



UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

THE VIRTUES OF STUDY ABROAD: VOLUME IV

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Cover Photo: Patterned blocks in Mumbai's famous Colaba Market

“TRAVEL AND CHANGE OF
PLACE IMPART NEW VIGOR
TO THE MIND.”

–SENECA

This publication, *The Virtues of Study Abroad*, is designed to showcase the merit of Study Abroad programs - especially how they contribute to the personal growth of students.

The following student works are intended to highlight the various personal characteristics that emerge and are strengthened by an international educational experience. Participants were inspired to share what they value most about the opportunity to study abroad. They wrote about traits many other study abroad students also say they gain: confidence, perseverance, empathy, enthusiasm, perspective, understanding, open-mindedness, engagement, curiosity and respect.

This publication not only discusses the potentially life-changing personal and educational benefits of Study Abroad programs, but also how the University of Oklahoma’s focus on international education makes these experiences possible. The variety and availability of programs speak to the degree to which educators and administrators value study abroad as an important component of higher education. Participation in such programs gives students the opportunity to practice intercultural communication skills, cultivate an openness to new experiences, and engage in a style of learning that inspires curiosity and a life-long love of learning.

We hope the following personal stories and observations resonate with those who have studied abroad, as well as prospective journeyers alike.

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A busy London street corner looking at Big Ben and the Palace of Westminster



1 [CONFIDENCE]
KELSEY MAYS

College Degree Program: History
Study Abroad Program: London

Every morning on my way to school I would pass the St. Pancras International Railway Station in the heart of King's Cross.



When I was 16 years old, my older brother traveled halfway across the world to study abroad. As I looked at his pictures and heard him share his fondest memories, I instantly became enamored with the whole idea of studying abroad. Six years later, I found myself standing in front of the terminal gates at the Dallas airport about to embark on my six-month study abroad journey to London. To my surprise, instead of being overwhelmingly excited, I was absolutely petrified about what awaited me across the pond. I walked away from my parents knowing that for the first time in my life I would no longer be five minutes away from them. Instead, I was going to be more than 4,000 miles from them. In that moment, as I stared up at the boarding sign, I realized that everything familiar to me was about to be gone.

I began questioning why I decided to leave everything I knew behind me to go live in a

foreign country where I knew absolutely no one. I held back the tears and anxiety that continued to creep up on me as I navigated my way through the Heathrow Airport to the London Underground. Instead of easing my way into independence I fully jumped, and for the first time in my life I was 100 percent on my own. I knew I had to decide how I wanted to spend my first day in London. I was either going to wallow in my uncertainty or revel in the fact that I was living out my wildest dreams. I like to think that my decision to pick the latter option was the moment that changed the course of my study abroad experience. Looking back at that first day, I cannot help but laugh at how overdramatic I was, but then again, everything I felt was more than justified.

It did not take me very long to fall in love with the whole experience. I never got tired of walking past beautiful historic sights such as King's

Cross Station or the British Library on my way to class every morning. I will forever miss the overwhelming happiness I felt every time I saw something I had read about in a book or learned about from one of my previous classes at the University of Oklahoma. I loved singing karaoke at the top of my lungs with all of my new friends every Wednesday night at the pub around the corner from my apartment. I memorized the map of the Underground to the point where I no longer got lost trying to get from Kings Cross to Oxford Street. I grew accustomed to catching flights at six in the morning so I could have just a little bit more time exploring other countries. I enjoyed dragging my suitcase down a cobblestone pathway, completely lost, searching for the hostel.

In those six months, I traveled to 12 different countries, 26 different cities and made 30 lifelong friends with whom I now keep in touch on a daily basis. Those moments, places and people have infinitely changed how I not only view myself, but also how I view the world around me. Through my study abroad experience, I slowly became the person I had always aspired to be: someone who smiled every morning, laughed every second of every day and never said no to any spontaneous adventure that came my way. For the first time in 22 years, I can honestly say that the second I decided to pursue my dreams, I gained more confidence than I imagined. All it took was a 4,000-mile step out of my comfort zone. So here's to London and my study abroad experience. Thanks for the memories that will forever be etched in my heart.



The Tower Bridge

2 [CURIOSITY]

DANIEL MOSES

College Degree Program: BA/MA International and Area Studies

Study Abroad Program: Jerusalem



A Spice Mountain in the Old City of Jerusalem



Jerusalem is a special place. Throughout the centuries it has inspired poets to write and soldiers to fight, and in the spring of 2014, it inspired me to spend a semester studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I started studying the Modern Hebrew language as a freshman at the University of Oklahoma, mostly because I was curious to find out how different the Christian Old Testament was in its original language. This ultimately influenced my decision to study abroad in Jerusalem. As an International and Area Studies major, I knew I needed to spend a semester abroad to graduate, and given my background studying Hebrew and my interest in the Middle East, Jerusalem seemed the most logical destination. I had no idea that my semester in Jerusalem would awaken an intense curiosity in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

As soon as I stepped out of the airport on a warm January day in Tel Aviv, I hopped into a *sheirut*—a large taxi in Israel—that was filled

with three Jewish Israelis, two Ethiopian Israelis, one international student from China, two Arab Israelis (including the driver) and me. You can study your destination country and the language as much as you want before leaving the United States, but there is no comparison to being on your own in a foreign country for the first time. The *sheirut* driver delivered me from the airport to the student village on Mt. Scopus with no problems, and I settled into what became a transformative semester.

There were so many unforgettable moments in Jerusalem. I deepened my understanding of Hebrew, Judaism and the Middle East conflict in my classes at the Hebrew University—there is nothing quite like studying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a classroom with a direct view of the Israeli separation wall. I learned about Jewish mysticism from one of the world's leading Kabbalah scholars, and I learned new things in conversations with other international



A view of shops in Jerusalem

students and local Israelis every day. I watched 500,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews march on the city in protest against a government bill that required them to serve in the Israeli military. I witnessed Passover and Easter in Jerusalem. I floated the Dead Sea, swam in the Red Sea and hiked from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sea of Galilee. I traveled to Prague, Budapest, Istanbul and Jordan during Passover break. I interned as an intelligence analyst with the Institute for Terrorism Research and Response, where I was on the forefront of knowledge for many pressing security issues. Most of all, I learned that there are many layers to Jerusalem—archaeology, history, religion, cuisine, art, architecture and even the people who live there.

