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My study abroad experience started in the US and ended in the US, but what happened in between was more valuable than any trip there or back. Our experience included a week long class with professors and students from varying backgrounds, ethnicities, and country of origin, all with the same passion for exercise science, regardless of major and/or minor. We participated in various traditional Japanese sports, tried Japanese fitness testing, and learned about how to coach in different ways than we ourselves were coached.

We also had a great deal of bonding opportunities other than class. We had a communal soccer game that was a highlight for everyone involved. We were all learning from one another and learning about each other all the while playing games and learning about the field that we love by doing.

A large portion of this experience involved me becoming more aware of the world's diverse cultures. A major realization of this was both in class and out of class. In class, we had a dance class, but it wasn't your average dance class. We were dancing with newspapers and dancing with partners and it was fun because just about everyone was not a great dancer, but we all had the enthusiasm and drive to make to so much fun that it didn't matter if we were actually good at it or not. Anyways, at the end of the class, the instructor had all the various countries and/or parts of countries choreograph a dance from their country of origin. It was eye opening to see all of that diversity and pride that we all had for our home countries, and that everyone else loved learning and seeing and experiencing everyone else's cultures as well as if not more than their own. What other opportunities are there to watch Samba, Michael Jackson, and traditional Japanese dance all in one room?

A similar thing happened when we did Kendo, the traditional Japanese sport, with everyone. It was a great honor to have an amazing athlete take time out of his schedule to teach us a sport that is so near and dear to the Japanese people as a culture. Even though we were only learning Japanese culture, we were all learning it together, Brazilians, Americans, Koreans, Bulgarians, and that was a diverse experience for all of us, we will never be in a room with that much diversity in the participants all willing to learn about a different culture, together. I believe that that is the key to diversity. We can all be from different places and cultures, but ultimately we can still come together to learn about one specific culture, and we can all learn something and appreciate it, not as someone from America, but as someone in the class, and that's a great thing.

My view of the global institution of education has changed as well. Coming from a public high school teacher and coach's kid visiting another school in Japan to see how they do things was incredible. I found that the American system of Physical Education was different from the Japanese. In my experience in the US of physical education, it seems like Phy. Ed is more like a requirement that needs to be filled rather than in Japan, where its integrated as a thing of daily life, that it's not forced on students, they just do it as part of their everyday. I feel as if the United States could use some of the thing Japan has done in education, but I also feel as though Japan could use a few tips from us, like how in the US, kids can try multiple things at once, something that the Japanese students don't really get.

I also learned about coaching from various professors, specifically how to keep everyone involved, like when we were out practicing soccer. We played handball to warm up, and that keeps

everyone involved, but it also creates an atmosphere that's not typical in soccer, using your hands. But it teaches things that are very important in soccer, like communication, spacing, and teamwork. I feel the US should incorporate more atypical things into sports practices to keep everyone's interest strong, as well as focus on other things than just winning, like being a team.

Ultimately I think that my view on education is much more open to other ideas not just from the US, something that I honestly never considered before, that other countries have interesting takes on education as well, that the US isn't the be-all-end-all of everything. We aren't the center of the universe; we can still learn things from others.

The US is affected by Japan right now in a big way in terms of the Olympics being hosting in Tokyo in 2020. This forces us as a country to start considering the Japanese people and culture into our daily sports life. I can hope that we can take some things from them before and after the Olympics in how we train, as well as how we treat each other before and after a competition or match happens. I feel as if we are considered such a globally focused country, but I think we focus on the big picture, which can be good, but I think we could stand to take a closer look at different countries, like Japan, and learn smaller things from them, and I believe with Japan hosting the Olympics, we can maybe start to do that.

One disorienting experience for me was lunch on the first day of class. It was hard for me to try and insert myself into a conversation where English wasn't a primary language to everyone involved, because English has always been a primary language to everyone I have ever spoken to in my entire life. It made me realize that English is not the primary language of the world, that there are other languages, that there really are other countries out there, and that when it comes down to it, it doesn't matter if everyone speaks English, you can still learn from others and laugh with others, even though a language and culture may separate us, and that you can still become friends.

My decision to jump in and talk with others even though it was terrifying and uncomfortable has a large impact on myself and other in the world. If we as Americans aren't willing or don't take that leap of faith, then we will become more isolated from the world and retreat into ourselves, instead of reaching out for ideas and help when we need it. I think our future could be very dark indeed if we aren't willing to try and work with other countries and cultures, and try to communicate, our world can't go forward, and it can only go backwards, so make that leap! You never know what you might discover.

Study abroad changed me in many ways from that small town, sheltered girl I once was. There's a world out there! Yes, we all know that there is a world out there, but to actually go out and experience it is a whole different thing, it's so much better. My goals and aspirations have expanded. I never thought that I could properly coach a sport ever before, or that I was even remotely qualified, and now I feel like I could do it. My love of sports is renewed ever since a terrible injury in high school sidelined me. This study abroad experience brought me back from the sideline audience member to an active participant, and it feels so good to be back in that space I loved so much three years ago. I'm going back to running, back to basketball, sports I haven't participated in seriously for the last 4 years. I'm going back to start coaching with my dad at my high school, I've brought back a lot of new and interesting

ideas for him to use. I can't wait to start. After this, I have so much enthusiasm for life. I want others to feel like this, to help people get back to this point through physical therapy. I want physical therapy to be fun, not boring, and I can incorporate what I learned studying abroad into the physical therapy world, and I am so excited to begin.



Me with group from Eau Claire with some other new friends made at the study abroad program out for dinner after class. Part of what was so good about the program was that we didn't just talk and be together in class, but outside of class as well on our own time.



Our program at our Kendo class on the very first day of the program. This was an important day for all of us, as we didn't know anyone really, and yet we all really bonded over our class that none of us had done before. One of my favorite memories from the whole experience as we all learned a lot about each other and had mutual respect for each other even though we didn't really know each other yet.