travel and gaining an appreciation of different cultures started.

My collegiate journey began in fall 2001 at the University of Delaware. In spring 2002, I took a course with a French professor and learned about an opportunity to study abroad in Paris, France for five weeks that summer. I jumped at this opportunity to travel to Paris - only this time I would live with a host family who spoke limited English, affording me the opportunity to become fluent in French. After completing this program in my freshman year, I became eager to identify other opportunities to study abroad.

Upon declaring a leadership minor my junior year, I learned from my roommate about the opportunity to study abroad in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji over winter session 2004. This program would fulfill six credits toward my minor and would provide me with the opportunity to visit a new continent. Both my roommate and I were accepted into this program and embarked on this life-changing journey. In addition to scuba diving in the Great Barrier Reef, sky diving in the adventure capital of the world - Queenstown, New Zealand - and bungee jumping in Auckland, New Zealand, I appreciated learning about both the Aboriginal and Maori cultures.

Fast forward to my senior year at UD, when I needed to fulfill a history requirement, so I enrolled in a course focusing on the history of South Africa.

At the time, I remember attending two class sessions on the UD campus taught by a South African professor and realized that I wanted to take this course in South Africa. I searched for, applied, and was granted admission to a UD winter session study abroad program in South Africa that provided the opportunity to study the history of South Africa on the campus of the University of Pretoria.

As I reflect on these formative experiences of studying abroad across three different continents, I envision my personal values of travel, community, culture, and adventure. My passion for cultural immersion paired with my personal spirit of adventure is how I merged the curricular and co-curricular learning moments on each program. Each lesson learned and each new experience added another perspective that empowered me to center inclusive practices in my personal and professional experiences by listening to others and providing space for them to have a voice to share their lived experiences.

I desire to travel to all seven continents in my lifetime. This vision was created as a result of the three study abroad programs I chose to participate in during college. This personal goal underscores the passion and curiosity that I have had since childhood for cultural exploration and that I intend to pass onto my children as my mom did for me.

I currently serve as a professional in higher education. Throughout my career, I have shared my experiences studying abroad with my own students and encourage each and every one to consider studying abroad as they map out their collegiate journeys. I am a lifelong learner and believe that exposure to cultures and experiences different from your own is how you become a globally-minded citizen who can positively impact your state, region, nation and the world.

Studying abroad is a high impact practice that students can take advantage of during their time in college. Throughout my career in higher education, I have seen students light up when they reflect and share about the transformative experience that they have had abroad. Conversely, it brings me joy to help college students eliminate barriers to seeing themselves study abroad no matter which major(s) or minor(s) they declare and/or the concerns or fears that may arise from them. Making the decision to incorporate studying abroad while pursuing an undergraduate degree has been life changing and impactful. I am grateful for international exposure to different people, the spaces that welcomed me as a Black woman and for the breath-taking landscapes that I photographed. These memories have been woven into my life story.

# Chapter 31

## Reflections on Spain

Emily Cardner Egan

*2010 Fall Semester, Granada, Spain*

I printed my name in clear lettering at the top of the TSA form with a pen that I borrowed from the flight attendant. In 2010, Customs forms were filled out with pen and paper, not fancy touch screen computers with face recognition. I scribbled my answers to the following questions:

“How long did you stay in Spain?” *Four months.*

“Where did you stay in Spain” *With a host family in Granada.*

“How much money are you bringing back with you?” *Negative dollars.*

I signed my name and stared at the form. I guess that was how the government summed up my study abroad program, but that’s not how I would. The form didn’t capture the important experiences I had during my time abroad.

They missed the part where I met the best friends of my life, Kelsey and Lesly, two of my study abroad mates. We spent every day together in those four months, exploring the winding streets of Granada, Spain. It’s where the three of us ate so many different tapas, drank pitchers of freshly squeezed orange juice or followed the scent of incense in and out of the Arabic storefronts. We would travel all around Spain to Ronda, Sevilla, Barcelona, Madrid, Cordoba, and Malaga. Each city had its own unique subculture that collectively defined the entire country.

The form missed the part where we traveled to other countries in Europe, each with their memorable stories. There was the time when we were stuck in a train yard in Slovakia because we were in the wrong train car. Or the awful moment when our plane to Italy dropped 100 feet in the air, starting a lifelong fear of flying. Who knew we would eat the best potato chips to ever exist in London’s Parliament? We will never forget the moment when our waiter “jumped” off a cliff in Portugal to pick fresh mint leaves for our drinks.

They missed the part where I learned a new language, both in my classes and because it was the only way I could communicate with my host mother. The first few weeks in September were a struggle, but by December I could carry on full conversations with strangers.

I guess you can't expect much from a Customs form. I stowed it away in my backpack, excited to see my family, yet sad to leave my new friends. To leave Spain. I didn't need to be sad, though. Kelsey and Lesly went on to be my roommates after graduation and my bridesmaids at my wedding. We've traveled to every continent since our first trip to Spain. We've been to Australia, Colombia, Zimbabwe, and Vietnam, to name a few. We are currently planning our next adventure, 13 years later. Lesly introduced me to my husband, Sean. I brought him to Granada a few years ago, to my old apartment, my old classroom, my favorite restaurant. The city felt the same, welcoming me back like an old friend.

I stepped off the plane and handed my paper to a Customs agent with my passport, full of new stamps that I collected over the previous months. "Welcome back," he said, as he handed me my things.

I gave a half smile in return. Yes, I was back in the States, but I was a new person. A person with two new best friends. A person with a much better Spanish accent. A person who saw things and experienced things she never dreamed for herself. A person who knew what she wanted out of life, and knowing that a little Customs form could not contain the full depth of what I picked up abroad.

# Chapter 32

## Language Lessons

Matthew Anderson

*2019 Spring Semester, Chengdu, China*

*2018 Fall Semester, Granada, Spain*

*2017 Summer Session, Xiamen, China*

*2016 Fall Semester, Madrid, Spain*

For me, study abroad has always been intimately connected with language learning. One of my primary motivations for choosing Madrid and the World Scholars Program was to surround myself with Spanish. As I left the United States for the first time and experienced the thrill of learning a language on its own terms, I felt I had found my purpose. In junior year, when we were required to study abroad for a minimum of a winter or summer session, I took the whole year. Not having had enough, I also studied at a German language school for a month my senior year.

I felt invigorated by the personal transformation I underwent in Madrid, in Granada, in Chengdu, and in Heidelberg. In the anonymity of foreign languages and landscapes, I felt so free. I felt that my soul had been given permission to do what it yearned to do: roam and wander, dedicate time and love to languages so I could watch myself be reborn through the vocabulary and grammar of someone else's childhood.

How special it felt to live these new experiences in these new places. I watched my Spanish escape the placeless language of the textbook to take on the lilt and accent of my adopted Spanish home. I began to wrap my head around how one could communicate all one's thoughts without the aid of tenses in Mandarin. I cherished the intellectual thrill of learning about the totally new subject of philosophy in Spanish, and felt how my first encounters with Plato and Socrates would forever be marked by the language of Cervantes.

I've heard it said in the international education field that it takes about three months to feel truly settled and at home in a foreign place. I remember how it happened to me each time, each split second of "eureka!" where the foreign became familiar, the strange became relatable. But for a semester student,

that time period can be a blessing and a curse: just as you feel settled, you have to make plans to go back home.

I ended each semester reluctantly with a period, as if placing a period on a story I wasn't ready to finish. I knew that it was my destiny to expand upon my undergraduate experiences and weave them into something greater. I wanted to know what it felt like to count your time in a country in years, not in months. I was willing to give my youth to some place, until its language became inseparable from the blood that flows through my veins. To get to that point, I had to make a decision—if as an undergraduate I could be a Three Languages major and accumulate local experience with each language, I would then need to choose one path and accept the opportunity costs to reach even farther beyond my horizons.

How lucky I was, then, to receive a Fulbright to Taiwan. While it was frustrating that my grant, which was supposed to begin in August 2020, was postponed to January 2021 due to the pandemic, I was so fortunate to be able to leave the US at all. In a feat of government efficiency, Taiwan managed to remain COVID-free amid worldwide lockdowns. Their government took a risk in bringing in teachers from the outside, and I owe them my gratitude for allowing me to enter as a teacher and embark on my dreams.

I got out of my three-week quarantine and knew I would be staying a long, long while. In those times, getting into Taiwan as a visitor was next to impossible. The support from my Fulbright program was the only reason that got me in. After a few months, I realized teaching wasn't for me. I felt relegated to an extra-societal role, living in but not as a part of society. I wasn't passionate about teaching English; in fact, it ran counter to my worldview and my goal of mastering Chinese. That's when I started making plans to do a master's degree in Chinese Literature, and started classes at National Taiwan Normal University in August 2022.

When you set out to do something difficult, you can imagine abstractly what difficulties you might face. I knew that my background in Chinese History and Literature would lag behind my peers, and I would have to work extra hard to keep up. However, knowing in the abstract is different from feeling in the concrete. As a straight-A student in my undergraduate program, I had to cozy up to the bare minimum. The academic pressure felt like being placed in calculus before learning to add, and the cultural tension was just as intimidating. I found myself feeling weak, unable to express myself in a sea of misunderstandings. On top of these inherent difficulties, I had to work to support myself, unlike the majority of my Taiwanese classmates who lived

with their families, and I had to take more credits than average to make up for classes I didn't take in undergrad.

As human beings, we grow in stages. As students, the tasks we can complete are organized in a hierarchical manner, and we learn by moving from bottom to top. When I felt frustrated by what I saw as a professor's unreasonable assignment, or when I felt like resources for international students in my program were insufficient, I reflected on how far I had come.

How special it was to arrive alone at Taipei's Oktoberfest and leave with eight new Taiwanese friends and to hear one of them say: *because you speak Chinese so well, I feel able to connect with you on a deeper level*. How proud I felt to notice in a round of class presentations the self-confidence I had gained. Watching first-year Taiwanese students present, I felt that I was no longer haunted by the idea of inferiority: I felt proud of my academic progress, of my contribution to the classroom forum.

I've always been the type to forge my own path—to decide on my goals and search out the right environment rather than let my environment decide my possibilities. When I think back to navigating tram fare violations with the German police or dealing with the tedium of transfer credit forms to reach my goal of studying in China, I feel so grateful for where I've been and where it's gotten me today. I feel that one day, I'll see again how present troubles can transform into future stories of triumph.

# Chapter 33

## Rooted in Reporting

Xiomara Moore

*2021 Fall Semester, London UK*

*2019 Fall Semester, Madrid, Spain*

In 2019, a group of fifty students and I traveled across the Atlantic to a land filled with community and paella or, as it's commonly known, Spain. I was finally able to leave my town, my state, and my country to experience a whole new culture and lifestyle. It was the first time I had left the country so it was a significant change for me.

As the plane at Philadelphia International Airport prepared for takeoff, I felt every emotion imaginable as my hands were sweating and my heart rate increased. The higher the altitude, the more my heart raced. For the entire flight, I was tense and alert. I felt every movement, every tremble of turbulence go through my body. It's unimaginable to think that just two months earlier I didn't want to go to the University of Delaware and then found a program called *World Scholars* that lured me back, yet simultaneously sent me far away. The program gave me the opportunity to visit and live in places where I never thought I would be able to go.

In my first semester in Madrid, Spain, I was able to form connections with people I would have never met if I were not abroad and that ability to connect with others has bled into my postgraduate experience at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. In my graduate program, at least 90 percent of the student body are international students. Since I was briefly an international student myself, I understand some struggles that they may have, but also how exciting it is to live in a country you have never been to before with people you do not know. Recalling those feelings of nervousness and excitement has helped me to connect with others who are from different countries and Americans that have studied abroad themselves.

My second study abroad experience during my junior year in London, England, solidified my decision to become an international reporter and, therefore, to apply to Columbia's Journalism School. In London, I was in the birthplace of journalism. We walked down the very streets where some of

the first newspapers were published. It was amazing being there, but then I suddenly realized that the internship I was placed in—with a marketing consultancy firm—wasn't the field that I was passionate about. There were so many international stories that I could write about. I was truly sad when I had to leave London without having the opportunity to gain real-life experience as an international reporter, but that feeling led me to apply to multiple graduate journalism programs with a particular focus on international news. Without my study abroad experiences, I probably would have stuck to reporting on local news. Being able to actually live in places that I could report on allowed me to expand my worldview and see what was possible for me.

Lastly, my experiences abroad have helped me to easily adapt to new situations such as graduate school. When I was abroad, I had to figure out how to get to class on the metro while reading signs in a foreign language, how the school grading system worked, and where to go when I wanted to go grocery shopping or just wanted to have fun. These experiences have made the transition from Delaware to New York a lot easier. I already know what I need to do in order to get settled because I've been through the "move to a new city" process two times already. All in all, my time studying abroad was valuable to my educational experiences and my life in general. Through study abroad, I discovered the beauty of travel and adventure. I also learned valuable lessons such as how to be more open to new opportunities. As I continue my postgraduate life, I can look back on my study abroad experiences to help me when times get rough. I believe that without the benefits of growth and perspective of study abroad, I could be in a very different place right now, and I am thankful for every opportunity I have been given.