Every now and then while doing simple, everyday tasks, I was overwhelmed by the thought of how many people have been through Jerusalem over the years. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, King Solomon, Alexander the Great, John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles, Muhammad, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and the list goes on and on. Pope Francis made an appearance while I was there, adding to the list right before my eyes. Each person who has wandered Jerusalem's ancient streets has

shaped the city in some way. Then there was me: an international student from Oklahoma who spoke mediocre Hebrew and was slightly overwhelmed by my view of the Dome of the Rock each time I walked to class. It was hard not to be intrigued by everything around me, and I began to wonder how I fit into it.

This wonder helped stir up an intense curiosity about the city's history and its people, and that is what eventually brought me back to the area. I wanted to understand how and why the city had become so divided, and I wanted to understand why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had persisted for so long. My classes at the Hebrew University certainly helped me understand these things from a theoretical perspective, but my conversations with people only seemed to complicate things. After returning to Oklahoma, I knew that I needed to go back, which happened in the summer of 2015. I returned to teach English in Hebron, the ancient city where Abraham and his family (yes, the Abraham from Genesis) are believed to be buried.

My time in Hebron proved to be as transformative as my time in Jerusalem, influencing the rest of my college career.

Not only did I teach English while living with a Palestinian family, but I also met a staggering number of local activists and leaders in my short time there. Hebron is very insulated from outsiders, which allowed me to quickly make connections with leaders of local nongovernmental and international organizations. My college roommate, Bijan Hosseini, accompanied me on this adventure, and our connections to local leaders in Hebron inspired us to make a short film highlighting the perspectives that people in Hebron have on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We presented *Voices from Hebron* to an audience of national security experts at the 2016 University of Oklahoma Center for Intelligence and National Security Symposium on September 13, 2016. This project would not have been possible without our willingness to pursue answers to our questions. Bijan and I were both curious to learn the perspectives of people who lived the conflict every day and we hope we aptly captured those perspectives in our film.

My curiosity in one particular phenomenon led me to write my master's thesis on the economic relationship between Israel and the Palestinian territories, specifically the role of migrant labor. The father of our host family was a construction worker in Israel. Even though he had a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering, he could not find a job in the West Bank that paid more than a construction job in Israel. I was curious

to find out why and what could be done about it. My thesis, titled *Billions of Dollars Lost Along the Checkpoints? An Econometric Analysis of Labor Mobility, Economic Development, and Violence in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, won the Thomas W. Adams Best Paper on Conflict Resolution in the spring of 2016. I am extremely thankful that I was able to pursue answers to my burning questions, but I do not think that my curiosity will ever be fully satisfied.

Studying abroad opens your eyes to the staggering reality that there are millions of people living with their own dreams, worries, problems and goals, and you might want to check your pulse if they do not make you intensely curious about how they came to be. Jerusalem is my favorite city on earth. I believe that a person can learn everything they need to know about people by studying the history of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. There is a certain impossibility of being in Jerusalem; the Holy City Upon a Hill has been referred to throughout history as the physical incarnation of all that people aspire to as human beings. In a philosophical sense, Jerusalem is meant to be a place in which Heaven has come to earth—a place where man has at last returned to a Garden of Eden sort of existence. The great irony in this is that man's imperfect visions of the future continue to create conflict in Jerusalem, as people try to shape the city into their own likeness.



3 [EMPATHY]

DAKOTA STEWART

College Degree Program: International and Area Studies

Study Abroad Program: India



Me in front of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India.

It was a crisp morning in New Delhi. Early March is easily considered winter in India, but it was a nice 75 degrees that day, which, at the time, I considered to be somewhat warm. Little did I know that 118 degrees was in store for the coming months. This easily explains why people were staring at my short-sleeved kurta, a traditional Indian blouse, as I made my way to school.

I wound my way through the busy streets by auto rickshaw. The path to school was so confusing that I needed friends to help me for at least a month. From open, busy highways to alleyways filled with people, it was almost impossible to get a grasp on where I was. Although my path occasionally changed to get there, at least one thing stayed the same.

“Hello, teacher!”

“How are you, teacher?”

“Good morning, *didi*.”

The excited voices of the students and the pep in their steps are burned into my memory forever. Every time I walked into the slum I felt welcomed, and not in an artificial way, but rather in a deep

way that felt like family and close friends I had known all my life. The slums of New Delhi are unforgiving, grueling places to live. Houses are made out of cardboard or other cheap materials, and lack basic utilities such as electricity and water. They are overcrowded, underserved communities where many children grow up and never leave. Even in these hard circumstances, the children and their parents alike cared for one another, and they even cared for a foreigner like me.

I made my way up the stairs to have *chai* with the other teachers. We started our morning by talking about our plan for the day and what we would teach the kids.

From then on, for about four hours, there was absolute chaos.

As every child walked in, they felt it necessary to have the following conversation with me:

“*aap kaise hain, didi?*” (How are you, sister?)

“I am fine thank you, how are you?”

“I am fine, *didi*.”

A slum in Pune, Maharashtra, India





From teaching English vocabulary to story time to lunch, it was a packed day; however, everyone's favorite time was "free time." The kids got to play games, color and do other things they generally did not get to do at home.

On this particular day, I had no idea what was in store for me. One of the little girls, Tanisha, started to motion for me to sit down.

"Baithiye, didi." (Sit, sister.)

I listened and took a seat in front of her. She started to run her fingers through my hair. I was a little shocked and confused, and I wondered what was going to happen to my hair. I was also concerned it would start a chain reaction of everyone wanting to touch my hair, which I was quite sensitive to when I first arrived. After a while, I noticed Tanisha was picking through

my hair and looking intently at my scalp. What I thought was going to be a stylish up-do was actually a lice check!

"Khatam hogia, didi!" (I am finished, sister!)

My lice check was complete, and I was a clean woman!

As I said goodbye to the kids and went about my normal day, I reflected on my encounter with Tanisha. Out of the goodness of her heart, she served me in something that was an everyday occurrence to her community. She even gave up her free time to do so. It did not matter that I was a 22-year-old American woman and that she was a 5-year-old Indian girl.

The commonality between the two of us? We both had long hair. The result of that

commonality? An understanding of each other's needs and a willingness to meet them, regardless of cultural differences and language barriers.

