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This past semester, I attended the Polytechnic University in Hong Kong. It is a university located in the heart of Hong Kong, about four times the size of UW-Eau Claire. I was the first and only person from Eau Claire to go to Hong Kong, which allowed me to not only branch out and meet new people from all over the world, but it also allowed me to live in the dorms with a local roommate. While there I was able to see about every inch of Hong Kong, plus six other countries, all at a cost not much more than if I would have just stayed at Eau Claire. I chose Hong Kong because the official language is not English, and the Asian culture is more different than any other location that I could have chosen. I wanted a challenge and a life changing experience, and I happily received both.

Study abroad has also advanced my knowledge in customs abroad by allowing me to travel around Asia. One experience came from taking a 34-hour train ride, and I was the only non-Chinese person on the train. With so much free time, I was able to observe so many new (and not always better) practices. Among the not pleasant practices was the constant spitting, extremely loud chewing, seeing very strict parenting to the point where the kids were not allowed to have fun, and the lifestyle of bumping into people wherever you go. Although this was unpleasant, it did not mean that I disliked it. Crazy, I craved seeing things like this, as it allowed me to see what is normal to other people but revolting to our society. If I were to practice any of these behaviors in America, I would have been deemed crazy. It just shows that there are different ways to live life, and that we are all entitled to our own ways, and we should not force others to act like us. The age of social media is taking away this variety in cultures, which is horrible because it is this variety that makes this world so great.

With China being a world competitor to the United States, I came to understand the importance of relationships between world powers. First, I saw how hard the Chinese worked and how fast they were improving, which made me realize that here in America we need to buckle down and work harder than ever to maintain our role as the best nation in the world. Although we need to work harder, it is inevitable that China will continue to grow in importance, which means that we need to find a way to cooperate peacefully with them, even though our ideologies are vastly different.

Not only did I learn about the importance of power, but I also learned about global institutions. Hong Kong has roughly one million businesses, so there is something to learn around every corner. There have been numerous times that I was analyzing a business and I wondered why we did not do something they did in

America. When I enter the business world, I have a wide array of newfound knowledge that will help me make a positive impact on whichever company that I work for, locally, nationally, and internationally.

Without a doubt the most important decision made in America that impacted Hong Kong was the decision to expand business globally. A majority of the clothing items, electronics, music, and so on were American made. Thanks to this decision, Hong Kongers would be hard pressed to go more than an hour without interacting with an American product. This is for the better, because all of these products are beneficial to their lives, and helps them live happier. For example, I took a marketing class and when we gave presentations on companies that were beneficial to us, I was surprised to see that almost every group chose an American company. That made me very grateful to know that I live in the best country in the world.

As a person that has been extremely shy for most of my life, those days are long gone thanks to studying abroad. With my goal of being an accountant, I need to have effective communication, and going to the other side of the world helped that immensely. I was the only person from UW-Eau Claire to go on this exchange to Hong Kong, meaning that any person that I wanted to talk to would be new, which also meant that I had to practice talking to anybody. This was successful, and I now find myself having great conversations with strangers that I would not have otherwise talked to. When I am trying to win over clients in the future, this will come in handy, as effective communication is the key to success in the accounting profession.

In addition to better communication, I also was able to make many contacts from countries all over Asia. Not only will I have the potential to contact these people for future business, but I also have knowledge in how to conduct and converse with people from different Asian countries. For example, in most Asian countries it is respectful to talk about each other's personal lives before talking about business, otherwise it is considered an insult to jump straight to business, which is what many westerners do. Also, the practice of gift giving is different, as many gifts can be considered insults that would be considered generous in America. As another example, a fancy watch would be a great gift in America, but in China it represents death and is a horrible gift (this is a true example of a gift given by a westerner, which caused the receiver to be irate). There are many more examples that I have learned that will help me conduct business in this ever globally expanding world.

One of the situations with the biggest impact on me actually came from the Philippines. I was walking around the capital of Manila with a friend when we stumbled upon a slum. With curiosity getting the best of us, we walked into it to see what it was like. On the surface, it was exactly like what we had seen in pictures and movies. Below the surface, however, we found much more. Although the street was the bathroom, rain was the shower, and food was scarce, we noticed that everybody was extremely happy. Not only were they just happy, I would make the assertion that they were happier than the majority of Americans. What made them so happy was the fact that they were all in it together, and were happy with what little they had. Coming together as a community, they were able to be creative and find ways to have fun. I had previously thought that those in slums were unhappy, or more

specifically that people with nothing were unhappy. I now know that although they could have better lives if they had access to suitable sanitation and water access, they didn't want to spend their lives sulking about what they didn't have, and instead rejoiced about what they did have. While I was there, I saw a group of young musicians who decided to take 3 months and travel around the slums to play music and provide supplies for the people in the slums. With something as simple as this, these young men were able to give the slum residents memories that will last them a lifetime, and also supplies to help them live a better life.



I was fortunate enough to spend time with this group of Hong Kongers who taught me everything that they could about the local culture (I am in the blue shirt in the back right corner)



With many Asian countries so close to each other, I was fortunate enough to visit seven countries for little money, but learned so much in each country, all while having a great vacation! (This is an example of that, as I am seen here visiting the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, China)