# Chapter 34

## Travel: An Expansion of the Global Mindset

Nicholas Sava

*2015 Winter Session, Rome, Italy*

The concept of travel is often associated with luxury and affluence. However, immersive adventures are as crucially influential in a person's cultural sensibilities and political ideologies as any college course or professional experience. For centuries, humans have utilized travel in some capacity to improve their existence, ranging from the notorious explorers seeking glory to nomadic peoples searching for superior natural advantages. Today, people should understand this importance and prioritize travel for themselves. No matter how far or short the distance, cultural integration expands a person's global mindset. My personal experience with the University of Delaware's study abroad program is one that I will remember forever, and it has altered the course of my life. It can be difficult to express one's personal travel experiences to others without imposing haughty or banal stories, but travel is a unique and privileged experience - an adventure worth sharing that was influential for me, and could be for others.

According to many, effective leaders possess a global mindset or the capacity to communicate with those of unique backgrounds and cultures. Certain characteristics of a global mindset can be heavily affected by the experience of traveling and studying abroad. Humans must expand their global mindsets not just in professional settings, but in their personal lives as well. Understanding those who are different from ourselves is how humans embrace and utilize diversity and inclusion practices for powerful advantages. Moreover, this is how society improves cohesive teamwork and passionate empathy. Travel not only requires people to learn more about fascinating historical events and eclectic cuisines, but allows them to discover things about themselves of which they were previously unaware.

In January 2015, I along with fifteen other students whom I had never met before, ventured across the Atlantic Ocean brimming with nervous anticipation as to what we might discover during our time in Italy. When I originally decided that I should take the plunge and register for the travel

abroad program, the destination was an easy choice. As a descendant of Italian immigrants, I was determined to connect with my ancestral roots, learn more about my cultural heritage, and perhaps partake in the world's finest cuisines and vintages. Despite my excitement, I was tremendously nervous since I was on the precipice of a major life event, graduation. Travel, it seemed, might be a good escape and provide a new journey.

When our group departed the United States, it was blustery and frigid outside. We landed on the island of Sicily eight hours later, greeted by the salty bouquet of the illustrious Ionian Sea and the romantic pleasantries of the townspeople. Syracuse, a small town just off the sea, provided a great introduction to the trip. Those first few days were full of countless prosciutto sandwiches, meals featuring fish freshly plucked from the sea, and views of impressive structures surviving since the Roman Empire. Our group spent those first few days taking in as many of the sites as we could, which forged a strong bond between us all.

A few days later, we boarded a small aircraft and headed for the next destination, the eternal city, Rome. It was truly a humbling experience to walk among the ruins that have endured so much over the past 2,000 years. None of us could comprehend how long that period is, yet our group walked among the same structures that were built in the time of Julius Caesar and the philosophers who developed rhetorical ideologies that are still applied today. What an eternal city Rome is indeed!

Each day followed a standard procedure, but each was its own unique adventure. We started with a locally prepared breakfast, followed by class, "Introduction to Rhetorical 2 Studies," and completing assignments. Next were guided tours of Rome's most impressive edifices and piazzas accompanied by hearty pasta dishes. While these experiences were amazing, the afternoons and evenings provided the best moments of the program with a self-guided quest across the city. One day we independently boarded a train to explore the ancient town of Florence. During these journeys, it was easy to interact and commune with locals. People who were just as fascinated to learn about our own culture as we were to learn about theirs. They bestowed upon us insights that no guidebook possibly could.

This experience was truly essential to my personal development. First, I learned how to make friends in an unfamiliar environment. In just a few days' time, our group developed a synergy that sustained us for the entire trip and beyond. We learned from each other, we laughed together, and it was an experience we will all share forever. I also learned how to integrate

myself into unique situations and socialize with diverse peoples, which is an example of an important skill for any person seeking their place in this world.

I developed a lust for travel and exploring the unknown. Not long after graduation, I embarked on a cross-country road trip. I would eventually accept a transfer in my job to a distinctive location and I am currently planning another trip back to the warming embrace of Italy, with a slightly different itinerary. No matter where you find yourself on the arc of life, remember the eternal phrase crafted by a Roman: “*Carpe Diem*,” or “seize the day.” Travel as much and as often as you can, for you will only be rewarding yourself.

# Chapter 35

## Lots of Opportunities, Lasting Impact

Colleen Kent Greenstine

*2011 Winter Session, Santiago, Chile*

*2010 Winter Session, Siena, Italy*

Though the tastes, memories, and experiences feel as vivid as if they happened yesterday, it has been more than a decade since I participated in several study abroad programs at UD. As a student in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, it was more or less a given that I was going to study abroad. Little did I know how my three opportunities abroad in thirteen short months would shape my career.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to study in Siena, Italy, during Winter 2010, which is when I excitedly received the first stamp in my passport following a draining eight-hour international flight. After a week of exploring Rome, we traveled to Siena and met our host family. Each night after a day of classes, I gathered around the dinner table with my host mom Lucia, my host dad Roberto, and my two host brothers who lived down the road but were breaking bread with us more often than not. My host mother was an amazing cook, but my favorite part of dinner was dessert—delicious blood oranges, crunchy lady fingers, or some other sweet treat, which would then turn up as part of the following day's breakfast.

My host family also had two cats, Sisi and Isidoro. One night, I heard a scratching at the window, and between the closed shutters and window, was Sisi. I let him in and opened the bedroom door so he could go to his bed in the kitchen, but he decided to curl up in my bed instead. The next morning, my host mother mentioned she could not find Sisi the night before. Apparently, he was usually particular about his evening routine and she was worried when she couldn't find him - whoops!

A few short months after returning from Italy, I was awarded a scholarship through the German Department and Delaware Saengerbund to attend the Hessen International Summer Institute in Summer 2010. When I first arrived

in Germany with my two fellow Blue Hens who also earned the scholarship, there was a heat wave or, as I understood the weather as someone who lives on the East Coast, regular summer weather. After a week, the weather settled to typical European summer temperatures and my Iranian, Hungarian, and Russian peers and I were wearing sweaters. In contrast to my familial experience in Siena, my time in Fulda was a more independent experience. As this was an international program, I was not surrounded by English speakers or faculty program advisors to help me acclimate to my surroundings, but rather I regularly heard swirls of Russian, French, and other languages as together we all figured out how to live in this new country.

After experiencing the sweatshirt-necessary European summer, I was ready to replace a typical East Coast winter with a hot and sunny January spent in Santiago, Chile. There is something very special about getting sunburnt on top of Mount Osorno in January. Again, I was fortunate to live with a host family. My host mother was eight months pregnant, so I spent lots of time with the woman who came to help out around the home and her six-year-old daughter, Connie. Connie and I watched Disney movies in Spanish together, and as she often saw me flipping through my Spanish-English dictionary to look up the words I did not know, she took it upon herself to draw a butterfly in the back of the dictionary and write down the words that she knew how to spell. I am now the proud owner of a one-of-a-kind Connie original, which I took with me on the program's weekend excursions along the Chilean coast. That dictionary served me well when a friend and I explored a used bookstore. The store's owners understood that my knowledge of Spanish was limited and were in turn very patient with me. They spoke slowly, helped me figure out which used books were appropriate for my reading level, and stayed in contact when we returned home.

Two short years after my "year of travel," I graduated and was fortunate to remain at UD to pursue a graduate degree in German Literature. While in my graduate program, I was selected to be the International Business Graduate Assistant in the Alfred Lerner College of Business and Economics. I worked with both international and US students pursuing the International Business major, which has a required study abroad component. I was able to use my international experiences to empathize with international students in their transition to UD and an entirely new culture and community. While I had the support from fellow UD students and faculty program directors on my abroad experiences, international students are, in contrast, very courageous

as they travel far from home, many times to a country where they do not natively speak the language. As a language and culture student with years of formal study under my belt, this very thought intimidates me.

I can confidently say that if I did not study abroad the three times I did as a UD student, I would not have been selected for the graduate assistantship, which directly led to my employment in the Registrar's Office, back to academic advising, and ultimately to my current position at UD in Enrollment Management Strategic Initiatives. Although international travel is a love I cultivated during my first few years as a UD student, this Blue Hen always comes back to the nest!

# Chapter 36

## My Little-Known Secret about Study Abroad

Kristen Halvorsen Pickering  
*1989-1990, Mannheim, Germany*

I'll let you in on a little secret: not everyone who undertakes a study abroad experience is doing it for the reasons you might think. I was an exchange student twice in my life: once as a 16-year-old high school senior and, again three years later, during my junior year at UD. My friends and family thought that I wanted to go to Germany to learn about the language, the culture and the people—and sure, I was interested in all that. But truth be told, I knew that setting off for a country 4,000 miles away from home would save me from the helicopter parenting of an overprotective mother and keep me from running into my ex-boyfriend.

The reality is that teenagers and young adults don't get too many opportunities to reinvent themselves, especially in today's day and age. There's no escape from the leash we call a cell phone and so many eyes watching everything. "Fear of missing out" is such a phenomenon that it has become an acronym that we know all too well. It's hard to make an abrupt break from social circles and our little patch of reality even when we want to. And sometimes we very much want to. People who don't feel like they fit in, or who are hurt by someone they just can't avoid, generally only have drastic options for their self-preservation, options that would usually stunt an academic career. But study abroad? It's literally the world on offer for us, and it comes all wrapped up with a big overachiever bow on top.

Here's the part though, that no young person fully understands when we embark on a study abroad experience - and this is true no matter where in the world we go - this experience changes us at our very core. Our concept of self develops in part as a result of how others see us. For most of us, that mirror is held up by a group of people who are heavily influenced by American cultural standards. What could a goldfish's life be if he could live outside of his bowl for a while?

As an American living abroad, I was frequently asked about my country's position and perspective on things I might not have understood or agreed

with. I became more informed about US history and policy as a result. Those dialogues led me to ask and learn about others' cultures, and what their perspective of the United States was... and of me by association. There were times I wanted to be seen as an American, and times that I did not. My study abroad experience transformed me into a chameleon who could adapt and blend into my surroundings by observing others - a skill I have continued to apply in my life. In the end, when I returned to the US, I felt like more of an American than when I left, because I was making the conscious choice to remain a citizen. I knew I could make a life elsewhere if I wanted to.

I haven't had many opportunities to travel internationally again in the decades since graduation, but I encourage every young person to take advantage of that chance, and I love that UD has so many options and resources for those considering it. My son, about to graduate from college next month, loved seeing Budapest during a faculty-led study abroad program in January 2020. He thanked me for the push to apply, especially when COVID grounded world travel for a while. My stepdaughter is making plans to begin her senior year in Edinburgh, Scotland, and I have to bite back a smile when I see that her excitement and anxiety are warring for dominance. I remember those days so well. My advice to quell the panic is that everything will be so vastly different from anything you can imagine that you might as well just let go of any preconceived worries.

When people ask me how my time abroad impacted me, it is so difficult to respond. After all, I haven't used my degree in foreign languages and I haven't continued to travel. I'm old enough now to admit that I found myself in Germany because I was running away from my life here, but those reasons don't really matter now. Ultimately, I discovered a resilience in myself I never knew I had. I became a person who took an interest in the world around me. I developed a habit of looking at an issue from perspectives that aren't my own. I attribute these traits to my study abroad experiences and I would be amazed if anyone else undertaking the experience wasn't touched by a few of those characteristics themselves.

# Chapter 37

## Full Circle: The Lifetime Impact of Studying Abroad

Angela Velez

*2006 Winter Session, Italy (multiple cities)*

Nearly twenty years ago, I had a newly minted passport in my hand and was about to embark on my first trip abroad to Italy. By then, I had actually traveled *farther* away from my home state of New Jersey (Hawaii) and spent countless hours in airplanes to visit family in Puerto Rico and on the West Coast. But my Winter 2006 study abroad program with the University of Delaware was my first opportunity to travel outside the US borders.

My choice to travel to Italy was grounded in my studies as a UD student – at the time I was a voice major, focusing on Italian art songs and opera, with my music and art history coursework emphasizing the aural and visual artworks created and curated in Venice, Rome, and Florence. It was no surprise that I signed up for a study abroad program that was a joint effort of the then Department of Music and the Department of Foreign Languages.

Under the guidance of my professors, we climbed the tower of Florence’s Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore; saw Samuel Ramey in Verdi’s *Attila* at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples; walked in history’s shoes in the Forum and Pompeii; attended a jazz concert in Rome; toured the wonderland that is Capri; took in a last-minute Vivaldi concert in Venice; and wandered Verdi’s hometown. Since the European Union had not yet reached all of Italy’s corners, and contacting home required a prepaid card or an internet café, we found ourselves completely immersed in our surroundings. By the time we left, I could introduce myself, count, order food, and shop in Italian, and had become so familiar with Rome, Florence, Venice, and Naples that I was my family’s tour guide when we returned nine years later. I came back to UD with lasting memories and a thirst for international travel that continues to this day.

Decades later, I am back at the University of Delaware as Associate General Counsel, working directly with UD’s international programs. Now, I know how unique and lucky it was for me to have a safe, affordable, study abroad experience that was tailored to my interests. I am privileged to work closely

with our study abroad office to support our faculty and staff in fostering the same transformative experiences I once had as a student, and in strengthening our connections with partners across the world. The collaboration with our partner offices has become more important than ever.