As I left India, I realized that I was leaving a piece of my heart there, too. As cliché as that sounds, my experiences stretched me and grew

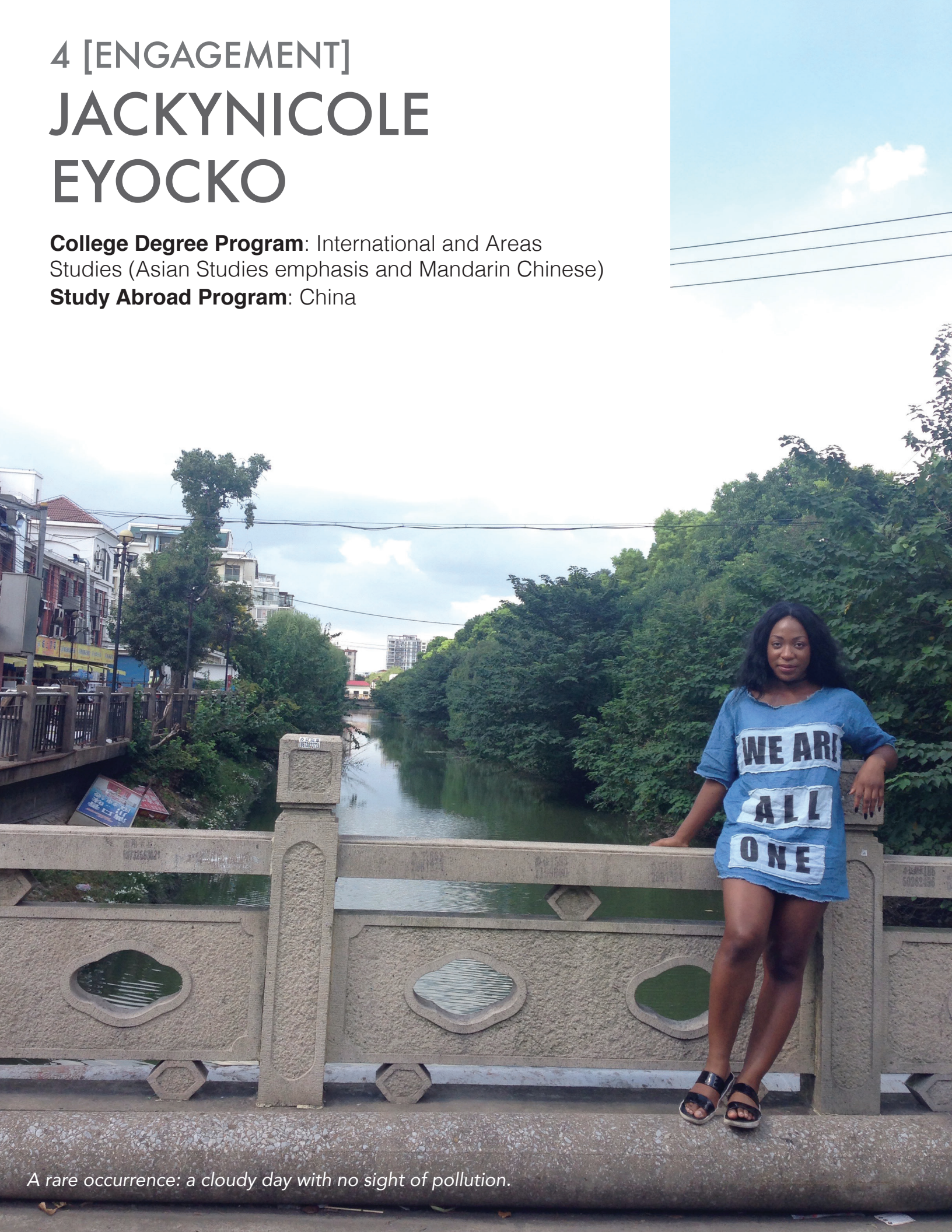
me to be the person I am today. Not only did I leave a piece of my heart there, but I gained a new piece to bring back with me. Tanisha helped me realize the importance of empathy and meeting people where they are. She helped me to see that we all have similar, basic feelings and needs that we can serve one another in, regardless of the barriers society erects for us.



Leaving a lantern in my place - my sendoff from India.

4 [ENGAGEMENT] JACKYNICOLE EYOCKO

College Degree Program: International and Areas Studies (Asian Studies emphasis and Mandarin Chinese)
Study Abroad Program: China



A rare occurrence: a cloudy day with no sight of pollution.

I made the mistake of taking the direct flight from Dallas to Shanghai. This flight consisted of babies crying for 14 hours straight, documentaries on Chinese opera and sleep—lots of it. While sleeping, I dreamt I was going to walk out of Pudong International Airport and it was going to smell like freedom and the journey of a lifetime, like you see in Hollywood movies. Instead, outside the airport reeked of burning gasoline and sticky tofu, which is an unpleasant combination. My cab driver, who I had hired a few weeks prior, showed up twenty minutes late and waited until I put my own bags in the taxi. I was not in Oklahoma anymore—no southern hospitality. The university I attended was in Baoshan, at least a 45-minute drive from the airport—talk about an expensive cab ride.

The first sentence my driver said to me was, “Obama, Yes We Can!” I chuckled and immediately knew I was in for a journey of a lifetime.

Apart from moving to the United States at the tender age of eight, this was my first trip abroad without any family. I was alone and the very first days of being in Shanghai were the most difficult. It turns out the Chinese public was obsessed with my skin and hair, and sometimes I would stay in my dorm room to avoid direct contact. Obviously, this was not the best idea, especially because I am an extrovert by birth. I took all

the negative thoughts and self-consciousness and engaged the only way I knew how: through dance.

It all began when one of the international student advisors from the university approached me and asked if I had any interest in leading a dance for an upcoming showcase. I immediately responded yes! The next few days consisted of choreographing a show with one of my newly found friends, Vee, who hailed from South Africa. From there, we began to round up people from all over. Our dance team consisted of boys and girls from China, Uzbekistan, Madagascar, South Africa, Panama, Ireland, Russia, Congo, Kazakhstan and Peru. During this process, I realized once again that the Chinese members of the group were infatuated with American culture and particularly interested in African American culture. Some were puzzled at the very idea that black people came from America, while others already had an idea of what blackness represents. I took this moment as a learning experience, an opportunity to positively influence their opinion on the plight of the black body. I was able to accomplish this through dance—by showing that we are truly only human.

