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Paris and Brussels Study Abroad Journal

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Final Entry

As I mentioned in a previous journal written for this course, I have traveled to 18 countries. There is no better experience, in my opinion, than traveling. It is an experience that pushes you beyond your comfort zone, your normal living patterns and into a world of the unknown.

Every time I leave our nation, I go through a fit of “self discovery”. I question my relationships from friends to boyfriends, I remember lost loved ones, and I reflect on time spent with those I’ve lost. I question my majors, my current jobs, my extracurriculars and my schedule. I literally doubt my entire life during those weeks abroad. It truly makes me wonder, is this true for anyone else who studies or travels abroad, or am I alone in questioning everything that I’ve surrounded myself in here?

There were times when I would think to myself, “I can’t go on this trip, I’ll end up coming back wanting to change my entire life.” Other times when I know that it will be the greatest experience of my life: an opportunity that I can’t dare to pass up. Always, I decide to go. Always, I come back with the same, or similar, results.

This study abroad, I traveled with the mindset of disconnection. I would Skype my parents twice, my boyfriend twice, and tweet at friends if something came up, but I would never go out of my way to hold a conversation (of course I still listened to the games, it’s march madness for Pete’s sake). As the days passed, I realized how easy it was for me to separate myself from the reality that waited for me in Cincinnati. I loved it- to be honest. I probably could have stayed for another year if I had the choice. But something was missing.

The businesses we toured were fascinating. Even our jet-lagged stop to the US Embassy was exciting. UCL was captivating and energizing at the same time. But it wasn’t for me. I was caught in this mindset that I didn’t want to talk to those in the US, but I didn’t belong where we were. I was doubting my life at home, but not finding a sub niche away either. Maybe it would have taken more time away and separated from the group.

Deeper emotions and thoughts crept into my head this time around than ever before. A conflict rose in me that I was having difficulties shaking. My professional and academic life is back in order. I know that I am on the right track here. My involvement in organizations and at work has been reevaluated and adjusted- I will be adding more to the plate (woohoo), and today, my social life finally realigned itself.

Paris and Brussels study abroad definitely shook up my understanding of myself in a way that I’ve never grasped before. I’d like to imagine that I am a decently well-rounded individual. I have a strong opinion, but I know when to shut my mouth. I care to confront problems, but attempt to never overstep drawn lines. At times I get annoyed easily, but I alter the situation before letting it escalate. All of these are aspects that qualify me to be a great traveler and, contextually, a good leader. I’ve found that dependent upon the situation, I can become resourceful and attentive. If we are lost or on the verge of making a mistake, I was usually the first to find the problem and create a solution. But these are in moments of distress. I come back to the US and a room of 30 strangers intimidates me for public speaking. I drive to work and question a turn that I make every day. This is literally the most conflicting thought process my brain has ever had to go through. Who thought analyzing it would be so difficult. Moving on to the other topics.

As for my view of other cultures, this study opened my eyes to many new things. I had never stepped foot in France, so stereotypes were of course all that I had to go off of. I’m in sorority, so fighting these views is not something new to me, but we all know that stereotypes have to start somewhere. French are not rude. There is definitely a sense of inurgency and a language barrier with older generations that is visible to those traveling from the US. But that is a cultural difference. We want our checks thrown at us the second the last bite is eaten, they want you to stay and enjoy each other’s company. I talked about how the French stare in a past journal, but once again, it’s something that I got used to. Just stare back, they aren’t offended.

Finally, for the business side, I discussed the difference in their interior designs and how it reflects back to their lifestyles. But overall, businesses are run quite similarly. The feel or vibe that I experienced in Europe was one that I would fit into better. This store is my baby, now that’s a motto I could live by. But the slowness of transactions and work would be a true struggle for me to fight.

Overall, I undoubtedly grew as an individual. Despite the problems I internally face, I know that returning home will always be the best option. My life is on the right path; headed directly towards a successful career, and the best friends I could ask for surround me. You can never be too globally cognizant, so I can only continue to grow from here. Whether in the US, Canada, Norway or Indonesia, there will always be a cultural, social, or professional lesson to learn. With another study abroad under my belt, I am one step closer to becoming a distinguished traveler.