Indeed, my study abroad program in January 2006 was not free of hiccups, including a factory worker's strike that shut down the highway on our way to Pompei, the loss of my traveler's cheque card to an ATM machine, several pickpocketing incidents, and days of unending rain in Venice. Anyone who has traveled abroad could probably relate to similar experiences, but they are more impactful to a college student just making their way into the world.

UD's commitment to these programs has evolved correspondingly over the last twenty years to proactively plan for and face the challenges of internationalization, whether they are as big as climate change or as small as a lost ATM card. I am really proud of the way our institution balances the value of connections across the globe with strategic planning, preparation, and risk management to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of our community members. It makes me proud to be a study abroad alum and supporter, and I am excited to continue this work with my colleagues.

# Chapter 38

## From Delaware to the World: A Blue Hen's Journey

David Máthé

*1989 Spring Semester, Vienna, Austria*

I had just finished a presentation to a room full of business leaders about economic development in Delaware when I decided to take a walk around the old town section of Tallinn, Estonia to unwind. As I did, I began reflecting on my incredible journey from UD student to State of Delaware government official, traveling the world.

I have had the privilege of working in international trade promotion for the State of Delaware for more than 30 years.

I am also a proud UD alum—and even prouder UD Study Abroad alum—where I earned my degree in Political Science with a minor in German. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel with my travel soccer team to England, West Germany, and the Netherlands when I was in high school. Studying German came naturally to me when I started in high school, and I chose to continue studying the language at UD. One of my favorite German teachers at UD, Trudy, also taught my father in high school when she started her teaching career. It was a great small world connection and I took as many German classes as I could.

In the fall of 1988, my father and I were at the Delaware Sangerbund Oktoberfest, and we ran into Trudy, who was a longtime Oktoberfest volunteer. Trudy asked, “why don’t you study abroad in Vienna next semester?” I thought, absolutely yes! Happily, it did not take much convincing for my parents to agree. I spent the spring of 1989 in Vienna, Austria and what an amazing experience that was!

It was one thing to be relatively on one’s own living off campus at UD. It was quite another settling into living in a foreign country. Where do I have to turn in my alien resident paperwork at the local police station? How do I make a phone call to the US from the post office? How does local transportation work to get to class? And doing all of this in German, I lapped it up like a sponge absorbs water.

In the spring of 1989, Vienna stood at the epicenter of the East German exodus through the Hungarian frontier into Austria. They were heady times to be living in one of Europe's most beautiful and historic cities, and traveling behind the Iron Curtain to Hungary and Czechoslovakia only deepened the experience.

As a Political Science graduate, I gravitated towards government and began working for Delaware's lone Congressman, Tom Carper. I enjoyed the work but the study abroad experience kept nibbling at my subconscious. When the Congressman was elected Governor in 1992, I was able to move to the State government and found a job on the Economic Development team. The State was in the infancy of starting an exporter assistance program and I eagerly volunteered to be a part of that initiative.

Just a few months into my new role, my boss turned to me one day and asked what I knew about Santiago, Chile. I replied, "Nothing." To my surprise, he then said, "OK. Well, we're doing a 3-week trade show in Santiago in a few months, please figure it out." Thus began a more than 30-year journey of traveling the world, meeting new and interesting people, helping businesses expand globally and promoting the State of Delaware.

One of my favorite Delaware factoids and talking points to share overseas is that the University of Delaware launched the first US study abroad program in 1923—a true point of pride for the State. That fact usually resonates on its own but it has a little more added 'oomph' when I mention that I am a product of UD's Study Abroad program, myself.

Study Abroad has an even closer connection in my home—my son, a UD senior Civil Engineering Student, studied in Athens in January 2025. My wife, an Italian instructor at UD, will lead a Study Abroad group to Florence in 2026.

The Study Abroad program at UD has had a lasting and enriching impact on me, both personally and professionally. It has led directly to my longstanding career in international trade. I am grateful to the students, faculty, and administrators who all make this program so meaningful, providing countless opportunities and experiences that can be transformative and life changing. It certainly has been the case for me.

**Part III:**  
**Reflections from Faculty**



# Chapter 39

## Where are you from?

Lesa Griffiths Massarotti  
*Professor, Animal and Food Sciences*

“*Where are you from?*” A question often asked of each other as college students meet on campus. However, when participating in study abroad, students quickly learn that mentions of their hometown and even home state often elicit a quizzical expression. They learn to identify as *Americans* from the *United States*. On my faculty-led, four-week study abroad program, students travel as a group of about 35 students, most of whom do not know each other very well, if at all, prior to the program. Perhaps it is the perception that they are now the *foreigners*, identified by themselves and others as simply *American* that begins to create an environment where the students transition from “*Where are you from?*” to “*Who are you?*” and “*Who am I?*”

Most of our excursions require a 1-2 hour bus ride and conversations overheard on the bus reinforce the value of my request that students sit next to a different person on the bus on every excursion. Students ask surprisingly probing questions of each other and I am certain that some of the same questions asked back on campus might be perceived as intrusive and sometimes offensive. Eavesdropping, I stiffen, ready to intercede as I wait to hear the response. What follows, in every case, has been a fascinating, very personal sharing of stories about *who* they are. Having always thought of college campuses as a place where students could safely explore their identity, I have learned that perhaps it is the vulnerability of being identified only as *American*, briefly stripping them of all other aspects of their identity, that eases students into conversations with other students that they might not encounter on a college campus because they have little in common. Of course, these exchanges lead to students finding others in the group that are like them but they also lead to acceptance and inclusion because students have the time to learn about each other, to know *who* they are. Simply stated, one alumnus of the program reflected that he learned the invaluable lesson of *support and caring*. The unintentional consequence of being captive on a bus— the start of a meaningful dialog that goes well beyond “*Where are you from?*”

Discussions that start on the bus continue throughout the program, creating an environment in which students begin to freely express who they are. These conversations include sexual identity, gender identity, faith and religion, ethnicity, race, disabilities, relationship status, and family dynamics. You may think that this period of self-identity and self-exploration is counter to the notion that study abroad is for cross-cultural exploration, and that the focus should be on our hosts, not ourselves. But my experience is that, as the students become more comfortable with these discussions among each other, they are more willing to have the same type of dialog with our hosts. They learn to be better conversationalists – asking questions and really listening to the answers. On my most current study abroad program, when participants were asked to identify students that made special contributions to the program so that we could recognize them at our departure dinner, several students suggested a new award, *Best Conversationalist*, recognizing one of their peers for his ability to engage in conversation and make them feel listened to.

While I think many students are initially interested in studying abroad because of the *place*, I have found that what they have learned about and from each other motivates them to more fully explore the *people* of their host community. My program is in a STEM discipline – Agriculture and Sustainable Food Production - and while we have a few excursions focused on history and culture, the majority are discipline-related. As the program progresses, students begin to talk to host farmers about much more than their crops and livestock. They have asked about mental health challenges, dividing up multigenerational farms between family members, and the challenges of living and raising families in isolated communities. Their interest in these very personal topics is highlighted in their reflective writing which focuses on intergenerational transfer of farms, supporting community, buying local, and quality of life, including mental health. Students become far more invested in understanding social sustainability than other aspects of sustainable food production, an outcome that inspires me.

As we prepare to leave on our program, I always jest with students that in the next month I will learn more about them than I ever wanted to know, but I never imagined how much I would learn about myself, and how it would make me a better teacher and mentor. As a result of leading a study abroad program, my own identity has significantly changed, adding new descriptors both out of necessity and personal growth. And while not all of these new facets of my identity have a place in the classroom back home, the perspectives gained from sharing a month abroad in which students explored and shared *who* they are, has for me, culminated in a more holistic approach to mentoring students. Whether home or abroad, it really is all about people.

# Chapter 40

## Going Back Home Again

Mahasveta Barua

*Assistant Professor (Adjunct), English*

They say you can never go home again. In 2007, when I first proposed a winter Study Abroad program to India, the country I am originally from, I found myself trying to disprove that. I would go home again. I planned a trip that would take my students through all the special places of my childhood, my college days, my young adulthood. We would start in New Delhi, where I touched down for all my trips back home, then move on to Darjeeling, where I spent the first years of college away from home, and then fly east to Assam, my home state. I arranged for my students to experience some home stay, living with hand-picked friends. I did include the tourist destinations of Agra and Jaipur, which didn't hold any special meaning, but the Taj Mahal had to be seen. And so, in January 2009, I was all set with a group of eleven students, to take them down the lanes of my memory.

My first inkling that it would not work out that way was in Delhi. As we settled into the first week, I found nothing was as I had remembered it from when I was a student. Instead, while walking around with Delhi University students who acted as our guides, I was absorbing all the changes that had taken place over a quarter century. I found myself checking out the places my students had heard about from their new friends – outdoor theaters, music venues, clubs, cafes; everything was new to me. Rather than reminiscing, I was discovering along with my students. It was the same in every city where we went. Even in my hometown where I would never have dreamed of going to a nightclub, there I was, sitting with some of the host parents, all of us shouting to be heard above the music that “we didn't even know this was here!” Over the fourteen years since that first trip, I have come to realize that study abroad was not just about students discovering and learning a new culture; as faculty director, I too was on a journey of discovery that has been reenergizing and revitalizing.

More than just those sociocultural changes, that first program was to change the direction of my research interests, as well as my adult relationship with India. As one of my courses was a service-learning class, from the very first

day I had to work at establishing connections with local NGOs with whom I had communicated earlier. Our first visit was to *Katha*, an organization I had known only for their wonderful publications. Sitting through their presentation, I learned that their primary focus was the education of women and children, with their publishing house supporting these endeavors. They invited us to visit their centers, set in the heart of the resettlement colonies (or slums) that they served. As we walked through the narrow lanes during that first visit, and then settled in to work in the centers for a week, I was humbled by the fact of how little I knew of that India – of the unseen spaces occupied by so many families, of the struggles of young children who wanted to learn, of the hundreds of volunteers who had been working for decades to bring opportunities and change to the lives of marginalized people. I knew then that I would have to do more than just the service projects every January. I would have to teach myself, do thorough research, and develop relationships with more than just one organization. In this, too, my students were responsible for shaping the path.

A month after we got back from that first trip, five of my students showed up together at my office. “We want to go back to India and work on our projects for a month, but our parents aren’t going to pay for it. Would you help us raise the money?” Looking at their hopeful faces, what could I say but, “yes.” And that began another exciting new journey for me – digging into undergraduate resources at UD, going hat in hand to various units to raise funds, teaching my students to write grants, taking them to regional global conferences to network, and best of all, making a whole new set of friends and connections within the social-work organizations in India. For example, in my own hometown, through my mother, I connected with the Kasturba Gandhi Ashram – officially opened by Gandhi himself in 1946 – where the women train volunteers to serve in rural areas. Over the last decade, these women have welcomed my students, and joke that they see me more often and know me better now than anyone else in my family.

Since that year, many of my following nine study abroad trips to India have included program alumni who go back to do service. There is no greater testimonial of how much a program has affected students than to see them return. I regularly approach, and am approached by, other service organizations whose focus fits in with my students’ academic training and skills. On one recent trip to see the Taj Mahal, a friend of a friend called. “Are you going to Agra? You must visit this organization that empowers acid attack survivors.” And just like that, a new connection is forged. Back in the US, my affiliations changed from literary to international education and service organizations. My work with service organizations helped me connect with

non-profits in the US and to help people traveling to work within different communities abroad with program logistics. Over these years I have moved away from the world of literary papers and theoretical discussions to hands-on work developing projects and partnerships.

Everything changed with that first program. Now that I think about it – I could go home again. Not to the home I left as a student, but to one where I take my place as an adult within that community.

# Chapter 41

## Swiss Hospitality

George Conrade †

I feel very privileged to have served as the director or co-director of eight Study Abroad programs to Switzerland from 1997 to 2006. In 1996, I accepted the position of Dean and Director of the English Division of the Swiss School of Tourism and Hospitality (SSTH) and at the same time became affiliated with the Center for International Studies and the Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management (HRIM) at the University of Delaware. One of my goals was to establish a Study Abroad between Delaware and Switzerland.

In the first couple of years the students traveled to Zurich, Switzerland where I met and escorted them via motorcoach to Passugg, a village located at about 800 meters overlooking the town of Chur in the southeastern Canton (state) of Graubunden. The students were housed in what was a spa hotel, built around 1883. The facility had been purchased and converted into a vocational training school, complete with classrooms, dining room, kitchen and dorm rooms.

The students spent their weekdays in the classroom, while on alternate weekends took part in planned travel or were free to travel anywhere in Europe. For the planned travel, I led tours to Ascona and Lucerne, Switzerland, and to Munich, Germany via the Black Forest and Neuschwanstein Castle. On their free weekends, the students' favorite destinations were Amsterdam, Paris, and Vienna. I always found it interesting to listen to them sharing their experiences when they returned to Passugg after their free weekends.

At the same time that the UD students were at SSTH, there was always a group of students from the former Soviet bloc countries preparing for an internship in Switzerland. These students prepared the daily meals under the guidance of SSTH's chefs and served the UD students. It was amazing to see how well the UD and Eastern European students adjusted to each other's language differences and became friends.

I left SSTH in 1999 and joined the HRIM department full-time, but the Swiss Study Abroad program stayed pretty much the same. I traveled with the students to Switzerland instead of just meeting them there and a

couple of times, another HRIM faculty member served as a co-director. The courses changed sometimes but were always selected to satisfy a UD HRIM requirement.