Next, I had an opportunity to teach an Afro-Zumba dance class to the older ladies in the neighborhood. The only problem was that they were not fully aware that a black woman was



“To dance is to be out of yourself. Larger, more beautiful, more powerful.”
— Agnes De Mille, American dancer and choreographer



The mothers, aunts and sisters I never knew I had.

going to teach the class. On our first interaction, they glared at me with such disgust and then proceeded to the dance studio owner to express their frustration. He told them to give me a chance, and they did. We went back to the dance room where we talked, laughed and danced. They confessed, much to my surprise, that I was the first black person they had ever met. These women from a small town within the confines of Shanghai had no prior contact with persons of African origin; they did not know who we were and they did not know who I was. As time went on, more Chinese women attended my Monday and Wednesday night Zumba classes. They engaged more.

Xinhua News wrote an article about police brutality in America. One day after class, one of the ladies approached me with article in hand. She asked if I would join her and her family for dinner the following week. I gladly accepted. While at dinner, her older sister began to pose questions about police brutality in America and about black lives. I was not sure if I should open that can of worms at dinner, but I thought, when else would a black woman like me ever have

the chance to discuss black lives with Chinese people? I went ahead and continued with the discussion. We talked for hours about Chinese traditions, I introduced them to the greatness that is Beyoncé and we ended with an emotional conversation about the unfortunate treatment of black people in their country. These individuals were the sincerest people I met in China. During my time abroad, because of my skin color, I was faced with many challenges. Often I was ready to just pack up my bags and go back to a place that I was familiar—a space where I felt accepted. These people at dinner, however, reminded me what humanity looked like.

With studying in China, you get the good food, the bad air and the questionable looks. But most importantly, you get an opportunity to change perspectives and even alter your own preconceived notions. One of the biggest lessons I learned was that everything is fluid—minds, thoughts and actions—but engagement is solid. I had the unique opportunity to represent not only my university and my country, but myself, as a black woman.

5 [ENTHUSIASM]

MARTIN SATRIO

College Degree Program: Meteorology, Math

Study Abroad Program: Australia



Posing in front of Loch Ard Gorge during the Great Ocean Road trip.

Growing up, I always had great enthusiasm to travel and see new places. Every summer, my family and I would journey to a new place we had not seen before, most of the time by road trip so we could experience more along the way. Going on these trips, traveling to different cities, and exploring many national parks constitutes many of my fondest childhood memories. My parents knew the value of traveling as well as the joy and excitement it can bring. Because of this, I knew that while attending the University of Oklahoma, I wanted to study abroad.

Fortunately, OU prides itself on making multitudes of study abroad opportunities available to students. Through the School of Meteorology's Exchange Program, I had the choice of studying abroad in England, Germany or Australia. Though the exchange program typically takes place during the spring semester of junior year, I had my eyes set on Australia from day one of my freshman year. The "land down under" full of kangaroos, koalas and poisonous reptiles? Sign me up.

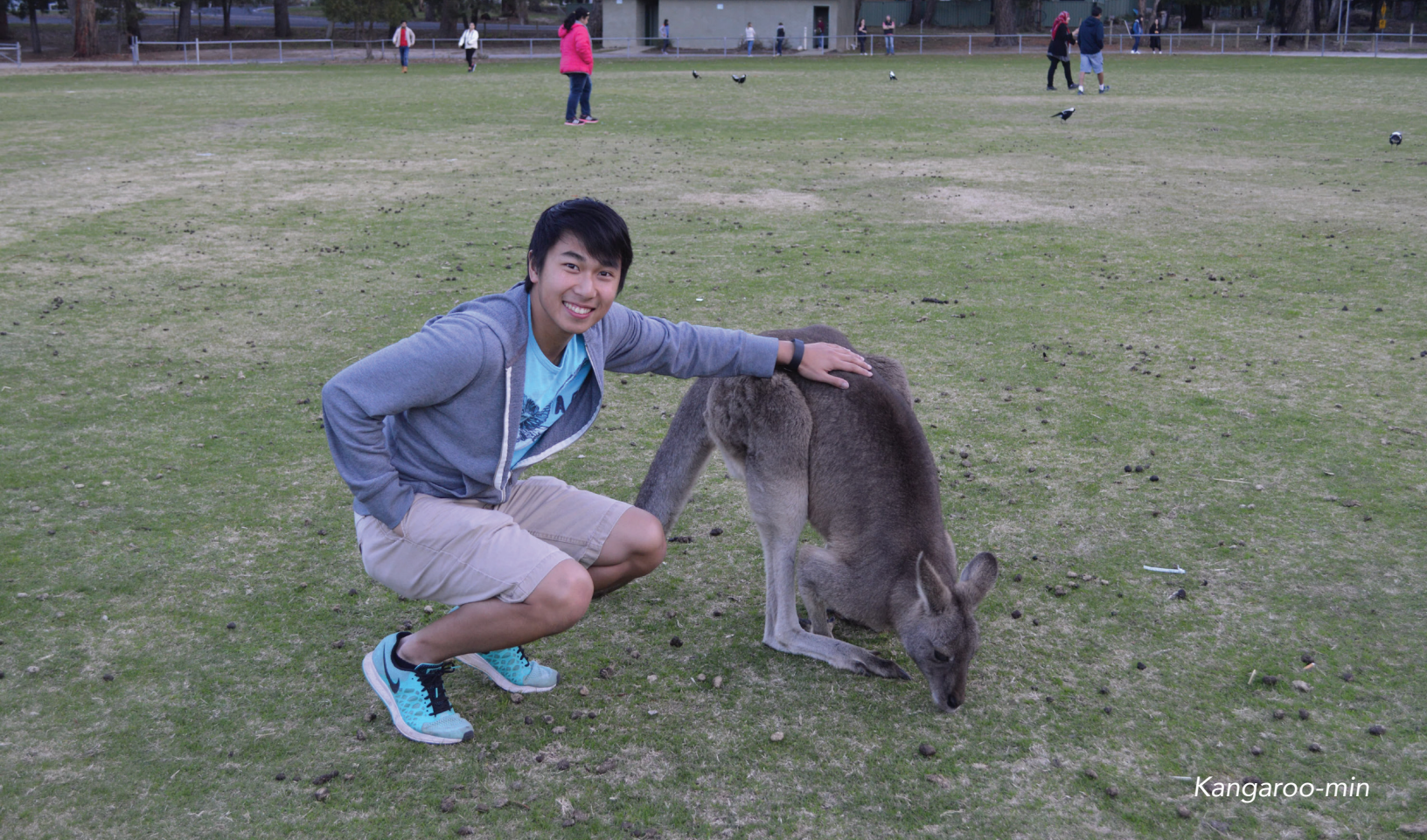
While I was undoubtedly excited to fly all the way to the other side of the world and begin my

semester-long journey, I was also nervous about venturing into an unfamiliar place. I had never traveled far on my own and definitely not to the other side of the world. I also wanted to share this experience with someone special to me. I eventually convinced my long-time girlfriend Claire to experience this journey with me, and though she was hesitant at first, she quickly became eager to explore Australia as well.

