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Expected Graduation Date May 2017

Special Education Major

Theatre Education Minor

SPED in Scotland

May 25<sup>th</sup> 2015 –July 16<sup>th</sup> 2015

**UW-Eau Claire Study Abroad Grant Committee**

Global Awareness Study Abroad Grant \$750

## **Critical Reflective Assignment**

### **What I learned in my study abroad experience**

*2014-15 Academic Year*

**Reflecting on your study abroad experience, please answer the following questions, using concrete examples to support any observations made. You may choose to answer each question individually, or to write an essay that addresses all of the questions. If answering individually, please allot at least three-four paragraphs to each question. If writing an essay, a minimum of 3 pages is expected. Be sure to include concrete examples to support any observations made.**

**Provide written responses to the following:**

**1. Provide a brief introduction and overview of your study abroad experience (1-2 paragraphs).**

When I was applying for college one component that I looked into, for every school that I applied to, was a study abroad opportunity. After my sophomore year of college I was worried that my vision of studying abroad wouldn't become a reality. I didn't speak a foreign language, I was worried about the cost, meeting degree requirements and I was afraid that I would have to be away for such a long period of time that I would get homesick. Now that I have studied abroad, while meeting my own set criteria, describing my experience briefly is near impossible. I learned a lot about myself by being challenged to adapt to a different culture and to different situations.

While abroad my adventure started with meeting our class for the first time in Scotland at the Dalkeith House. We were only there for a few days and then dispersed to our home stays, mine being in Dunkeld with four other UWEC students. I was there for two weeks and observed a residential school called The New School Butterstone. After our home stays our class got back together and went to the University of Aberdeen, for two and a half more weeks and took our faculty led class, SPED 350 Introduction to Emotional Behavior Disorders. Lastly we all went on a weeklong highlands trip and got to hear much about Scotland's history.

**2. *Global Learning Element A: Demonstrate knowledge of the world's diverse cultures, environments, practices, or values.* While abroad, you may have encountered and engaged with a range of differences between your host country and the U.S. The experience of difference may have prompted you to reflect upon the nature of difference and how and why these differences exist and what they mean. Your return to the U.S. may have prompted further reflection upon difference. Using one to two examples, explain how your study abroad experience advanced your knowledge and understanding of ONE of the following: the world's diverse cultures, environments, practices or values (2-3 paragraphs).**

In Scotland there were many characteristics that are parallel to what I have experienced in the United States, specifically Wisconsin. Scotland's weather was typical to an early Wisconsin spring; Scotland's landscape also had many farms and trees everywhere except Scotland is more mountainous. For dinner I had many meals that consisted of meat and potatoes, which is also similar to a typical Wisconsin meal. One practice that I wish was more significant in the United States, compared to what it is in Scotland, is family time. In the United States I have witnessed, including in my own life, that life gets busy and we focus on other aspects and sometimes forget the importance of family. However Scotland would dedicate all of Sunday to be spent with the family.

I loved this practice. My host family explained to me that Scotland has a strong emphasis on family and Sunday is the day that you most often see it exhibited. Typically after church, families

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would spend the rest of the day together and in the evening would have a large Sunday dinner, with enough food that the leftovers could be used to help make meals for other days of the week. For the two Sunday's that I was with my host family, my host parents would make a large meal and my host siblings, who are around their 30's and live in their own homes would come. After dinner we would talk and play games and just enjoy each other's company and that we got to spend quality time with one another.

- 3. *Global Learning Element B: Learn to evaluate global systems, institutions and relationships of power in a historical or geographical context.* You may have encountered and engaged with global, transnational forces and power (forces that shape societal and individual experiences in your host country, and/or in the U.S.). You might have begun to ask questions about global forces and global dynamics and the way that they shape societal and individual experiences. Or, you may have learned about education, the media, religions, marriage and the family, civil society, healthcare, or other formal or informal institutions. Using one to two examples, describe how your study abroad experience has impacted your knowledge and understanding of ONE of the following: global systems, institutions, or relationships of power (2-3 paragraphs).**

Being an education major in Scotland for educational purposes, learning about how Scotland teaches individuals with special needs and how the teachers are trained to teach students with special needs was very interesting. It was fascinating learning about how some teachers at my placement and Aberdeen University professors were surprised that special education is even a major. At Aberdeen University, college students perusing education may have had only a lecture on about disabilities while UWEC has a four-year program. It was astounding for me to compare that my knowledge of special education, with just being accepted to the special education program, was more than some certified teachers in Scotland.

At the school that I observed I learned a lot about how to create relationships with students, especially students that need emotional support. It was interesting being at a residential school because it was unlike any other placement experience that I have had. The students had so much pride in their school, which you really don't see often, sometimes even, in America. Even though all the students had an area that they struggled with they all supported one another and became a large community and family.