In 2002, it was suggested that I shorten the Swiss portion of the trip and add time in Italy. The group still stayed at SSTH for the Swiss portion, but we selected a hotel in Siena, Italy for the Italian stay. The Italian part of the trip occurred in the week or so prior to the world-famous Palio horse race in Siena. This gave the students the chance to see the preparations that went into the Palio race, while also experiencing the early festivities that took place in the town.

While staying in Siena, we set up day trips to various sites. We went to Florence, Italy and to an *agriturismo*, where the students had a chance to assist in the preparation of a farm-to-table Italian dinner. We also took the students to the Banfi winery in Montalcino and to the Culinary Institute of Tuscany, the Olive Garden chef-training facility located in the charming 11th century hamlet of Riserva di Fizzano, in Chianti, Tuscany.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the students, sharing my insights about the Swiss country and culture and learning from them about their interests. The Study Abroad programs provided a great opportunity to really get to know the students on a personal basis and to help them achieve their professional goals.

*† This essay was submitted by Professor George Conrade as part of the 2023 CGPS Essay Contest, before his passing in January 2025. We publish it here with deep appreciation for his contributions to our academic community.*

# Chapter 42

## Revolution is not History

Colette Gaiter

*Professor, Africana Studies*

Cuba did not have 3G mobile internet service until 2018. Until then Wi-Fi was in places like businesses, institutions, hotels, and some parks. People sat close to each other outside with their faces in their phones, signaling a hot spot. Cubans paid by the minute to use Wi-Fi and stood in long lines to buy expensive cards with scratch-off codes that allowed access. Over the years we visited, the cost was between \$2 and \$10 per hour. Sometimes there were no cards to buy at any price. In January of 2015, 2017, and 2018—UD students gave up 24/7 internet access on their mobile phones (paid seemingly imperceptibly on a monthly plan) and agreed to live virtually disconnected for three to five weeks. That's how much they wanted to go to Cuba.

Students had different motivations. Some had relatives who had left or were still there. Others wanted to visit a mythical Cuba of palm trees, beaches, nightclubs with live bands and dancing, and ride in rebuilt shiny 1950's cars. We experienced all of that, but there was more they could have never imagined. A few students knew of Cuba's reputation for contemporary art and poster design.

I developed the course Media/Design/Culture in 2009, now open to all university students, to teach multicultural visual literacy. Cuba was the perfect place to learn how to read visual culture because it is the primary medium for disseminating their revolutionary ideology and history. The country won its independence from Spain in 1898, fighting with the US in the Spanish American War. The American Revolution happened almost 125 years earlier and is now distant history in our public mind. The actual 1959 Cuban Revolution that ousted the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista is vivid in the memories of Cubans who are no older than the students' grandparents. For those who do not have direct memories, images of revolutionary leaders are everywhere.

Revolution is not history but, to people in Cuba, a way of life as their struggle against the US and global capitalism continues. There are few billboards

except those with revolutionary slogans or advertising products and services from government-run companies. There is no competition among brands, just limited choice among various government-made products. Visiting Cuba gave students a rare opportunity to visit a country with a non-capitalist economic system. It was easier to buy a small piece of original art than to purchase aspirin. Artists are paid by the government to produce their work as a necessary part of their economy and culture. Even the most sparsely furnished apartment displays original art because it is everywhere, accessible, and can be inexpensive. When we visited galleries and museums to see work made by world-renowned artists, tour guides explained that Cubans see their creative culture as part of their personal history and value as a nation. Like sports in Cuba, creative talent is nurtured and cultivated from a young age through special schools and programs, resulting in a highly developed creative culture. Art and music are not just everywhere, they are exceptional!

UD students saw that participating in the arts made life rich for Cuban people in a way that transcends money. Creativity mixed with resourcefulness in a place of scarcity makes Cuba a sensual wonderland that attracts tourists from all over the world. We practiced the life skill of looking at a country from a visual culture lens. Students learned that history and values are embedded in every piece of architecture, street art, mural, cartoon animation, film, or gallery or museum work. Through bus windows, on our way to inland cities or rural destinations, they saw vast stretches of uninhabited land interrupted by tall palm trees, and remnants of a lucrative agrarian economy that provided sugar and other tropical crops through enslavement and later exploitative colonialist systems. Because of the contrast between our two countries, Cuba's visual culture and ideology were glaringly apparent.

Student assignments went into visual journals as written texts accompanied by images. Journals could include found objects like tickets, business cards, flyers, leaves, or newspaper pages. Since drawing was the most accessible way for students to include images, some of them rediscovered abilities that they probably left behind in childhood. They reflected what they saw through their own mind and hands. It was not about making great drawings, but processing and communicating their impressions. Hand writing in their journals, using print or cursive, added another level of bodily involvement to their insights and reflections.

Students were shocked by the scarcity and general conditions in the country, despite warnings. They felt inconvenienced, but also newly aware of their own privilege. They wrote in their journals about details like rough towels and searching for bottled water when there was a citywide shortage in Havana. They also experienced centuries-old Spanish architectural grandeur

in historically restored buildings as well as the surprise of using decades-old fine china and real silverware in a medium-priced restaurant. The students' ideas of "value" were challenged by paying exorbitant prices for things that are relatively inexpensive at home but also buying original art for less than the price of a mass-produced poster at a museum store in the US

Despite official government claims that they have outlawed racism since the Revolution, systemic and psychological racism persist in Cuba. Slavery was not abolished in Cuba until 1886, more than twenty years after the US. The mostly white groups of UD students saw Black and mixed-race people everywhere, since they make up the majority of the country's population. De facto visual segregation across combinations of race and class that is pervasive here is less common in Cuba. In a pre-George Floyd world, when systemic racism was routinely ignored, white UD students experienced race in a way that was not possible in the US period. They were in the minority.

I have heard people say that being in Cuba is like being on a movie set. One day in Old Havana a group of students and I walked into a music video taping of Enrique Iglesias's 2017 hit song *Súbeme la Radio*. I am sure we could locate ourselves in the street crowd in one of the overhead drone shots. Even if we cannot see our specific selves, we know we were there and experienced something in real time that would later be available as a recording. There is so little media about Cuba in the US, the students had only partial ideas of what they would find there. Each of them created their own memory recording and they are all different. My hope is that the students will never take for granted, again, the visual signs all around them.

# Chapter 43

## Enhancing Graduate Study in Public Administration Through Study Abroad

G. Arno Loessner

*Associate Professor Emeritus, Public Policy and Administration*

### **Introduction: all learning is comparative**

Study abroad gives graduate students supplemental academic areas of specialization with exposure to foreign travel, roles played by culture and tradition and their effects on governmental, economic and social organization. My study abroad courses evolved in an iterative process. As an Army officer serving in Germany in the 1960s, I gained an appreciation for cultural understanding that inspired my interest in study abroad offerings. As a public administration advisor in Delaware, those interests expanded. Course content and venues changed over the years and concluded with a joint course offered with a Romanian university. Effective cross-cultural education is rooted in clear objectives, aided by interpersonal trust and support to help students understand how values contribute to personal and professional development.

### **The evolution of study abroad courses**

#### *Developing contacts*

It can be challenging to begin study abroad without having contacts to facilitate it. I was fortunate to have a six-month professional leave overseas in 1976, which was extended to allow me to attend the Salzburg Seminar in Austria. Contacts made there subsequently supported my study abroad courses. When I joined the UD central administration in 1978, I was able to organize a program to support UD faculty and professional staff to attend the Salzburg Seminar and develop similar opportunities, among other benefits.

#### *Observing history and culture*

Student experiences abroad help them understand history and the potential for change. Some notable examples include study abroad in Prague in 1978 as guests of the Czech National Academy of Science and receiving the communist party line instead of analysis; a day of meetings with prisoners and

staff in the overcrowded Barlinnie prison near Glasgow, Scotland; a meeting with the Mayor of Milan, which he extended to bring in his staff to hear UD graduate students report on economic development programs in Wilmington and Philadelphia; and an intimate dinner for my students in a private home with persons who had been members of the Dutch Resistance during World War II. There are also examples of graduate students being exposed to issues similar to those at home that included exchanges with experts to discuss alternative approaches and results. Those sessions enabled students to “return to where they started and know the place for the first time.” [i]

### *Connections with foreign universities*

Courses evolved to include more direct interaction with academic units abroad following my professional leave in The Netherlands, where I worked with international organizations, the Institute for Housing Studies (IHS) at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, and the Institute for Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague. The latter two are graduate study programs sponsored by the Dutch government for students from developing countries. Our students and I used the student cafeteria and student housing during our two-week stay. Students organized a full-day student-run academic conference, participated in field trips, seminars and discussions ranging from urban renewal to the Dutch policy of assisted suicide. At one informal student session, an African American student began an intervention by saying, “I am interested in studying the effects of poverty in America,” to which a student from Kenya responded, “with all due respect, most Americans do not know what poverty means.” The comment was not mean-spirited, but it did reflect what developing country students were thinking, and it was shared because students felt comfortable enough with one another to be honest. The takeaway was that most things in public policy are understood within their context.

In addition to engaging with academic programs in The Netherlands, there were interactions with public administration faculty and students at Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland. These included meetings with the Lord Mayor of Glasgow, the Scottish Parliament, the Barlinnie prison and planners and elected officials to discuss a large project to repurpose a former industrial site to residential use. Glasgow Caledonian’s strong applied research public service program offered faculty expertise that produced both a fine program and reinforced for graduate students the value of their participation in applied research work at UD.

### *Developing a joint study abroad course*

I continued to engage in study abroad after I retired from UD by offering courses in Cluj-Napoca, Romania with the Faculty of Political, Administration

and Communication Sciences (FSPAC) at Babes-Bolyai University. The first course offering, titled “Learning to be an Effective Public Sector Advisor” involved Romanian students joining with UD students as interpreters and guides. As interest from both groups increased, the course became a joint course with students from both institutions participating virtually in preparatory seminars during the fall semester and in the two-week field trip in Cluj that followed when students were mixed in teams for applied, comparative, research projects and seminars. Students presented their work at a press conference and finally in reflective and research papers that were graded in the spring. On two occasions, one in the United States and one in central Europe, students from both institutions participated in panels at professional meetings.

The UD/Babes-Bolyai model and the concept of “The Engaged University” upon which it is built are the subject of a book and academic conferences in central and eastern Europe. [ii] Joint course teaching responsibilities are shared, as are some financial expenses, while tuition and grading are managed separately by each institution. As the UD instructor, I met with UD students in the fall to identify areas of interest for the research projects, prepared the syllabus, led two of the three fall seminars, interacted with students on the field trip, facilitated a student-run seminar, helped students prepare for the press conference and edited and graded UD student research papers. FSPAC faculty contributed to the fall seminar, organized the field trip by organizing interviews to complement the research, provided a student conference room with computers and printers, and arranged student housing and a weekend excursion. Students were invited to dinner in faculty homes and fellowship with their counterparts in local pubs and clubs.

#### *Course evolution as a guide for future study abroad programming*

The richness of the experiences that led to the joint course was greatly aided by the help and support of both universities and faculty colleagues. Throughout my experience with study abroad courses, I have been impressed with the importance of trust and personal connections in their planning and execution. This carries over to the importance of university support. I appreciate the involvement of the UD Center for Global Programs and Services in the preparation of this publication and encourage an emphasis upon faculty initiative and creativity.

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[i] Elliot, T.S., “Little Gidding”, 1942.

[ii] See Loessner, G.A., Hintea, C. and Neamtu, B., Learning to be an Effective Public Sector Advisor, NISPAce press, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2018.

# Chapter 44

## Study Abroad, A Personal Journey

Peter Rees

*Professor Emeritus, Geography and Spatial Sciences*

I am a product of study abroad. Born in London, a scholarship took me to Montreal as an undergraduate, then to Berkeley for graduate work with additional research in Mexico and the Caribbean Lesser Antilles, before finally arriving in Delaware. Exposed to the diversity of languages, food, cultural behaviors and landscapes, I never permanently completed the journey home. Today, I still remain mentally (and some tell me I still sound) somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. But this personal history provoked a passion for imparting the value of study abroad and it has engaged my fifty-plus years of teaching during which I have directed twenty-nine study abroad programs.

It began in 1972, the second year of President Trabant's Winterim "experiment," when I drove a van packed with nine students the length of Great Britain, exploring the nature of British New Towns. After a second London program, I took a break and instead subjected my young children to their own study abroad experiences in Europe and Mexico. Then in 1985, Julio DaCunha in the art department invited me to jointly lead a program we called *Society, Art and Culture in London*. While we all joined Julio in galleries and museums as he took us through the history of painting, he accompanied me as we walked the city, tracing and interpreting its historical and geographic development. Students called us "the inside and the outside profs." Learning more than perhaps I taught, I developed my study abroad rule: only direct a program if you either know the place very well or you are with a colleague who does. My London program evolved over the years, focusing progressively on the city's response to the Millennium, urban planning, the environment and sustainability. Driving a van rental that probably troubled UD administrators' liability concerns, I also always took students cross-country to the English Lake District, allowing them to understand the contrasts between urban and rural landscapes and the dual role each played in British literature, history and politics.