The day finally came to begin my 24-hour flight to Australia. The whole way there, questions raced through my mind: Would I make new friends there? Would I have enough time outside of school to travel? Would I get homesick? When I finally landed and got to the university after an exhausting trip, many of my fears eased. Several others staying in my dormitory were also exchange or international students. I quickly made a group of friends who lived in my hall, some of them local to Australia and some from other countries. They talked about life in their home countries compared to life in Australia, and I shared my own stories about what life in America was like. From that moment on, enthusiasm about the next few months took over.

Skyline of Melbourne during the evening from the Melbourne Star observation wheel.





Kangaroo-min

During the first few nights in Australia, Claire and I, along with new friends we made, took to the streets of Melbourne to explore the city and see what it had to offer. We shopped around, walked through historic areas and went out for a couple of drinks when the sun went down. It was a beautiful city and it all seemed so surreal.

We then decided that we wanted to explore outside of Melbourne, and we heard of a guided trip to Sydney that was happening the first weekend of school. Though we were uncertain about it since it would require us to miss classes, we decided to just go for it since a trip to Sydney does not come around every day. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We explored the Sydney Harbor Bridge and the iconic Opera House, and even took a nighttime boat ride in the Sydney Harbor. The city was beautiful and unforgettable.

After Sydney, I decided that we would take as many trips and explore as many places as possible. Besides, I did not fly halfway around the world just to sit in class and study for tests. Over the next few months, I went to places

such as the Grampians National Park, where I got to pet wild kangaroos; the Great Ocean Road, which was filled with stunning blue ocean views; and Phillip Island, where I fed pelicans, body boarded down steep sand dunes and saw cute penguins. I took short day trips with friends to Fort Nepean, a historic fort at the very southern end of Melbourne; St. Kilda, where I rode rollercoasters and saw more penguins; and Torquay Beach, where I successfully learned to surf. With my meteorology class, I even drove to Lake Eildon for a weekend camping trip to experience the wildlife and conduct field experiments.

During spring break, Claire and I flew out to Indonesia, where my parents grew up. We spent a few days in beautiful Bali and a few days in the island of Java, experiencing and learning a completely new culture of Indonesian life. Lastly, and perhaps the pinnacle of it all, was my trip to the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef: Cairns, Australia. There I scouted the tropical rainforests, held a koala for the first time, and of course, snorkeled in the Great Barrier Reef with its plethora of aquatic life. It is impossible

to describe in a short story all of the incredible experiences that I had through all my trips. Whether the experiences were with Claire, friends I made upon arriving or people I had just met, all of it was unforgettable.

Looking back at all of it now, the experience seems more than surreal. The amazing things I saw, did and experienced were beyond what I imagined before going to Australia. My enthusiasm motivated me to study abroad. It

pushed me to see and travel to as many places as possible while I was there, and to experience those sights with old and new friends. Everyone expects to hold a koala and see kangaroos in Australia, but not everyone expects to camp out in the wilderness or boogie board down sand dunes. Keeping an open mind and being excited about all of it allowed me to enjoy Australia to its fullest, and I hope that I can experience it all again someday.

Claire and I on the Sydney Harbor with the Sydney Opera House in the background.



6 [PATIENCE]

HANNAH GRILLOT

College Degree Program: Dramaturgy, International Security Studies

Study Abroad Program: Italy



On the top of the Altare della Patria

“Scusi...posso avere un altro coke?”

I stammered out this phrase in ugly, broken Italian to the waitress at our table. This was the first night of a three-week study abroad trip through Italy. I studied Italian previously and even lived in the country for a year during high school, so I felt the pressure that night to impress my peers with my foreign language skills. It seemed that the waitress could detect my fear of speaking Italian as she continued staring at me with a blank face.

“Uh...*un altro?*” I said while pointing to the Coke bottle. She continued to stare, and I thought to myself, *what is her problem?!* People around me watched inquisitively, but she did not seem to understand what I was trying to say. A million thoughts raced through my head: *These are the correct words, right? I couldn't have forgotten that much in a few years! Has the language changed?* It felt like forever while I decided my next move. The waitress started slowly shaking her head. Did she not understand? My worst fear was coming true. I could not determine if my spoken Italian was simply incomprehensible or if she was playing a really well-timed joke on me.

“*Va bene...*okay, never mind,” I said in dismissal, trying to salvage some of my Italian-speaking pride. As she left I shrugged off this experience to my friends, laughing that maybe my accent was worse than I thought. Then it happened. Just as quickly as she left, she returned with a two-liter bottle of Coke, placing it in front of me. Just as mysteriously as she appeared, she left again.

I never thought that speaking foreign languages would be a talent of mine. It is not that I could not speak them, but that I refused to do so. Being a crippling perfectionist, I have struggled to use my words when traveling abroad. I have been fortunate to travel extensively in about 30 countries, and even live abroad multiple times before turning 18 years old. After all this experience, one might think I would be more comfortable out of my comfort zone, able to bravely attempt communicating in a different language. However, this is not the case. I have been afraid of using the wrong grammar or syntax, leaving the native speaker unable



to understand what I said, and worse, being perceived as a dumb American. Although I realize this concern is irrational, the fear nonetheless maintained a strong grip over my study abroad experiences.

I understand that the fear of messing up and looking dumb is anathema to study abroad. In fact, it is anathema to almost everything in life. In order to get the most out of your experience, you must be willing to try, fail and then try again. New foods, new ideas and new customs are all available through travel—and I was able to fearlessly try them all—so why was speaking a foreign language so hard for me? The answer is that it *was not* hard. During this study abroad trip I decided to speak more Italian while traveling throughout Italy. I decided that I could not be afraid—my peers could benefit from my knowledge and previous experience in the country, and I wanted to be there to help them have the best experience. Once that decision was steadfast in my mind, it truly was not hard to implement. Yes, I received that dreaded blank stare from time to time, and yes, I embarrassingly used incorrect grammar, but it was well worth it. If anything can be learned from this essay then let it be this: find a way to overcome your fears. Be patient with yourself because those with whom you interact will be patient with you as well.

