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WHAT I LEARNED IN MY STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

1. Introduction and overview of my study abroad experience.

This past summer I studied abroad in Costa Rica for 2 months. There were between 20 and 30 students from Eau Claire participating in the program. We each had the incredible opportunity to stay with host families while abroad. My family consisted of my host mom and dad, and two sisters ages 6 and 11. My host family's home was situated within the same gate as the rest of the family (my host mom's parents and siblings) and two of the other households were hosting Eau Claire students, as well. My host family was one of the greatest parts of my study abroad experience. I am still in contact with them and consider them family. In addition to my host family, I was also able to spend time with other Eau Claire students and make friends from Costa Rica in the process.

Throughout the week, Monday-Friday, I went to classes with other study abroad students from Eau Claire. In addition, one day during the week we had a cultural emersion experience scheduled which took the place of our normal in class time. During the school day, each student took two classes with daily homework that revolved around enhancing our cultural experience in Costa Rica and knowledge of the Spanish language. We were also able to learn about Costa Rican culture on our weekly cultural emersion days which included cooking traditional Costa Rican food, dance lessons, visits to national monuments, and more. When we weren't at school or with our families during the week, we would walk into town, play a pick-up game of futbol (soccer), and anything else to interact with the residents of our temporary hometown. In addition to our weekly activities in our hometown, as students we split into smaller groups and traveled throughout Costa Rica on the weekends. Our travels were usually to popular tourist destinations, so it was nice to see the many different things that Costa Rica had to offer.

2. How my study abroad experience advanced my knowledge and understanding of the world's diverse cultures, environments, practices and/or values.

Costa Rica was recently named one of the world's happiest countries. While in Costa Rica, I couldn't help but notice the pure joy that the citizens radiated every day. I wondered what it was that prompted the Ticans to be so happy. This led me to ask my host mom what her and other Costa Rican's secrets to happiness were, and what she said will stick with me forever. She said, "Brooke, there is no secret. We live in the present and don't let the past or worries about the futures affect us. You can only control what happens today, so be thankful for today and live it to the fullest."

This simple conversation with my host mom has caused me to reevaluate my way of life and redirect my main focuses. Since coming back to the United States, I have been living in the present like my host mom mentioned. I try not to worry about what I can't control. What I value and direct my focus on in life has changed from material things to family and friends. Costa Rica has taught me that what truly makes life special is the people you engage with throughout it. These simple truths that I learned from the

people of Costa Rica have allowed me to mature greatly in just a few short months and will enhance my life in the years to come.

3. How my study abroad experience has impacted my knowledge and understanding of global systems, institutions, and relationships of power.

An interesting fact about the Costa Rican government is that they do not have a military. While no government is perfect, including the Costa Rican government, the lack of a military demonstrates the importance of peace in the small country. Many say that this contributes to the country's happy population and well-preserved ecology. The United States and Costa Rica are very different countries, but during my study abroad experience I learned that warfare is not the solution to all problems, as many believe it is. Everything needs to start with effective communication as the Costa Rican government has demonstrated.

This simple idea is different in some ways from the governmental ideas of the United States, but also shares many similarities. My experience in Costa Rica has allowed me to have a world view of government and see that not all governments are the same. While I liked the concept of "peace" that the Costa Rican government represented, I realize that demonstrating peace in this manner in the United States would not be very effective. After studying abroad, I have been able to realize that importance of a strong government and that governments are greatly influenced by the culture of its nation. I look forward to finding more in depth information about the government in the United States and learning more about other countries' government.

4. How a decision (or lack of a decision) made by people in my home community or country has impacted my host community or country. Or, how a decision/lack of a decision made by people in my host community/country has impacted my home community/country.

When in Costa Rica, I realized that the ability to thoroughly and effectively communicate with people was something that I had taken for granted the past 19 years of my life. In the United States, almost every citizen can speak English or many individuals feel that everyone should speak English. With this in mind, I have rarely had to fully concentrate on trying to express myself until I traveled to Costa Rica. This experience has allowed me to appreciate language and the ability to communicate. With that being said, I think that the United States, as my home country, could have a more selfless attitude and show more respect to other countries by learning a second language.