One January morning on the south bank of the Thames as students were huddled around me trying to take notes and a North Sea snow was blowing horizontally in our faces, I did wonder if perhaps there were other locations in which to pursue study abroad. The next year (2005), I was

offered the chance to join Krystyna Musik, a native of Buenos Aires in the Foreign Languages department, as the Latin American Studies Program representative on the Argentina winter session program. Although I knew Mexico and Central America well, I had never been to South America but Krystyna was a native so I followed my “rule” and agreed that indeed Buenos Aires in summer had some advantages over London in winter. Three more Argentina programs followed, jointly with Stella Hall and Doris Manzano, both from Foreign Languages. Exposed to the cultural vibrancy of Buenos Aires, students learned the tango, took excursions to Iguazu Falls where we watched smugglers brazenly moving goods between the borders of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, rode horseback with gauchos in the Pampas, hiked in the high Andes, and watched glaciers calve in Patagonia. However well-prepared I was with book knowledge, again, like most teachers, I learned as much as I taught.

London still occasionally called and I had always wanted to direct a program that contrasted the city with Amsterdam. Both were powerful medieval merchant centers, one highly planned and the other much less so. I broached the possibility with my colleague Yda Schreuder who is Dutch. Her response was quick: Amsterdam in January, are you mad? I pivoted to Plan B. Then how about Barbados? We had both conducted research on the island and knew it well. Yda was now enthusiastic and thus began four additional programs exploring how a small-island country responds to the stresses of climate change with little influence over its causes. Once again, students were exposed to cultural diversity, with research projects that varied from how Barbados conducted its national elections to whether invading poisonous lionfish could be converted to a local restaurant delicacy.

While directing study abroad programs is now behind me, I continue to advise and admit students to UD’s Semester in Copenhagen, a program I initiated in 1984, and which is now our longest continuous-running semester program. Students can take a wider range of courses than in any of our other semester programs, from art history to neuroscience, from European politics to child development, from computer science to sustainability, all the while experiencing the Danes’ distinctive blend of a humane society and a culture infused with *hygge*. Many returning students report life-changing experiences as a result of their three months abroad. And this is the essence of study abroad. When you engage with other people in other lands, you cannot help but make comparisons, realizing that there are many ways to confront different issues and challenges. It forces you to take stock, to re-evaluate views, attitudes, beliefs. It is a powerful educational tool and is why so many of us as teachers find the effort to direct such programs worthwhile. For me, it has been a life-long journey.

# Chapter 45

## The Best of the Best: London Design Program

William Deering

*Assistant Professor (Retired), Art and Design*

For over twenty-five years, a select group of undergraduate students in the Department of Art and Design studied abroad in London during the summer session at the end of their junior year. London, England—renowned as one of the world’s great centers for art and design—is an ideal setting for this experience. With an international view, the city pulses with creativity across Art + Design disciplines, such as advertising, fine art, graphic and editorial design, illustration, photography, interactive-social media, typography, letterpress, architecture, fashion, and industrial design. This program came about after much cold calling to leaders in the international design field. Getting past their agents and personal assistants was always a challenge and required lots of persistence. This rolodex continued to build as agencies and experts opened their doors to our students. Each year the program incorporated 50+ art related visits, lectures, and presentations. These experiences provide an important educational foundation and inspiration for those planning to enter the creative industry.

For many students, this program provides an excellent opportunity to broaden their visual creative development and image-oriented global perspective. Immersed in London’s vibrant artistic community, the program focuses on people and places that shape the creative arts. As part of the program, students were challenged by some of the agencies to present their designs for a formal critique by the best in the business. Yes, there were plenty of formal talks, but there were also the unexpected moments like when one of the presenters grabbed his guitar and serenaded the group for the next half hour.

The response from the London creative community continues to be overwhelmingly positive about our program. Many industry professionals have noted that very few schools in the US or Europe have developed a program of this nature. One of the designers once noted that the only reason he agreed to speak with the students was solely because they had traveled so far to see him. The program is consistently described as a “once in a lifetime” and unique opportunity for the students that everyone wants to contribute

to. This is such high praise as the professional creative community in London includes some of the very best in the city and in the world.

As a long-term study abroad director who has led 35 programs, I can say without hesitation that the London program stands out as truly exceptional. For twenty-five years, it's been a success, with students often describing it as the most meaningful and transformative experience of their college career. To date, more than 500 students have participated in the UD London summer session program, each returning home with academic insights, professional development, and personal growth, from their experience living and learning abroad. In between group meals, listening to speakers, spending time at exhibits, navigating the London Underground, and completing their assignments, the students made lifelong friendships, and ultimately renewed their passion for design. Traveling and studying abroad is, by its very nature, both an adventure and challenge, and those who choose to take this path show a genuine desire to expand their academic, personal, and social horizons.

Many alumni of the program say that the study abroad program in London was the most impactful part of their UD education. Three former students who participated in the early years of the program credit one of the designers that they encountered as the inspiration for founding their own successful design studio in New York City. For the past three years, they have returned to London to meet with their mentor and last summer these alumni served as inspiration for the newest group of summer London study abroad students when they co-led a session at their mentor's design office.

From a director's perspective, studying abroad is nothing short of a once in a lifetime experience. The quality of learning our students achieve continues to inspire and motivate me from year to year. I will conclude by saying that the ongoing success that we've seen with the London program and many others at UD is due in large part to the excellent support and outstanding partnership of the University's Center for Global Programs and Services and the Study Abroad Office. I look forward to continuing this incredible journey of guiding students as they discover the world—and themselves—through the power of art, design, and global engagement.

# Chapter 46

## The View from the Front: What My Students Taught Me About Cultural Adaptation

Suresh Sundaram

*Associate Professor, Marketing*

My journey to the United States in 1996 as an international student changed my life and career trajectory. So, when my colleague reached out to co-direct an Australia program, I took it as an opportunity to create that same kind of transformative opportunity for my students. Preparing for my first program in January 2010, I developed content focused on providing a comprehensive understanding of how students would experience cultural immersion. What I didn't anticipate was that across 25 programs, over 15 years, the teacher would become the student.

The traditional study abroad narrative positions faculty as cultural interpreters who decode foreign contexts for inexperienced students. However, I discovered something more nuanced. Students don't simply receive cultural knowledge. They generate it, challenge it, and ultimately allow us to witness how the transformation happens.

### **When Students Become Teachers**

I have been fascinated by the self-discovery we all uncover on these programs. I have found that cultural adaptation isn't linear, and confidence isn't always predictive. Students continue to teach me that transformation often looks like struggle, homesickness can coexist with exhilaration, and the most meaningful learning happens in moments of discomfort that no faculty member can (or should) eliminate.

There was even a humbling moment in Australia when my co-director and I stepped onto our apartment balcony, only to have the sliding door lock shut behind us. We had to call one of our students to rescue us. When the student arrived, all three of us burst out laughing. That moment revealed our shared vulnerability. It showed that we, too, could falter and rely on others.

The most meaningful lessons have emerged not from my faculty expertise, but from students' lived experiences abroad. Students taught me that cultural competence isn't about eliminating mistakes but rather recovering gracefully from them. They showed me that homesickness doesn't mean the program is failing; it means students care deeply about what they have left behind.

One former student told me that companies almost always asked about her study abroad experience during job interviews because it distinguished her from other candidates. Every one of us is, after all, just a human being seeking connections.

### **When Crisis Becomes Connection**

No program goes without its hiccups and these moments are often some of the most profound. During a company visit, a student experienced an unexpected emotional crisis: personal trauma memories triggered by the presentation. While the rest of the group continued with the scheduled visit, I sat with her as she worked through her distress. That afternoon taught me the profound lesson that sometimes resilience is not carrying on despite being broken, rather it is about stopping to acknowledge the pain before moving forward. Responding with compassion rather than judgment in someone's most vulnerable moment can transform the dynamic into an enduring friendship.

Years later in Australia, another crisis emerged when a student faced a medical emergency. By coordinating care, navigating hospitals, and communicating across time zones, I forged connections extending beyond him and his family.

These moments taught me that our most important role isn't always about content or logistics. Sometimes, the most meaningful work is simply being fully present as students confront their fears and grow. In both crises, the comprehensive support systems and resources provided by UD and CGPS were invaluable in helping me respond effectively. That said, there are other times when the best thing a faculty leader can do is to get out of the way. Students need space to struggle, fail, recover, and succeed on their own.

### **Discovering Hidden Capabilities**

The moments that push boundaries the hardest are often the most rewarding. A student terrified of heights reluctantly attempted the Sydney Harbor Bridge climb. When she reached the top, her disbelief, pride, and joy for stepping outside her comfort zone were palpable. She taught everyone that courage isn't simply the absence of fear; it's taking the next step anyway.

Perhaps most striking are students who discovered entirely new career paths. One reflected: “I had no idea at the time that I would end up employed there,” after visiting a prominent multinational company. Another told me her time abroad was “such a game changer in my life.” These experiences became more than résumé entries; they were moments of identity transformation.

### **The Relationships That Endure**

I never imagined how leading study abroad programs would so fundamentally change how I relate to students and how they relate to me. Navigating foreign locations together, sharing meals across the globe, and problem-solving through challenges far from home create bonds extending well beyond the semester.

Many students who arrive not knowing anyone have become meaningful professional connections. One reflected: “I came to a realization while abroad that you never know who you are going to meet.” Like most other participants, he arrived knowing no one and left with a network of lifelong friends spanning continents.

Former students continue to reach out for career advice, references, and mentorship. Having seen each other in moments of growth and struggle half a world from home creates authenticity that continues long after we return home.

### **The View from the Front**

Witnessing the same developmental journey across wildly different contexts has been my greatest privilege. Each student’s path is entirely their own even though the building blocks are often the same: confusion to comprehension, anxiety to competence, outsider to participant. I’ve documented these moments with photos that become tangible reminders of the journey we all take on a study abroad program.

Every time I think I’ve seen every possible response to cultural immersion, a student surprises me. This humility has reshaped my understanding of my role: I am no longer the expert leading novices, but a fellow traveler witnessing our shared capacity for growth and transformation.

Education abroad is about creating space for students to discover who they are when everything familiar falls away. The view from the front isn’t about seeing more than students do. It’s about seeing them more clearly and learning from who they become when they are brave enough to step into the world!

# **Part IV:**

# **Reflections from Staff**



# Chapter 47

## The Historical Record of 100 Years of Study Abroad

Lisa Gensel

*Coordinator, University Archives and Records Management*

Early in 1921, Professor Raymond Kirkbride approached University of Delaware President Walter Hullihen with an innovative idea. What if college students could be trained for careers in international affairs, education, and business while simultaneously gaining exposure to the culture, citizenry, and daily life of a foreign country? What if this could all take place over one systematically organized and supervised year abroad during their undergraduate career? And what if all the coursework counted for credit towards completing their degrees? Hullihen immediately saw the value in such a plan for both the University and the nation and was galvanized into action.

Receiving a detailed sketch of the plan from Professor Kirkbride, Hullihen shared this information with the University's Board of Trustees as well as with government officials, like US Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, and prominent businessmen, like Pierre Samuel du Pont, who was already a supporter of the University. All met these ideas with approval, and a Faculty Committee on Foreign Study was created, of which President Hullihen was the chair. Professor Kirkbride was made director of the program, and by 1923, the Delaware Foreign Study Plan was underway with the first eight students sailing to France under the leadership of Professor Kirkbride that summer.

As Delaware celebrates the centenary of study abroad, we can speak about Professor Kirkbride's initial plan and about President Hullihen's reaction and enthusiasm with great certainty because of the richness of the archival records relating to the Foreign Study Plan. University Archives and Records Management (UARM), the unit tasked with acquiring, preserving, and providing access to materials that document the history of the University of Delaware, holds several collections relating to the early years of study abroad. These include the records accumulated by the Foreign Study Plan Office as well as the papers of President Walter Hullihen and Professor Raymond Kirkbride.

In the records of the Foreign Study Plan, UARM preserves general correspondence, operational files, printed reports, clippings, publicity materials and files of correspondence with the over 900 students who participated in the plan between 1923 and its suspension in 1948. From Professor Kirkbride's letters from France in 1922 as he completed arrangements for the program, to bulletins issued throughout each year by the Director detailing the scholarly and cultural activities undertaken by the current group, to various course materials and copies of student assignments (almost entirely in French), the materials reveal the operations and organization of the program in great detail. The operational record of the program is somewhat uneven, however, with most of the records composed of materials preserved by the Foreign Study Plan Office on this side of the Atlantic. The Foreign Study Plan maintained a building and small administrative staff in Paris, known as the Paris Bureau. Regrettably, most of the records and photographic evidence of the program's operation in France housed at the Paris Bureau were lost during World War II with the Nazi occupation of the city.

Student voices play an equally important role in the collection, sharing the experiences of the University's earliest global scholars. In some cases, these voices are mediated by the program's staff and faculty, as with writing assignments completed for language classes or in the Letters from a Junior in France publications authored by faculty-selected students specifically to promote the Foreign Study Plan. At other times, more natural commentary dealing with the student's thoughts and experiences abroad comes through in the collections.

The Foreign Study Plan Office maintained correspondence files for all students who studied with the program, containing their applications as well as any letters written to the staff before or during their studies. Student contact with the Foreign Study Plan Office also continued after their matriculation abroad with Delaware, as alumni of the program contacted the staff for recommendations, to discuss promoting the plan to current students, and to maintain contact with other alumni. Students' strong affiliation with the Foreign Study Plan led them to form an alumni association, the Delforians, which held reunions in several East Coast cities.