Of course, miscommunications cannot be avoided when operating in a foreign culture. That is the beauty and difficulty of travel, and is one of the most important lessons you can learn before even leaving home. It is easy to appreciate cultural differences and language barriers when you are sitting comfortably in the United States surrounded by the familiarity of your lifestyle. It is much harder to do so when you are actually on the ground in a foreign country, but that is precisely when to appreciate cultural and linguistic differences the most. That experience may be a bit messy when speaking a language less than perfectly, but it also comes with the joy of understanding and empathizing with another community.

Being abroad is hard. I do not say that to scare anyone—in fact, I say it in the hope of inspiring



others. College is about overcoming hardships in order to grow as a young person. Life is about having the grit to do things that seem scary. Through study abroad and overcoming difficulties, skills are gained—tenacity, confidence, and of course, patience. You must have patience with others when you do not understand their actions, beliefs or customs.

You must also have patience with yourself when you make little mistakes—whether getting on the wrong train, using the wrong restroom or receiving blank stares as you try to use your knowledge of another language. Ultimately, one must have patience in order to learn and grow as a young adult, to develop into an educated person and to become a global citizen.



Swimming in the ocean off of Capri

View from the seawall in Asilah, Morocco

A photograph of a man with short brown hair, seen from behind, wearing a yellow polo shirt. He is standing on a stone seawall, looking out at a vast, clear blue ocean under a bright blue sky. The water is a deep turquoise color, and there are some white waves breaking in the distance. The sky is a uniform, clear blue.

7 [PERSEVERANCE]
**JAMES LINCOLN
RATCLIFF**

College Degree Program: International Security Studies,
Arabic

Study Abroad Program: Morocco

Aaaaaaaaaaallah u-akbar. Aaaaaaaaaaallah u-akbar.

The call to prayer echoed across the city streets. Sunlight began to creep in through the open window; a necessity given the lack of air conditioning in the house.

Laaaaaa allah ila aaaaallah.

My eyes shot open, taking in the dimly lit room. The sudden consciousness quickly filled with dread as a singular thought entered my mind: *I have to go to class*. Never before in my some 13 years of schooling had I so dearly not wanted to go to class. This was Monday, week two.

I started studying Arabic in fall 2014 of my freshmen year. It was a utilitarian decision, as I harbor hopes of finding work in the government someday. I always knew study abroad lay in my future; where exactly, I did not know until

last summer. The Arab World reaches from Oman to Morocco, so quite a few options were available. I decided to go with Morocco out of some particular advantages my program at OU offered. My program was 10 weeks of intensive study of Arabic—four hours of class each day and four hours of homework. Easy. Piece of cake. Culture shock? No sweat. I had been abroad to Europe before. How bad could this be?

It was in those 10 weeks that I learned the true meaning of perseverance.

My host family's house sat upon a small hill. From the window, I could see for miles and had a full view of the main square. My school was located in the old city a couple of kilometers down the main drag. Every weekday I walked that route. Given the hilly topography of the city, the walk was, in fact, uphill both ways. The temperatures, even in the mornings, were rather



Medieval Stable in Meknes, Morocco

high and my back was almost always drenched in sweat by the time I got to class. Despite this, I enjoyed that walk.

The classes I took in Meknes were probably some of the hardest I have ever taken or will take. Not a syllable of English was found on our assignments. I am not completely proud of my somewhat liberal use of Google Translate. The worst part was the sensation of moving backwards, that I was somehow falling behind in my study of the language. It is quite the blow to one's confidence to have remedial practice after six semesters of Arabic.

The stress of class was strongly amplified by life with my host family. They were quite possibly the nicest people on Earth. They always made sure I had what I needed, even Americanizing some of their dishes to give me a taste of home. That being said, there was a certain clash between the very social nature of Arab culture and my more anti-social nature. Not being able to be alone for more than a few moments at a time made it very difficult to relax after class. Indeed, I stayed at a low boil almost constantly.

After a few weeks of this, I found myself staring at the ceiling, hearing the call to prayer in the early morning. Somehow my roommate never seemed to be woken by the muezzin's call. *I am not sure I can do this*, my mind thought. *It is too much.*

During the week, I studied. On the weekends, I traveled. I went to cities all over the country — Fez Asilah, Chefchaouen and Marrakech. Sometime near the middle of the program, I went to the city of Ifrane. It was very different from the other cities I visited. Slightly in the mountains, the town was designed as a French resort town in the colonial era. It is often referred to as “Little Switzerland.” Even in the middle of the summer, it is a green town with grassy islands dividing the tree-lined streets. The difference was so stark from the arid environments my friends and I previously visited that we looked at each other as if we had passed through a wormhole upon entering the town.



Medieval Stable in Meknes, Morocco

Despite the charm of the town, it was a terribly boring place to visit. In an hour or two we had eaten at its cafés and walked its numerous parks. Tired after not only the day of traveling but also the previous weeks of intensive study, we found ourselves sitting on the edge of a park looking into a small bank of trees. There was little chatter between us. The air hung heavy and moist between us in the forest climate. I was immersed in my own thoughts. By then, I was having serious doubts of my ability to finish the program and possibly my studies in Arabic.

I sipped the Coke I was drinking—likely my second or third bottle that day. I began to drink a lot of soda as a coping mechanism. I found that Moroccan Coke did not taste very different from American Coke, so it was like carrying a little piece of America with me at all times. Months later, I had a cavity filled upon my visit to the dentist.

It was at that sip that I realized something: I only had a month left. I only had four weeks of classes remaining. Four vocab lists, four tests and four more meetings with my language partner. Upon discovering that, a weight lifted in me. The program, in terms of scope, became manageable. It was finishable.

That thought led to another thought: progress. It occurred to me I had made a great deal of progress. While homework was still hard, I was

getting through the articles faster and faster. I could defend myself better in the daily debates we had on topics I had only heard of the day before. Even my *ghain* was getting ever closer to perfection.

I squeezed my bottle a little at this thought: *I can do this. I can do this.* I smiled into the distance. *It is going to be alright.* Later, as we walked back to the long-distance taxi stand, my friends thought my behavior was a bit strange: one moment a dour person and the next a smiling fool making jokes all the way back to Meknes. I did not tell them about my minor revelation. I just kept smiling and moving forward.

