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part of me must have bought the myth of the US as one giant Times Square: tall buildings, bright lights and concrete streets.



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The longer I stayed in Costa Rica, the more I recognized the importance of achieving balance. This idea was especially illuminated as I worked on my senior thesis on Costa Rica's goal to become carbon neutral. My job was to travel around the country to interview community leaders to discover what their strategies were to achieve greater environmental sustainability.

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ESSAY CONTEST

Office for International Students and Scholars
Office of Study Abroad

Being able to apply what I have learned in class, and understanding the types of careers that will allow me to do that, are both important goals to me. With my degree in French, there is no question that

I was able apply what I have learned at MSU - I spoke the language there practically all day, every day.

**Final
impression?
Changed.**



Office for International
Students and Scholars
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The presence of international students at MSU provides us with extraordinary opportunities to learn about other cultures. MSU is deeply committed to building international understanding through education and is proud to host students from all over the world.

The goal of the International Student Essay Contest is to build greater cross-cultural understanding and to learn from the experiences of international students. Living outside one's own culture can trigger a complex range of feelings that lead to powerful insights. This contest is an opportunity for international students to reflect on their experiences and share their stories as international students at Michigan State University.

OISS Essay Contest Winners



The Journey Here - 1st place
Talitha Tukura Pam



Spartans Will - 2nd place
Jingyi Yao



Dear Classmate X - 3rd place
Benjamin Angobe Eshiwani

OISS Essay Contest Honorable Mention

- **Ezgi Sertler**
- **Isabella Besborodco**
- **Carl Gyapong-Ankamah**
- **Diev Rakojoana**
- **Boitshoko Naboth Molephi**
- **KhaoDang Truong**
- **Samuel Tham**

The Journey Here

Talitha Tukura Pam

My favorite book of all time is Anne of Green Gables. It's a story of an orphan girl with a wonderful imagination that gets adopted by a spinster, Marilla, and her brother, Matthew. The siblings adopt Anne thinking they are adopting a boy to help around the farmhouse as they age, only to discover their mistake at the last minute. Marilla wants to return Anne to the orphanage but her brother, who instantly took a liking to the spunky, talkative and lovable girl, insists they keep her.

I remember the day I received the email that I was going to Michigan State University on a full MasterCard scholarship. My joy knew no bounds and I laughed and cried, overjoyed and relieved at the prospects. Later on I thought to myself, could this be real? Maybe there was a mix-up. I waited for the phone call or letter informing me that it was all a mistake. However, like Anne, I had made up my mind to do whatever it took to get them to like me enough to keep me, mistake or not.

The day before my departure I walked home slowly and passed the kiosk at the corner of my street made from old, rusty pieces of zinc. The old Berom shopkeeper who owns the kiosk always lets me buy stuff on credit even though I am a low income earner. I have known him since I was a young girl and he is like a father to me. It is all about taking things until an unknowable later; that's the Nigerian system of a credit. He wears a threadbare kaftan and old worn out slippers, sewn several times over in bright red thread. I chuckle to myself. It's not what it looks like that's important but the fact that it's still functional. Suddenly, I remember that I have not said goodbye to him, my good benefactor, and I retrace my steps back towards the kiosk. I could start a lifelong vendetta if I failed to say farewell to any relative, friend, neighbor or companion. The list was endless.

"Sannu, Baba[1]," I say kneeling slightly when I sight him as I enter the kiosk. In Nigeria you never greet an elder standing up straight.

"My daughter, how are you?" he smiles brightly.

"I am fine, Baba. You know I am leaving tomorrow, right?"

"That is true, my daughter. I will miss you very much." His face is suddenly

1 Hello, father 2 approx. \$3 3 Technically it means sorry but in this case it is a way of humbly giving a gift

pensive. "I pray that God will bless you and keep you. You will be a shining star in America."

"Amen," I answer.

He goes on and on for a minute more and I stand patiently waiting for him to finish. He rummages through his tiny desk in the kiosk and gives me a one thousand naira note[2].

"Yi hankuri[3] my daughter, take this and buy bread and eat on the road, okay." He pushes the crumpled note to me.

"Na gode baba[4]," I say curtsying over and over, my smile so wide. I walk away thinking of the money even as I slip it into my bag. This is the Nigerian way of giving a gift by attaching it to something you imagine the person may need.

It is dusk and I continue my walk home, slowly soaking in the rays of the sun as it goes behind the buildings for the night. Nearby I see purple and blue bougainvillea flowers from the overgrown rambling bush nearby. The weight and size of the stems lean heavily on the fence, pushing it downwards. I am quite certain that by the end of the next rainy season this fence will not be standing anymore. The realization that I will not be here to see who triumphs in this battle of plant versus fence makes me a bit sad.

The next morning, I am pleasantly surprised when I see the people that have gathered to say goodbye to me. Hugs and kisses are shared, prayers are said, advice is given, stern warnings and admonishments are unleashed and all the while I am waiting for something to happen that'll make all this turn out to be a hoax. It simply cannot be true, nothing this good has ever happened to me.

A few months ago

"Tami would you like to have a drink after class on Thursday?" Tim, the cute boy in my class, asked. "A bunch of us are going for TGIF at the Green Tavern."

"Sure," I answered nodding my head. Since I got to America I have not really made friends or hung out much. Maybe this was my opportunity to do both. I grabbed my bag and jumped into the car. At the bar we all stood around until the barista saw us and came towards us. In Nigeria I would shout "barman" and someone would come running. We ordered drinks and I drank mine slowly, mesmerized with the taste of American brew. What I could really use was some spicy hot suya[5] or chicken, I thought. Beer always goes with a meat dish at home, not a salad or sandwich.