Staff of the Foreign Study Plan also solicited former students and their families to share copies or transcripts of letters they sent home from their time in Europe, and many of them complied. These letters reflect students' wonder at their travels, the changes from and commonalities with American life that they experienced abroad, and the impressions a new culture made on their minds and spirits. More recently, descendants of Foreign Study Plan

alumni have shared collections of their relative's correspondence and other records with UARM, giving a further glimpse at student life in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe.

The Foreign Study Plan was suspended in 1948, resulting from the devastation in Europe post-WWII, a change in the priorities of the University's administration, and less certain sources of financial support. By then, however, study abroad was a national movement, with many schools throughout the United States supporting trips. The University of Delaware's return to institutionally supported programs in the 1970s saw a rapid increase in the number of students traveling and the number of destinations offered. Short trips made over the Winter and Summer Sessions added to semester-long programs in a variety of nations mean more students studying abroad with the University of Delaware than ever before.

However, the richness of the current study abroad programming has led to a paucity of archival records about modern foreign study. With so much diversity in programming and additional faculty and staff involvement, it has become harder to create a central repository for the records, audio-visual materials and memorabilia undoubtedly held by current study abroad participants and alumni of recent decades. UARM is focusing on building donor relationships and working with the Center for Global Programs and Services to increase the flow of material reaching our collections. Creating rich resources for future historians and scholars to explore Delaware's leadership in international study depends upon this.

# Chapter 48

## Flirting with Flânerie

Cesar Caro

*Program Coordinator, World Scholars Program*

When I think back to the time of my early twenties, there's not much I would like to repeat or revisit. I am not the kind of person who longs for college glory days, or whose youth grows grander in one's own memory with passing years. Yet, the summer of 2007 was a particularly special time, a touchpoint to which I have often referred. I was at a personal and academic crossroads – processing a difficult breakup with my first love, grieving the recent loss of multiple loved ones, and deciding if I wanted to stick with physics as my chosen vocation. The opportunity to live for the first time on my own in another country, spending two months in an optics research lab and communicating solely in Spanish, was thus a welcome challenge. It was a reprieve from everything weighing on my mind back home.

Aside from immediate navigational adjustment in getting around the city of Madrid via its marvelous metro system, my first impression was of my own immense sense of isolation. I had arranged an internship at the Complutense University of Madrid through a tenuous research connection, and a distant relation knew of a room to rent in a three-bedroom apartment in Argüelles—a picturesque neighborhood around the corner from filmmaker Almodóvar, and a short walk to the Parque del Oeste and the royal palace to which it leads. It was my first time in Europe, so I was impressed by the architectural grandeur and the transport interconnectivity. The lab work was great, with truly special mentors in a nurturing environment that led to published work, but I poured myself into the experiments to escape the loneliness. I stayed way later into the night than was acceptable, and my supervisors reminded me of appropriate work culture and the need to set more reasonable hours.

With my evenings now free, I flirted with flânerie, roaming and exploring what the city had to offer. I discovered what I soon understood to be one of the few cinemas showing films in their original language, and I became a regular, walking into whichever film I had not already seen. The solitary experience was almost spiritual, connecting me to my humanity through art foreign to both myself and the others in the anonymous audience. The

magnificent collections of paintings in Madrid were a revelation, but they also somehow left me feeling cold, as if I were connecting to great humans by touring a mausoleum of their efforts.

I was silently still processing everything that had beset me back home, and outside the lab I still felt like the alien I was. As a first-generation Colombian-American in Spain amidst a large wave of Latin-American immigration, I often received confused looks or comments from those trying to discern my true origins. With a thirdhand Motorola Razr, I made regular but infrequent phone calls back home, which made me feel even more alone, but I found curious comfort in dialing a phone line in the US that would audibly report the local weather forecast. It was a sad day just a few years ago when I discovered the smartphone era had retired that service into obsolescence.

Moping in the apartment on a Saturday night, I found myself being questioned by my French flatmate, who I had never really seen or talked to before. When he asked about my plans for the evening, he was dismayed by my non-answer. I was slightly uncomfortable but also relieved when he insisted on bringing me out with his French friends, a cohort of seven or eight students from Toulouse in Madrid on the Erasmus program, studying at the same university and taking classes together. Though I had very rudimentary ability in French, I was largely lost in their rapid, dialectical conversations with references I didn't grasp. Nevertheless, I was grateful to be adopted into the group. It felt safe, and it gave me courage to explore a more extroverted version of myself. The focus required to maintain effective communication with these peers allowed me to quiet my brain and to tune into that which I was hitherto shy to act upon.

From that point forth I felt more at ease, able to relax and make peace with myself and what had been on my mind. Although I was not part of that cohort and did not hang out with them often, my acceptance had a profound effect. Simply sharing in their camaraderie, with other cultural interlopers in a new land, brought a sense of belonging and validation that I had not received back in the States. Allowing myself to express my more performative persona liberated me, with a lasting effect on the confidence I was subsequently able to muster in social settings. I made a conscious choice to deliberately seek more new experiences and new relationships, and I am quite sure this may not have happened for quite some time if not for the kind intervention of my French flatmate.

These days, in my role with the World Scholars Program at the University of Delaware, I cannot help but be at once proud and envious of the first-semester

students who go abroad together. With so many wonderful experiences ahead of them, I am not sure how much they appreciate the benefit of having a cohort of no more than thirty or forty students with them along for the journey. It is big enough to find a smaller group confronting similar feelings, but not so large that one gets lost in the sea or removed from encounters with locals. Because it is a four-year intentional program, they know others have the same motivation to undertake mixtures of education in the US and abroad, as they study abroad, again, for at least another semester. I will never know what my life would have been like had I participated, but when I see others grow as I did, I am glad they can be part of this special community for the rest of their lives.

# Chapter 49

## The Heart of Study Abroad

Matthew L. Drexler  
*Director, Study Abroad*

I don't remember the look on my Mom's face. I don't remember the day of the week. I don't remember if I had football, soccer, baseball, or piano practice that night. I don't remember what we had for dinner. All I remember is that sheet of paper I was waving in the air as I stormed into the house and announced that I wanted to be an exchange student.

That sheet of paper turned into an application, which turned into an acceptance letter. It became an orientation handbook, pages in a passport, a boarding pass, and handwritten letters home. It grew into a Portuguese dictionary, an article in the local paper, and into hundreds of pages in my journal. That sheet of paper transformed into hopes, dreams, and a career. It was the first page of a lifelong journey that has led me to international education.

I still wonder about the woman who gave me that paper all the time, almost 30 years later. It happens every time I stand in front of a room full of students, click to the first slide, and ask, "okay, so when are we going to study abroad?" It's not a question I take for granted and I can hear some of them think, "yeah and you paying for it, Mr. Director??" Nonetheless, I persist. I tell them about the University of Delaware's legacy of study abroad, and how we've made the experience possible for tens of thousands of students. At the same time, I wonder what the first director, Raymond Kirkbride, might have put on his first slide if he designed a PowerPoint. It's my own little attempt to change the world, just like the woman who gave me a paper and Prof. Kirkbride in 1923. I hope the students run (or text, or call) home as I did, waving their future in the air. I hope they take my question for what it is – an opportunity, an invitation to adventure, and an offer of support along the way.

The thing about papers (and slides) and starting points is that, even though they draw us in and point us in the right direction, they are not the heart of the story. After that paper, I spent the next year in Brazil as a Rotary Exchange student. I did everything that year, and I mean everything – Portuguese by

immersion, high school classes, giant soccer (*futebol!*) matches, pick-up games on dirt fields. I joined pranks with host cousins at Brazilian family reunions and dressed in white to launch new year's wishes into the waves of Copacabana. I delivered meals and learned to fight kites with glass coated lines in the favelas. There was happiness in forgotten places, sadness in safe spaces, and the loneliness of a tropical Christmas thousands of miles from home. At that age (16), it was an incompressible privilege that inspired something inside. What manifested into a spirit of *carpe diem* and the mantra "I'll sleep when I'm dead!" eventually became an idea, promise, and the purpose of my life and career. It's taken me longer than most of our students, but nearly 30 years later, and after almost 15 years in international education, it starts to feel like there's something to say that touches at the heart of study abroad.

Study abroad is built upon a commitment to a constructive and impactful educational practice. It's in the carefully crafted curriculum that expert faculty bring to life with the world as their classroom. It's the thoughtfully mapped advice of a study abroad advisor who lowers barriers and supports each student. Study abroad learning outcomes are embedded deep within institutional partnerships and unique personal relationships with local experts, host families and community organizations. Programs in all fields of study incorporate global topics like advancing UN Sustainable Development Goals, and cross-cultural learning outcomes that enhance careers and develop globally competent leaders. As mysterious as it may seem to our students, I can confirm that study abroad is not magic. To the contrary, the heart of study abroad is deliberate design.

Yes, study abroad stories are written about personal experiences, and about experiencing things personally. The stories convey a mix of anticipated moments and the surprises in between. From new perspectives to heightened levels of self-awareness, from culture shock to learning outside of comfort zones, a great study abroad experience provokes a range of reflections. It draws students in with that first piece of carefully designed paper, and leads to a transformative educational experience. Their stories are proof positive that when students accept the invitation to study abroad, their world changes.

# Chapter 50

## From UD to Vienna and Back: Taking the Road Less Traveled

Lisa Chieffo

*Associate Director (Retired), Study Abroad*

As I reflect on my study abroad experiences as a University of Delaware student, I conclude that together they had an immeasurable influence on my life: my career, personal development, interests, and relationships. Thanks to that first UD study abroad program in Vienna during the spring semester of my junior year, I was able to literally and figuratively choose the road less traveled as future opportunities presented themselves.

I am a native Delawarean from a working-class family, a grandchild of European immigrants, and was a first-generation college student. Because my only sibling is severely handicapped, we did not travel at all during my childhood--not within the US, and certainly not internationally. Through my maternal grandfather I became interested in my German heritage and began studying German as soon as I could in middle school. After two sets of German relatives visited us, my grandfather asked if I would like to travel with him to his little village in Germany for three weeks. I was eager to meet the rest of his large family and to test my German language skills, so at 16 I set off on my first intercultural experience, and the spark was lit for a lifetime of global travel and learning.

Later, as a student of German at UD, I was thrilled to discover the program in Vienna. It was not Germany, but it was close enough, and I quickly adapted to the distinctive Austrian accent and culture. More foreign to me than the linguistic challenge was the urban lifestyle. Growing up in suburban Delaware, I had never before taken public transportation, visited an art museum, or attended a classical concert. Our classes in history, music, and art history included excursions and performances that complemented the course content and were rife with “aha” moments. I recall visiting St. Stephen’s Cathedral as part of our art history class, and the professor pointing out the various architectural styles evident in the façade which had been built and reconstructed over hundreds of years. Though I marveled at the Romanesque

remnants from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, even more awesome to me were the Roman ruins in the cathedral's basement. "What were the ancient Romans doing in Vienna," I thought, "and how can it be that foundations of their buildings are still here?" This episode and so many others like it would spark an interest in learning about the history and culture of my travel destinations.

I thoroughly enjoyed the feeling of accomplishment upon navigating the Viennese subway system (in German, no less!) and the level of independence achieved after mastering the train timetable. Europe awaited discovering! I befriended another studious program participant who, like me, was not interested in whirlwind travel to five countries in seven days, and over spring break we not only formed a bond that lasts to this day, but also expertly arranged a manageable itinerary to Venice with stops in little-known Klagenfurt (Austria) on the way. When we shared stories with other program participants after break, we learned that many had been to several European capitals, but none had been to Klagenfurt!

After my semester in Vienna, I spent several weeks with my relatives in Germany, deepening my linguistic and intercultural skills and strengthening family ties. I felt so at home and comfortable in these new surroundings that it became clear to me that I had to find a way to return to Germany for an extended period. The opportunity presented itself the following year when I was awarded a Fulbright grant to spend my first year of graduate study at the University of Tübingen, just a half-hour train ride from my grandfather's hometown. My masters-level courses in German not only helped me achieve peak linguistic competency, but they were also instrumental in developing my interest in languages and dialects that continue to this day. I owe a debt of gratitude to one of my UD German instructors (and a Fulbright recipient herself), Trudy Gilgenast, for encouraging me to apply for the Fulbright grant. In fact, her actions, as well as the significance of my Fulbright year in Germany, highly influenced my later work at UD as Fulbright advisor, where I tried to help students attain the same rewarding experience that was so formative for me.

During my Fulbright year I not only grew closer to my German relatives (and began speaking German with their distinctive southwestern accent), but I also embarked on an adventure to pursue my Italian heritage. Since my paternal grandparents had emigrated from a small mountain village in south-central Italy in the 1920s, there had been no personal contact across the Atlantic. Using Italian skills acquired at UD, I wrote a letter to my grandmother's niece, asking if I could visit her while I was studying in Germany. She kindly agreed, and I set off alone by train, bus, and another train, winding through the mountains of central Italy to meet "la famiglia." I was one of two

passengers in the train car and the only one to disembark on the platform, where I saw a woman who looked remarkably like my grandmother! I was warmly welcomed and shown around, stuffed with fabulous food (including a care package to take back on the train), and invited to return, which I did two years later while spending a semester at the University of Bayreuth in Bavaria teaching English to German students.