If I could boil down the lesson of my study abroad experience into a line, I would say to remember this when you are facing difficulties: relax, reflect and refocus. Studying abroad can be a very discouraging experience, especially if you are learning a foreign language. That feeling, while very real, is also very much in your head. Even when you feel like you are not, you are progressing and learning. The challenge is very much manageable—a program would not be made that students could not finish. Relax knowing you can finish. Reflect on how far you have come and refocus on the goals you have for the remainder of your trip. With that, you will persevere.

Moulay Idriss, Morocco



*Noticing where the ocean is holding the sky
in Rio de Janeiro.*



8 [PERSPECTIVE - A PHOTO ESSAY]
MARSHAE COMPTON

College Degree Program: Psychology
Study Abroad Program: Rio de Janeiro



Footsteps in the sand



Tijuca National Park



Sugarloaf Mountain



We all come in many colors, but with unity we can all thrive.



Throwing myself into a completely new culture creates a smile full of joy and a heart full of love.

TLC said "don't go chasing waterfalls," but I say the waterfalls can get you to your happy place!



9 [RESPECT]

TAYLOR JOHNSON

College Degree Program: Regional and City Planning

Study Abroad Program: Uganda



Elephants blocking a vehicle path on the way to Murchison Falls National Park in Uganda. Photo Credit Chris Lê

Shortly after starting my graduate studies in the fall of 2015 at OU in Regional and City Planning, I came across the opportunity to study abroad in Uganda during the summer of 2016. This would be my first trip out of the United States and I am not typically adventurous, so I was nervous for a whole host of reasons. *What if I do not like the food?* I wondered. *Will things be sanitary?* *What if I see or hear things I do not agree with?* I convinced myself, however, that it was at least worth the credits toward my graduate degree, and before I knew it I was in the air on my way to Uganda.

When I landed in Uganda, I quickly became homesick and lonely—did I mention I accidentally scheduled my flight a full day ahead of my professors and classmates? I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life those first few days, but as my classmates and I got more involved in our project and immersed in the culture, I fell in love with the people, their way of life and what I was learning.

Our project while there was to go to different communities in Northern Uganda and interview them about their water situation. This included where their water source was, how much their household used per day, the negative and positive aspects of their water situation and any improvements that could be made. After the interviews, we walked with people of the communities to locations they felt were important and linked to water. Then, we gave them a camera and asked them to take a picture of what was important about that location. Once we conducted all of our interviews, we took what we heard back to the communities to ensure we got it right, then wrote a report to share with organizations that might be able to help their situations.

Throughout the project, I gained a great deal of respect for Ugandans and their way of life. Most communities were located a fair walking distance (anywhere from 100 feet to half a mile) from the nearest water source—for many, gathering enough water for all their needs could take half



Posing with a hand painted Ugandan flag in Gulu



OU students walking a path to a community's water source in northern Uganda

a day or all day. Walking on their paths and learning about their living situations helped me gain a small understanding of their lives. You would expect someone in this situation to be bitter and angry, but most people were happy with their lives and just loved the opportunity to talk with us. I was blown away with how nice and generous the communities were to me and my classmates.

My respect grew as I listened intently to every word said by a villager. I began to appreciate that what they shared was about their lives, and every word was real and precious. I wanted

those communities to know that their words were not falling on deaf ears. Also, their way of life may not be what I was used to, but I respected them and their outlooks on life. I began to understand and respect how Ugandans lived, realizing that their way of life was not wrong, but just different from what I had previously been exposed to in my bubble in the United States. I would challenge anyone reading this to take a step out of your comfort zone to experience something different, especially other cultures. You will gain a great respect for the diversity you find in those cultures across the globe.



10 [UNDERSTANDING]
JEREMIAH GENTLE

College Degree Program: International and Area Studies,
Pre-Law

Study Abroad Program: France



La Vienne River

The month before I left the United States, I flipped through a brochure filled with photos of Limoges and strained to imagine myself in this town at the heart of France. *Is it too small for me?* I thought. *How will I get along with people in this new culture?* The wheels of my mind spun with hypothetical scenarios and notions of what French people might be like. These questions evoked an inexplicable feeling that led me to pack my things and move to rural France for four months. I wanted to discover a microcosm of European culture, gain an understanding of people who think differently and see the world through another lens.

On the day of my arrival, my train sputtered into the station of Limoges some two hours late. It was getting dark outside and the welcoming team had already gone home. I was annoyed, tired and nervous. I tried to maintain my composure and suppress the feeling of dread rising up in me. I felt totally left to my own devices. After taking some time to put together a game plan, I hailed a taxi and left for my bed and breakfast. Upon arriving, I realized that not only was the door locked, but my host, Pascal,

was nowhere in sight. I called to see where he was, but all I could gather from his rambling on the phone was that he was angry, not home and upset by the quality of my French. I was offended by his coarseness and dumbfounded by his impoliteness. Although Pascal was well-intentioned, his brash attitude made me want nothing more than to catch the next flight back home.

However, Pascal taught me something about the difference between understanding and perception. Perception is a biased judgment rooted in preconceived notions and first impressions. It is not always wrong, but is never the complete reality. The host was far from warm and welcoming, but his intention was not malicious. After meeting him, I found out he was extremely nice and wanted to do whatever he could to make me feel at home. He, like so many French people I met, was simply not hospitable in the same way as so many in Oklahoma. This difference in helpfulness and general niceties was a serious adjustment.

My third week, I met with my French advisor,

Said Ouaked. I opened up to him about the challenges of being in this new environment. I talked to him about how different life was in Limoges compared to my hometown of Norman. He listened, waited and then spoke. He legitimized my difficulties and challenges with the idiosyncrasies of France and encouraged me to give myself space to take in all my surroundings. It was not until I established a routine and way of life there that I found myself growing fonder of it. Going abroad requires a temporary abandoning of your way of life so that you might fully embrace a new one, understand its benefits and appreciate it for what it does well rather than what it does not. It inspired me to adventure more, knowing that nearly anywhere in the world I go there will be people who want to help me and welcome me. Study abroad changed me because it brought to the surface who I am and the things that make me come alive. I loved Limoges, and the things I learned there were imperative in my journey to discovering who I am becoming.

Limoges became a place to immerse myself in the French way of life, away from the noise and bustle of the University of Oklahoma. It was a sleepy place with kindly mannered citizens and incredible food. Albeit charming and adventurous, Limoges taught me how to understand a culture far different from my own, to move on when I do not handle challenges well, and to embrace outlooks quickly and process them slowly. Americans are generally a task-oriented people who love to stay busy, a trait with which I am well acquainted. But in Limoges, I took a lot of long walks in quiet afternoons, meeting locals along the way. On these walks, I grew. My racing mind learned how to embrace the French perspective and how to understand even when I felt misunderstood.