The school was much more relaxed than a typical school in Wisconsin. Students were allowed to roam the school grounds during their free time; they could sit where ever they wanted including at the teacher's desk during class. The teachers were just happy to have the students coming to class. There also wasn't a hierarchy between the headmaster, teachers and students, this is something that I haven't witnessed before. During lunch the teachers and the headmaster would intermingle with the students which helped create a great relationship between the staff and the students.

- 4. *Global Learning Element C: Develop an understanding of the global implications of individual and collective actions.* As you study abroad, you may begin to question where you and your experiences, values, and actions fit within an increasingly globalized world. You may recognize**

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**that the choices that individuals and groups make have wide-reaching, transnational, even global effects. Using one to two examples, identify and describe how a decision (or lack of a decision) made by people in your home community or country has impacted your host community or country. Or, if you prefer, identify and describe how a decision/lack of a decision made by people in your host community/country has impacted your home community/country (2-3 paragraphs).**

One thing that I noticed while being in Scotland was the influence that America has on other countries. When talking with a teacher at the school I observed in, I realized the impact and rein that that America holds on other countries. This teacher and I had a conversation about the different aspects of America's culture that are invading Scotland's culture. In Scotland there is an increased risk of obesity, which unsurprisingly came from the fast food chains that were introduced to Scotland, but came from America. Scotland's government is trying to reduce obesity and the risks of obesity because they can foresee their own possible future through looking at obesity in America.

In this same conversation with this teacher I learned about how bridal and baby showers are a new trend in Scotland because it's the 'hip thing' from America. I also was educated on how Halloween as a holiday was not celebrated like it is now. When this teacher was younger for Halloween decorations there may have been a pumpkin on the porch, not a spooky decorated house. Also the fad of trick-or-treating also came from America, as a little girl this teacher didn't know what trick-or-treating was. After this conversation with the teacher, I was talking with a classmate about how the influence that America has on other countries can suffocate other cultures and not let them be independent. Some of these American traditions that are being introduced to Scotland are miniscule but when they overpower some of the Scottish traditions, I think that can cause potential problems for many reasons. Yes, the United States is great but we are not the best, and in personal opinion we do not have the right to take over other cultures.

- 5. Describe a disorienting experience that challenged your assumptions, and why you found it disorienting. How did the experience challenge your previous knowledge of the world's cultures, environments, practices, or values? How did the experience help you to understand how your decisions and the decisions of others have global implications? (2-3 paragraphs).**

I had two disorienting experiences abroad, both revolving around education. The first experience was one many of my classmates noticed as well. I heard many teachers make the statement that every person has autism and is on the autism spectrum. This was something that I was shocked by. I was initially confused because I had never heard that said before since Autism is a disability. This statement went against what I already knew about the disability and I thought it was discriminating individuals who actually have Autism. However after talking with more people I learned that currently in Scotland learning about Autism is a popular and common educational choice, because Autism foundations have a lot of support and funding. However there is a bit of misguidance and confusion learning about the Autism spectrum, that there can be varied degrees of severity for individuals with Autism.

The other experience that was disorienting that I had was about inclusion. Going to Scotland I was confused as to why there were many schools for individuals with disabilities because I think that

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inclusion into mainstream classes can be a great thing. However after being placed at a residential school for individuals with disabilities I learned that sometimes being excluded can lead to inclusion. I learned that even though the students that I observed were not in mainstream classes they still had the same expectations as if they were and had other opportunities to be in extracurricular activities and to create relationships. I thought this was such an intriguing thing because it challenged what I had thought but made me aware of other situations. Both of these encounters made me think about the education and opinions that I can share with individuals while in return receiving new information and opinions.

- 6. Explore and reflect on how you see your study abroad experience integrating into your life. How has your study abroad experience changed your goals, aspirations, or perceptions? Are you or do you plan to do anything differently after returning home from this study abroad experience? (2-3 paragraphs).**

My study abroad experience has created many new outlooks that I have on culture and about myself. I learned how to be more self-sufficient and independent. I also learned how to adapt my surroundings, even though at times I was uncomfortable. I am much more confident about my abilities as a college student, taking rigorous classes within a few weeks. I am also more confident about my abilities as a future teacher. I learned new tips through practice about how to manage difficult behaviors, I got to witness how important teacher and student relationships are, and how to incorporate life skills into curriculum. These are all factors that I plan to implement in my future classroom.

Now being back in the United States I plan to continue to educate myself on Scotland's culture, because I would love to go back someday. I also plan to continue to keep an eye on their political system. With the referendum that happened last year in Scotland, voting if they want independence it will be interesting to see if an opportunity becomes available again and what the outcome would be. After hearing many personal stories and perspectives from Scottish individuals, while coming to the realization that America did the same thing many years ago with the same country, it is quite an interesting topic to learn more about.

- 7. Finally, please attach two pictures, with captions, that illustrate what was important and meaningful about your experience.**

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This first picture is of the students and teachers from the school that I observed at with 3 other students that were in the UWEC SPED in Scotland program. I learned a lot from these teachers and students



This picture is from the last day, and the last time, that everyone was in Scotland together. I created so many memories with this group of people, and I cannot believe that our time abroad and together has ended.