Soon after I completed my MA at UD, a position opened up for a Study Abroad Coordinator in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures (now Languages, Literatures, and Cultures), and the chairperson at that time, Richard Zipser, apparently thought that with my organizational skills and experience abroad, I would be a good fit for the job. I owe him a debt of gratitude for that decision, as I continued working at UD in education abroad for the next 28 years, 20 of which were spent in the central study abroad office overseeing programs after I earned my doctorate. One of the most rewarding aspects was working with UD faculty to develop winter and summer session programs focused on unique learning experiences (as opposed to touristic goals) for their students. Likewise I enjoyed working with a small number of exchange students over the years, mostly from Japan, Germany, and the Middle East. These interactions led me (later together with my husband) to co-teach an English-as-a-Second-Language class at my church for fifteen years, where we met people from Iran, Brazil, China, Georgia, France, Turkey, and many more locations. We often said that we learned more from our students than they did from us! Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of my time at UD was being able to help individual students who demonstrated perseverance and potential but who also struggled with personal problems or had difficulty navigating institutional bureaucracy. Whenever I could enable such students to fulfill their goal of studying abroad as I had done, I knew I had done my job.

During my time at UD I pursued my love of travel with my German husband, and now in retirement we continue to explore other cultures and countries multiple times per year, always reading up on the history of a place before we go, and planning our itineraries with plenty of time to explore the lesser-known destinations. As I look around our living room at decorative items we brought back from New Zealand, Germany, Spain, Iceland, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Scotland, Peru, and many other locations around the world, I realize how profoundly educational travel has influenced my life, and I am grateful to those at UD who helped a working-class gal from Delaware explore the globe.

# Chapter 51

## University of Delaware London Centre

Elizabeth Terry

*Former Director, UD London Centre*

In 1997 during the second year of my MSc, I interviewed, successfully, for a part-time position as Assistant to the Director of the University of Delaware's London Centre. Little did I think at the time that this would be the beginning of my career in international education. I was interviewed by the incumbent director and a politics professor visiting from Delaware and subsequently Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

I was assistant for approximately one year when, a week after I completed my studies and was considering my future, the Director left, the University asked me to be a caretaker in the role while they 'conducted a search for someone with experience.' I can only assume that the search was fruitless as I remained in place for some 12 years! I was, I now realise, very young and inexperienced and I recognise the support from faculty, colleagues and the wider study abroad community in London for helping to guide me through those early years. My role covered the administrative, accounting, compliance, running the centre, academic management and all of the needs of the students, it was very varied and each day was different. In 2001, Sara joined for three days per week and together we managed everything. It was busy and sometimes a bit hectic but always enjoyable and never ever boring. Sara still works with the London theatre program in her role as Senior Programs Coordinator at an organization in London.

We occupied a terraced house at 49 Doughty Street in Bloomsbury, our landlord was the Charles Dickens Museum, Dickens had lived for some years at 48 Doughty Street and, after Delaware left both 48 and 49 were bought together as a new museum. Being next to the museum bought some added glamour to our lives. When Laura Bush, at the time First Lady, visited the Museum, our quiet street was full of security and large black SUVs. We once had an exam interrupted by Clint Eastwood who was using the Museum as a film location and directing Matt Damon. Boris Johnson often walked past, his office as editor of the Spectator magazine was down the street and Keir Starmer was a barrister at Doughty Street Chambers opposite our front door.

We welcomed up to 55 students each spring and fall. Students took classes from London Theatre, The Novel, British Political System, Britain and the EU, History of Britain, Sociology, History of Architecture, History of Art, Music Appreciation, Economics and the UD visiting faculty taught a class in their field. In January we usually had eight Winter Session programs from any department but with Theatre, English, Economics and Geography as regular visitors. In summer we had fewer programs including the long running Art Communication program.

During the late 1990's and early 2000's, we relied on the telephone and fax machine, we received fedex packages twice each semester, the first with the student photos and the second with the grade forms. These were completed in black ink and faxed back to the US. We received email twice each day when it was downloaded in the morning and mid-afternoon. Students did not have mobile phones and were not constantly in touch. There was little information on the internet about travel and no social media. Somehow everyone remained safe and happy.

Working with UD faculty connected us to the campus, I visited each year and felt very much part of the team. Visiting UD faculty always connected with the adjunct faculty teaching on the London program and further strengthened the connection between London and Newark.

We had a visit from President Roselle, who I believe was in London on other business but found time to visit the UD London Centre. I recall it was the day of a strike on London transport and we had a very long taxi ride from his hotel, about an hour. He was very gracious and I knew that not many staff at the University would have that much time to spend with the President. When he returned to Delaware we were allocated funds to upgrade the centre so I can only assume he was happy with what we were doing.

The students were, of course, at the centre of everything. They were generally very well behaved and we had few problems. We were in touch with the local police who attended student orientation but rarely had contact with them otherwise. Sometimes students would take rather too much advantage of the lower drinking age in the UK but they were generally supportive of one another and avoided catastrophe. The students enjoyed their classes, they were keen to learn and engaged with guest speakers, always impressing visitors with their questions. Undoubtedly the most challenging time was the September 11th attacks. We were in the first week of teaching and students were settling into class, as we realised the extent of what was happening I decided we had to tell the students. I interrupted their Music Appreciation class and at first they laughed and thought I was joking. There was no live

stream on the internet and we did not have a television in the centre and students went down to the local pub to watch the TV.

On the following day we were prepared to cancel class but the students were determined to continue and were all early, in the classroom waiting to start. They were united in not wanting what happened to deprive them of the experiences they had come to London for. We were really impressed with their resilience. We had a very different relationship with that group - it was an extraordinary semester. We provided students with a list of places of worship but we also recognised that they needed somewhere to go together. We organised to take flowers and sign the condolence book in Grosvenor Square in front of the US Embassy. En route we took the underground, there was a train on the platform and I suggested we wait for everyone to get to the platform and get the next train. The train was about to leave when the doors opened and it waited for us, everyone recognised the students as American and they held the train – anyone who has ever been to London would know this never happens. On the train people came up and spoke to the students offering condolences, it was an extraordinary moment and something positive in an otherwise terrible week.

Throughout this time I heard friends, all starting out in their careers, complain about their jobs, their colleagues, the company they worked for. I was the envy of everyone as I really enjoyed my job. I worked long hours, went on weekend trips with students and was still at my desk on Monday morning but I loved it. No two days were the same and it was rewarding to see the students enjoy class, the faculty enjoy teaching and to know that this experience was having a lifelong positive impact on people.

The University of Delaware London Centre closed in 2010. The world had changed and priorities had shifted. We had our last semester of students in Spring 2010 and spent the summer emptying and closing up the building. I came to Delaware in April 2010 and the study abroad office organised a farewell party for me. Many of the faculty who had worked with us in London as well as students and staff were there. I was very touched and happy to have worked with such a great group of people.

# Chapter 52

## Important Connections

Marie Gleason

*Senior Program Coordinator, Study Abroad*

As an undergraduate at Saint Joseph's University, I had the opportunity to study abroad for a semester in London, England to focus on my English major with a concentration in theater. I had paid the nonrefundable \$1,000 deposit before I got cold feet thanks to the outbreak of the Gulf War, and decided to stay home. That actually turned out to be a huge turning point in my life as I found out that I could then double major in English and Spanish. So I did not study abroad until I was pursuing a Masters degree in Spanish Peninsular Literature at the University of Delaware, a few years later. That happened by chance and mostly because of the support and guidance that I had from a visiting professor and a graduate student from the University of Granada, who were part of the exchange program. Because of them, I gathered the courage to apply for the program knowing that only one UD graduate student is selected each semester. It is also how I ended up living in a single-sex *colegio mayor* run by nuns in the spring of 1995. That was actually very reassuring and great for improving my Spanish language skills as only about ten of the students in the residence hall were studying English.

I am eternally grateful for the way all of the young women and the nuns who served as our RAs, and who formed a community on the first floor, supported me. I was treated like all the rest, but there were some perks to being “Mary, la Americana” as they had a hard time pronouncing “Marie.” One memory is the day I encountered two of the retired nuns in the backyard harvesting almonds. They quickly gave me a lesson about almonds, but best of all, later that day, I was called down to the kitchen and handed a small tray of fresh baked homemade almond cookies with strict instructions to go singing up the stairs so I wouldn't ruin my dinner.

The study abroad students I advise today would be horrified by the fact that we had strict nightly curfews and had to check in and out at a computer at the front reception area each time we left the building. That actually helped me feel safe. There were no phones in the rooms. The calls to the front desk got transferred to a phone at the end of each floor. I could call out using

those same phones but had to keep in mind the time difference with home so I didn't impact quiet hours. My classes were at the main campus of the University of Granada with Spanish students. I also helped out in the English department there, which served as a great support network for me. One of the most difficult things I have ever done is to phone home and tell them that I was not going to return in July as planned, but that I was going to fly home in December for the Christmas holidays and return to Granada for the month of January to take and grade exams.

Having had such a wonderful experience in Spain, I knew that I wanted to try and help others have that same experience, whether that meant understanding what international students faced when they came to the United States or American students going abroad for the first time. For me, it is all about connecting with others across cultures, embracing the unfamiliar, and daring to try new things that expand your view of the world. After all, what do the concepts of intercultural competence all boil down to in the end? After over twenty years of working in the field of international education, I have realized that it all comes down to people and partnerships. It's about connections, however brief they may be.

Of vital importance is understanding that if this is the first time a student or faculty member has gone on a study abroad program, they are most likely going to have lots of questions and concerns. One can't always anticipate the questions, but it is important that they know to ask whenever in doubt. Most undergraduates students I work with are worried that they aren't going to know anyone on the program. I always assure them that by the end of the first orientation meeting, they might find that one of their peers was or is in a class with them, are from the same hometown/state, or follow the same sports team. I encourage them to form their own online group so they can spend time getting to know each other outside of the formal meetings for the program.

Even experienced travelers will face new challenges while abroad and my role is to help them navigate those. For example, listening to a concerned faculty director as we work out the best way to support a student with a medical concern, or how to proceed with a student who violated the code of conduct, or deal with a major disruption to their program plans.

It is also important to note that study abroad is not for every faculty member or student. It is a great deal of responsibility and work to take a group of students abroad for a month. That's why I think it is very important to make sure that students know exactly what they are signing up for when it comes to the expectations for each particular study abroad program. This

is when interviewing the applicants comes in handy. Sometimes a quick Zoom meeting with a student or faculty director who has lots of questions is faster than trying to respond to a long list of emailed questions. You can always send them an email summary later to clarify things or send them more resources. The best part is when students share their experiences with their peers before another group departs. Yes, it is heartwarming to hear the returnee validate the advice you gave about packing light and taking all your luggage outside to see how far you can walk with it before you face the challenges of navigating an airport, cobblestoned streets, finding a taxi rack, etc. They can let their peers know that it is okay if you can't afford to splurge on expensive coffee in Denmark, however, you can still sit with your new friends while you sip water or coffee you made at your residence hall and put in your thermos. Hanging out is free. They can let them know that staying with a host family was a great experience and which classes they loved.

My full circle moment came last year when a representative from the US Department of State came to campus and I was able to hand him the letter he had written to the benefactor of the scholarship which had helped fund part of his semester-long study abroad program to London. I still coordinate our scholarship process and that has been one of the most important ways I hope that we have made a lasting difference. Thanks to my work, I never stopped learning about other people and cultures, and just how much we all have in common.

# Chapter 53

## From Costa Rica to Career: Finding My Way Through Study Abroad

Janica Cimo

*Director, Immigration Services*

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact moment I realized studying abroad would become such a defining part of my life—shaping my career, worldview, and sense of self. Was it when I climbed the narrow staircase inside the Chichén Itzá pyramid to a hidden altar, ziplined through the Costa Rican rainforest, or stood in awe before the waterfalls of Iguazú? Looking back, every experience, friendship, culture shock, and meal contributed to who I am today and fueled my desire to keep exploring the world.

When I was applying to college, I explored several options. The University of Delaware ranked among my top choices for its academic offering, but what ultimately sealed the deal for me was the range of study abroad options it offered, especially in the form of short-term, faculty-led programs. I was eager to explore the world, but wanted to start small.

Within weeks of beginning my freshman year, I was already searching for study abroad opportunities. I was in my Spanish 101 class one day when my instructor announced she would be leading a program to Costa Rica. I didn't know much about the country, only that they spoke Spanish, but that was enough. I signed up immediately, even before I could point to Costa Rica on a map. I wanted to learn Spanish, and I wanted to do it abroad.

During that first program in Costa Rica, my vegetarian diet limited my options, but my host family was kind and accommodating. I ate *gallo pinto*—a dish of rice and black beans—twice a day for an entire month. Even twenty-five years later, the sight of rice and beans instantly transports me back to that dining table, watching *telenovelas* with my host family. I rarely understood what was happening on screen, but I felt completely included.

The faculty-led excursions were unforgettable. We visited Manuel Antonio, a nature reserve where monkeys would steal your food if you weren't careful

and later stayed at a hot springs hotel with an active volcano that occasionally rumbled.