11 [OPEN-MINDEDNESS]

MITCHEL MCCORMICK

College Degree Program: History, Latin American Studies

Study Abroad Program: Puebla, Mexico



AVENIDA
JUAREZ

Avenida Juarez street sign

Countries, in many ways, are like people: a reputation precedes them. Perhaps no country experiences this as much as Mexico, where beautiful beaches are juxtaposed with thoughts of violence and poverty. These stereotypes weighed heavy on my mind before going to Puebla, Mexico, where OU has a study center. *What if I feel unsafe? What if my Spanish is not good enough? What if I do not like Mexico?* These were all questions I had leading up to my departure. In many ways, I expected Puebla to be a sort of rough, old city. It turned out to be

a lot different than that. I have now studied in Puebla for three semesters, and through a never-ending process of trying to remain open-minded, I have come to appreciate and love Mexico.

When I first arrived in Puebla, I was pleasantly surprised at how the city blends its rich history with a modern atmosphere. Puebla is a place where you can discover 500-year-old churches and modern architecture just a few blocks from each other. Going to the main mall in Puebla, I found luxury stores like Prada and Williams

Sonoma. Early in my experience, I realized that my previous notions of old and rough had been wrong, and this forced me to keep an open mind going forward about the things I saw.

In the beginning of my first semester in Mexico, I also noticed another cultural trait that differed from our own in the United States: public displays of affection. In Mexico, it is common to see young couples kissing in parks or on the sidewalks. Although not public displays of affection, kisses on the cheeks for greetings and goodbyes are common not only in Mexico, but also in pretty much all of Latin America. I was intrigued, confused and baffled by this, but now in my third semester, I do not even notice.

An image I chose to represent my time in Puebla is a sign of Avenida Juárez, a main thoroughfare in Puebla. This street, for me, encompasses Mexico. Walking down this road, you see all sides of Mexico: taco stands, business men and

women, upscale restaurants and old buildings. Walking up Avenida Juárez, you realize that Mexico is much more than many may think. The street ends at a park, one that separates the colonial center from the newer part of the city. For me, this represents both Puebla and Mexico in general, the mix of the old and the new.

Without an open mind, I do not believe I would have learned about and appreciated much of the culture and identity that makes up Mexico. Because I did, I feel that I was able to understand and appreciate the beauty and complexity that is Mexican culture. Open-mindedness can be difficult when studying abroad, but if I had to use my time in Puebla, Mexico, as an example, I would say it is important to have one at all times—the results can change your appreciation of a society and culture, and maybe even change your entire worldview.

View of Puebla





12 [COURAGE] SANGITA RAI

College Degree Program: International and Area Studies
Study Abroad Program: South Korea

I have spent most of my life studying abroad. I finished high school in Norway and then came to the University of Oklahoma to further my studies. Since I am already abroad, I never thought of doing a study abroad until one day when a friend approached me about it. We literally filled out the application three days before the deadline. I was anxious and had limited time to finish my entire application and get the required recommendation letters from my professors. I could not believe what I had done until I was on a plane headed to South Korea. I was really going abroad once again!

I was excited, yet nervous, even though I am used to adapting to new places. I did not know what to expect from South Korea since I did not know much about the place except what I have seen in Korean dramas. Today, looking back at all the memories, I am so glad that I chose to go there. I not only made more international

friends, but also learned a lot about Korea and the people.

Studying abroad not only made me appreciate a new place and new culture, but also helped me find my hidden courage. I applied for an internship program at the Daegu Arts Center in South Korea. I was nervous at first as it was my first internship. The position I applied for had different responsibilities, ranging from marketing to organizing different cultural programs for locals in Daegu as well as assisting co-workers with foreign students who had enrolled in music class at the Center. I still remember going to the internship interview. One of the coordinators from my college took me to the Center and on the way I asked her so many questions. She was patient enough to answer them all without hesitation during our 45-minute bus ride. Sarah, the supervisor, was waiting outside for us, which I thought was very nice of her. We were warmly

greeted and I was directed to an office to begin my interview. The next day I got an email that I had been selected. I was really excited and looking forward to meeting everyone.

I think that internship was one of the best learning experiences I had during my stay in South Korea, even though in the beginning it was a little challenging because of the language barrier. Only my boss and one of my co-workers felt comfortable speaking to me in English. However, everyone was really helpful when I had any questions, always trying their best to make me feel comfortable at work. My internship taught me about work ethic and a lot about Korean culture. Actually, one of the Daegu Arts Center's main focuses was to promote and preserve Korean culture. Through my time there, I had the opportunity to travel with my boss, seeing all the new places where the Center had planned concerts and cultural programs.

There is one other memory from South Korea that always makes me think, "Did I really do that?" It was a trip to the Philippines with seven

others. Before going to the Philippines we were strangers although we were all exchange students from different countries at Kyungpook National University. We communicated through Facebook, using it to plan this 10-day trip— isn't social media amazing? Once again, I did not realize I was really going to the Philippines until I was on a plane with these other friends from Germany, France, the United States and Lithuania. Initially I was nervous, but I am so glad I went with them. By the end of our little vacation, we all became good friends. I still write to some of them on Facebook and we are even planning to meet next summer somewhere in Europe. If I had not overcome the fear of meeting new people and sharing a hostel with them, I probably would not have become friends with them or experienced the beautiful Boracay, Philippines.

Overall, studying in South Korea was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I am so glad I made the decision to go, even if it was just three days before the deadline.



A weekend in Busan with my friends from Hungry/Korea, Tibet and Malaysia.



BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY

Visit the Education Abroad office at the University of Oklahoma to speak with an advisor and begin planning your study abroad experience. Study Abroad 101 sessions are held throughout the academic year. OU offers many study abroad opportunities, such as the OU Study Centers in Arezzo, Italy; Puebla, Mexico; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil which offers both semester and year-long programs in Italian history, language culture and more.

OU also offers summer Journey programs across the globe led by OU professors with linguistic, historical or political expertise in the given area. The cost of such programs is generously subsidized by multiple scholarship options, including the Presidential International Travel Fellowship, which OU President David Boren created to make international travel and study abroad opportunities available to more students.

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