Costa Ricans are the hardest working people that I know. During my time abroad, both of my host parents worked 10-12 hours days and once they returned home they would work around the house. They never stopped and were passionate about everything that they did whether that be during their work day or making nightly dinner for the family. With this, I believe that Costa Ricans would make excellent workers for U.S. companies. Many times, U.S. citizens feel that they are entitled to a good job and don't always try their hardest at work if a task is undesirable. Costa Ricans, from what I experienced, put everything they have into their work and would prove to be good assets to U.S. companies and good connections in general for the

people of the United States. The only thing that is stopping us from interacting with these amazing people is the language barrier.

5. How my study abroad experience has impacted my professional or career goals or aspirations. Skills I developed or enhanced during my study abroad experience that might be transferable or beneficial in my future workplace.

I have previously stated some of the many ways that my study abroad experience has changed my life and will be integrated into my life from here on out, but one thing that I have neglected to share is my new love of the Spanish language. Before going to Costa Rica my only purpose to minoring in Spanish was that it would be attractive to employers. Spanish classes were a burden to me. Since coming back from Costa Rica I have a new found love for the Spanish language and look forward to using it in my future. I can say that I am now minoring in Spanish because I am greatly intrigued by the subject and the fact that it will be attractive for possible employers is just an added bonus.

With my passion for Spanish I look forward to be able to communicate with a wide variety of people. In the near future, I am incredibly excited to build relationships with exchange students on our campus from Spanish speaking host countries. I hope to learn more about their culture and teach them about the culture in the United States in order to enhance their experience abroad. I also look forward to applying this mindset after college in the work place. The idea of working abroad in a Spanish speaking country or working with Spanish speaking professionals on a daily basis excites me. Thanks to my study abroad experience I now have a world mindset and look forward to communicating with and doing business with individuals from outside of the United States.

6. Study abroad can be a transformative learning experience, in which students learn more about themselves and the world in which they live.

a. A disorienting dilemma I experienced while abroad and why I found it disorienting.

b. How the dilemma challenged my previous knowledge of the world's cultures, environments, practices, or values.

c. How the dilemma helped me to understand how my decisions and the decisions of others have global implications.

a. In the first week of my Costa Rican culture class, I referred to the United States as "America" and referred to United States citizens as "Americans". My teacher was quick to correct me. He explained to me that Costa Ricans are Americans and that they live in America too. As a U.S. citizen without very much worldly experience, I often thought that the U.S. was "the best" and, as bad as it sounds, that it was the only country in the world.

b. My Costa Rican teacher would go on to explain that there is a North America, Central America, and South America, all of which have numerous countries inhabiting them. He asked the question, why is the United States the only

country considered America when there are other countries in the same position?

- c. I will never forget that question. Before Costa Rica, I had a selfish and closed minded look at the world. In fact, I didn't even look at the world outside of the United States. I have now stepped off of my stereotypical "U.S. citizen pedestal". The influence and presence of other countries in the world and in the United States economy is vital and I now sense their importance. In the future I hope to have a marketing position in the marketplace. I now realize the importance of my future decisions in the workplace and will look past just the effects on the U.S. In addition, I will look outside of the U.S. for the decisions that I make in my personal life.

7. **Attached are two pictures, with captions, that illustrate what was important and meaningful about my experience.**



I cannot image this experience without my Costa Rican host family. They truly made my experience so special and memorable. They will forever be family. While they were always exceptionally nice and polite, they also never hesitated to make me laugh. We all shared some laughter after seeing my sister Yosie (11) in this picture.



Costa Rica taught me to stop and enjoy the simple things in life. In the United States I rarely stopped to admire nature's beauty, but in Costa Rica I couldn't help but relish in it every day. Even a modest rainbow on a Wednesday afternoon made my day, if not my week.