Of course, not everything went smoothly. I hadn't packed enough warm clothes, assuming Costa Rica was always hot. I spent much of the program feeling cold, but too embarrassed to admit my mistake and buy a jacket. Still, that experience marked the beginning of my lifelong passion for studying abroad. Each trip taught me something new: how to research and pack properly, how to navigate food challenges, and how to choose programs with more awareness and preparation.

Each year during my undergraduate program at UD, I took the opportunity to study abroad: winter session in Mérida, Mexico as a sophomore; a semester in Granada, Spain during my junior year; and finally, a winter session in Buenos Aires, Argentina during my senior year. These experiences deepened my sense of self and global awareness in ways I could never have gained in a classroom.

After graduation, it quickly became clear that my adventures couldn't end there. The next step was to work abroad. What better way to use everything I had learned than to live and work in a Spanish-speaking country? A friend from my Granada program told me about a new initiative through the Spanish Ministry of Education that hired "Cultural Auxiliaries" to teach English in public schools. You could select a region of Spain, but not a specific city. Having fallen in love with Andalucía during my semester in Granada, I requested to return there. Luckily, I was placed in Málaga on the *Costa del Sol* of Andalucía.

The program was intended as a one-year contract, but I reapplied twice and stayed for three years. If I could have frozen time, I would have. Still, I knew this was only one chapter in my journey. What would come next?

I stayed in touch with fellow *auxiliares* who had returned to the US in the meantime, and one asked if I had ever considered working in an international office at a university. It struck me like a bolt of clarity: of course—I could help others have the same transformative study abroad experiences that shaped my own life.

That realization led me back to the US to start a master's program in International Education, and ultimately to a fifteen-year (and counting) career helping others navigate one of the most complex aspects of international education: immigration regulations and compliance.

Now, as Director for Immigration Services at UD, I'm reminded of my own time abroad each year during International Student Orientation, when I look out at the new faces of students beginning their own journeys filled with excitement, culture shock, and self-discovery. For over two decades, studying abroad has been my compass, even when I didn't know exactly where it would lead. And as I welcome each new group of international students to the University, I can't help but smile and hope they remembered to pack a jacket.

# Chapter 54

## The Mental Health Benefits of Study Abroad: A Message to our Students

Cynthia A. Diefenbeck

*Director, Center for Counseling and Student Development*

Bradley M. Wolgast

*Assistant Director of Training, Center for Counseling and Student Development*

Dear Students:

At the Center for Counseling and Student Development, we believe that studying abroad is more than just a trip—it's a journey of personal transformation. When you step into a new culture, you step beyond your comfort zone and into a world of growth. You'll learn to navigate unfamiliar situations, adapt to unexpected challenges, and discover strengths you didn't know you had. Along the way, you'll form lasting friendships and build connections that reach far beyond borders. We're here to support you as you take this bold step toward becoming a more confident, capable, and globally minded version of yourself.

Studying abroad develops resilience which correlates highly with success and is cultivated through challenge. The difficulties encountered during study abroad have a higher potential to teach resilience more than any routine day or vacation. Study abroad programs aren't vacations; there are classes, exams, and academic relationships. There is also laundry to do, limited food choices and standard day-to-day experiences that will surprise you. These will stretch your patience. Your resilience will grow through the significant and the incidental frustrations, especially while on a study abroad program.

Nearly all the challenges you will experience abroad will tend to be related to adjusting to the new situation, and not necessarily mental health problems. These challenges feel upsetting, draining, even annoying. Happily, most of these experiences can be managed within the existing supports built into the experience: from pre-departure preparations and programming to the

on-location peers and faculty. There is a wealth of experience and knowledge onsite with you and supporting you back in the US.

### **Pre-Departure**

If you deal with a mental health disorder, caring for your mental health while abroad begins pre-departure. Discuss your intentions for study abroad with your mental health support system (mental health care providers and your family) before you apply. With their support, and once you are approved for your program, discuss the specifics of how to manage your mental health while abroad with your providers. This is our strongest recommendation.

Most US-based mental health care practitioners cannot meet with clients abroad due to liability issues. US prescribers also cannot send new prescriptions overseas. Talk with your clinician and prescriber about how to handle your symptoms while you are overseas. Determine practices and activities that can help you manage your symptoms as well as the challenges and thrills.

Some medications commonly prescribed in the US cannot be brought to other countries. Others may be brought in, but not refilled. Review your intended treatment plan while away as well as how your providers recommend you manage restrictions to your medications. You may need to present a copy of your flight information to your health insurance to have your medication filled for this circumstance. Have enough of any medication before you go and always place them in your carry-on as opposed to a checked bag. Use the original packaging for your medicine while traveling. We recommend having a letter, written on letterhead, and signed by your prescriber that includes your name, your diagnosis or reason for prescription, and directions for use.

#### *Pre-Departure Worries*

Over-preparing for your trip can do more harm than good. Guessing what every challenge might be while away and preparing things you could pack to manage them can overtake your final weeks. Good preparation is helpful and can manage worries. Over-preparing can take on a life of its own and exhaust you. If you notice your preparations are connected to dread, it is time to pull back. Remember that where you are going also has soap and toothpaste. Review what the pre-departure materials recommend you do to prepare and define for yourself what is “enough” preparation.

As your departure date approaches, get excited! This isn't just another Thursday! If you are someone who has noticed in the past that you get overwhelmed by your feelings, even the fun and exciting feelings, prepare for

this as well. If you have a mental health clinician, spend some time talking with them about how you might manage these exciting days.

### **Studying Abroad**

One unique challenge of studying abroad is the high expectation for your experience. You will hear that this will be “life changing.” While it could be true that your life will change forever, the pressure to have the best experience of your life can be intense. No one has their best-ever experience by trying every day to have their best-ever experience. If you notice yourself in this trap, refocus on taking things one day at a time - notice what is meaningful to you about each day or hour.

Now that you are abroad, consider your experience as a new round of your freshman year. Remember that? (Or if this is your freshman year, know that a version of these challenges is happening for all new students.) You learned where to eat, to do laundry, where your classes were and how to balance coursework. This is not so different! You will also be managing jet lag, your sleep, adjusting to your accommodations, your peers, the electric sockets, weather, tipping customs, and more. What you used to manage on autopilot, you now need to make decisions about. At first, this will take time and can bring fun, but also fatigue, anxiety, and frustration. The good news – just like your freshman year, these adjustments are normal, and they will become routine and pass in time.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, focus on the basics to boost your mental health. Your grandmother was right: science supports you taking care of sleep, nutrition, and exercise. These are three of the most essential activities for managing mental health. Start with these areas and your mental health will build.

Got FOMO? Wondering if you are missing out on what is going on at home with your friends? Guess what. They are thinking the same about you - wondering what you are doing and wishing they were with you. The antidote for FOMO is to remind yourself that the only thing you can control is what is in front of you. Then remember that everyone, everywhere is missing out on almost everything all the time. Also, when was the last time you had the chance to do, see, or eat what you can today?

Feeling isolated or just missing home is completely normal. Again, remind yourself of your freshman year. There were times you missed home, your old routine, and the food you grew up with. You got through and found your way at college even though it was different. Remember, you’ve done this before, and this time is briefer than freshman year.

If your mental health gets to a point where you need help, remember that students have access to health care options, including a 24-hour call line and global assistance, which includes virtual mental health appointments. This has been a vital benefit for many University of Delaware students. If you are considering reaching out to your health care provider, there is no need to wait any longer. Contact them to learn your options for managing your situation.

Beware that the same or a similar illicit drug in the US can be very different in another country. The laws and criminal charges are often far more severe. Exposure to illicit drugs could trigger new or pre-existing mental health concerns. While psychosis is the most problematic, combining your own medications with illicit drugs while abroad opens the door to a multitude of potential problems. Our advice: avoid illicit drug use.

### **Return and Reintegration**

Welcome back! You've completed your experience and returned home. Expect to be full of emotions and fatigue. Most returners experience sadness, nostalgia, relief, increased focus, new energy, but also exhaustion, boredom, and disappointment. This is part of normal readjustment after completing a challenging adventure. Let the feelings happen and notice them. Talk with friends and family as well as your friends from the study abroad experience about the feelings. Friends from your group are probably having a similar experience. Sharing your experiences will help the emotions feel more normal and will help you process them better.

Lean into those relationships you built over the experience. Stay connected and make plans to meet for a meal or an activity that reminds you of your experience. Then do it again.

Remember how you heard this would be a “life-changing” experience? Now that you are home it is time to understand what it meant to you. Life-changing experiences become meaningful through reflection and processing. You can do this alone, but you can process with friends, family, classmates, and professors.

What meaning do you make of it now?

How is it different from what you expected?

What would you tell your pre-departure self now that you have returned?

What advice would you give someone considering the same experience next year?

Answering those questions will help you learn what this experience meant to you, and how it changed you. Our guess is that you had an experience you were excited about, but that became more than you expected and surprised you in ways you couldn't have foreseen. That's what adventure does. And through the highs and lows of adventure, you become a stronger, more resilient person.

Sincerely,

Cynthia and Brad

# Epilogue

William B. Farquhar

*Interim Provost, University of Delaware*

I'm honored to work at a university that developed the first study abroad program 100 years ago. This legacy continues to shape who we are as an institution. Developing globally aware and engaged citizens is an important goal for all universities, and UD continues to lead the way.

I was fortunate enough to co-direct a study abroad program to Barcelona, Spain in January 2023. Thirty-two students attended. Classes were taught. Essays were written. Museums were visited. Yet this list does not begin to capture the deeper learning and social interactions that took place. Traveling among a large group creates time and space for friendships, understanding, and awareness. I remember the in-between activity times as much as I remember the planned excursions. Having some time to wander and explore in a different country can be deeply satisfying for the curious-minded. In me, this triggers a sense of awe, of the wonderfully diverse planet we inhabit, and the many opportunities to learn and grow.

Study abroad is an important educational experience for many Blue Hens – over 1400 students will participate this academic year. Outside the classroom experiential learning – especially in another country – promotes personal growth and development. Value systems are formed during periods of growth, and we carry these values forward during our personal and professional lives. Among the many lessons learned when spending time abroad, tolerance, acceptance, and humility are the most important, in my view. A deeper understanding of these values leads to a simple yet enduring conclusion: we are more similar than different.

We learn when we immerse ourselves in an activity, any activity. At UD, study abroad programs range from 3 weeks in January to a full year immersion. We've recently added 3 additional full semester programs in Buenos Aires, Berlin, and Salzburg, and over a dozen summer internships abroad. In all these settings, academic development, social development, and growth as a person often occur. There is something about being in a foreign country that enhances our senses and allows us to commit more to memory, resulting in less sleepwalking through a routine day, and more briskly approaching the tasks at hand. There is the balancing of intellectually engaging activities with simple downtime at a street café. This is why travel is so meaningful to me. I

hope all UD's study abroad students develop a lasting passion for travel and personal growth.

I especially like when students sign up for a program outside of their field of study and comfort zone. Many students do. My STEM-minded son participated in a study abroad program to Florence, Italy, where he studied Renaissance Art. His faculty instructor was exceptional. He signed up not knowing many in the group, and in doing so created shared experiences with new friends. Study abroad helped my son become a more confident, problem-solving traveler, but for all the reasons mentioned above, it does so much more. The world needs more culturally adept citizens who value differences and lean into new experiences, and UD continues to provide opportunities for students to do just this.

UD also supports a robust World Scholars Program, where incoming students spend their first full semester at one of five international sites: Rome, Madrid, Athens, Auckland, and Newcastle. I am so pleased that the World Scholars Program is growing and that these students continue to engage in internationally focused activities during their time at UD. Students truly value these experiences, as reflected in overwhelmingly positive survey results.

Study abroad and global experiences promote community building and teamwork among the traveling cohort – a needed skill in today's workforce. Along with this comes openness to differences and acceptance of other ways of thinking and living, which together can seed a more empathetic approach to life. A university is charged with pointing students in the right direction of life and favorably influencing their growth trajectory – study abroad does this.

Beyond UD's 100-year history, we have an ongoing focus to expand study abroad offerings, enrich the student experience, and make them more accessible. Our Center for Global Programs and Services awarded over \$1M in scholarship funds for these programs, and we aspire to increase the number of full and partial scholarships. Seasoned study abroad faculty often mentor novice faculty, bringing new energy into the programs and helping to sustain our momentum.

Developing globally engaged, knowledgeable citizens is a North Star goal at UD. Our vision – my vision – is for UD to remain a leader in global education.





This volume presents a diverse collection of short personal essays that illuminate the experiences of study abroad students, alumni, faculty, and staff as they reflect on the lasting impact of their intercultural encounters and interactions in new environments and communities around the world. The stories explore themes ranging from culture shock and adaptation to resilience and personal growth, revealing how individuals gain new perspectives and develop deeper self-awareness by stepping outside their comfort zones. The authors share moments of perseverance and discovery, the challenges of building connections across cultures, and the rewards of learning and living in unfamiliar settings. Current and former students, in particular, describe their journeys of personal and academic growth through immersive coursework, internships, and community engagement, despite the initial hurdles of adjusting to new norms and expectations. This collection of reflective essays takes readers on a journey alongside those who have lived the study abroad experience while also offering insights from international educators and university administrators who design, direct, and support these programs at the University of Delaware—home to the nation's first study abroad program for over a century.

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