4 Thank you father 5 skewered beef

We shared our best Trump jokes and did impersonations of our favorite faculty members. We laughed till our tummies ached, danced on our seats and had a jolly good time. We jumped from bar to bar, a concept that I simply could not understand. Why couldn't we just stay in one place and enjoy some other bar on another day. But, I was in America and this is the American way.

It was past midnight and everyone was yawning or stifling a yawn. Everyone brought out their wallets and put some money on the table in front of Tim. I could see them making mental calculations. I brought out my wallet too and put a five-dollar bill in front of Tim.

"You gotta throw in something extra for a tip," Tim said.

I suddenly felt naked because I didn't have a cent more on me. Awkward silence.

"I'm outta cash," I finally said. "Is there an ATM machine in here?"

"Don't worry, I've got you covered. You can pay me back next time," Tim said. I assumed that since he asked me out for drinks he was going to pay. Oh God, I groaned, another thing to get used to.

A few Years ago

I didn't know whose party it was but I followed my friends anyways. That's what Nigerians did. Invitations were simply a way of spreading the news far and wide, not a way to restrict attendance. The party scene was epic. The music was loud and everybody danced in a frenzy, sweat pouring out of their bodies. A wide array of snacks and finger food welcomed me. But, it was the smell of roasted meat and pepper that filled my nostrils and lured me to the nearest table, where I eagerly took a seat and loudly called the server to bring me some food. My plate came heaped high with shaki^[6] pepper soup. The steam of the hot pepper soup was a sharp contrast to the cold bottle of coke I held in my hands.

"Stand up let's dance," my friend yelled over the deafening music.

The opening notes of a new song filled the speaker and I stood up. Gyrating and twisting my body to the rhythm I danced long and hard with my friends all night eating and drinking till our hearts content. The funny thing is I did not have the slightest idea of whose party it was, who the host was or what the occasion was. The important thing is that we attended....that is the Nigerian way.

Today

I plug in my earphones and wait for the bus along with a bunch of other

students. The earphone culture had replaced conversation and the norm is to silently stand together until the bus comes. I don't know whether it was the silence that irked me or the fact that no greetings or pleasantries were being exchanged. I prefer the Nigerian way of loudly greeting friends and strangers whenever you saw them, enquiring of their parents in the village and even their domestic animals. Here, the only people that spoke were couples, quietly whispering in each other's ears. The way they held each other, touching and kissing was surprising to me. Back home that was considered foreplay and relegated to the bedroom. I appreciated the fact that couples wanted the world to know of their love but at home anybody that exhibited such public display of emotions would be considered a daniska[7] because no one wanted to admit that his son or daughter would be that shameless.

Browsing through the sound tracks on my phone I select Yemi Alade's hit song Africa and pressed play. Gosh, it sounds so good, I close my eyes and my head immediately moves to the beat followed by my body. I sway to the music and in this moment, I am at home in Nigeria and can even smell the kosai[8] and masa[9] that women sell at the bus stops to commuters that have not had breakfast to eat on the bus.

The sound of the CATA bus arriving startles me and I open my eyes. Queuing quietly, I wait my turn to scan my card before walking into the bus to find a seat. No one was rushing, rudely pushing and shoving for a seat, no conductor was shouting to collect his fare and there were no loud conversations.

Only the automated bus PA system said, "Route 39, University Village- CATA Bus Station next stop Harrison before Trowbridge."



Spartans Will

Jingyi Yao

August 22nd, 2015 – that was the first day I stepped onto MSU campus, filled with exhilaration and trepidation to start my brand new Spartan journey. A clean slate, I reminded myself. A place where I'd create memories and form lifelong friendships, a place that was painted with red

and orange leaves, and a place that felt freezing cold to me even when the temperature was in the 50s. This place was to be my home for the next 4 years. Frankly, I did not know what to expect at all, all I knew was that I was coming to college, in the land of the free, 25 hours worth of flight from home, and 12 hours behind in time. I thought simply, that I'd make it there and slowly get used to it. But boy was it so much harder than that.

I had heard that Michigan was up north, and that it'd be really cold in the winter, but I had no idea what really cold meant till I actually had to live through it. Being born in Beijing, China, and growing up in Singapore, as much as I had seen and lived through snow before, I had spent most of my life before this soaking up the sun in Singapore. See, where I come from, we have summer all year round! I could go out in shorts or jeans on any day of the year and it'd be alright. Right here, however, it was different. Creeping up to November, the weather took a drastic turn, I had to get used to checking the weather app every morning before I left for my 8am classes.

It'd always be dark and musty when I was getting ready to leave, so I'd bundle myself up in my winter coat (one of my proud pieces that comes in really handy), but by the time I get back after my 12:40 class, the sun would be shining and I'd ask myself, "Why, why torture yourself through this heat?!" The next morning always reminded me of that reason I sometimes forget when the sun decides to peek its head. And after about a month long of experimenting with what to wear for the cold, I learnt that it was always safer to layer up, rather than regret while shivering from head to toe.

Besides the weather, language was another aspect to get used to. I had thought it would not be as bad, considering English is my first language too, but evidently British English and American English are not the same! It was so much more than having to drop my "u"s and change those "s" to "z". I'd ask for directions to the lift, and people would not understand what I was referring to. Soon, I started catching on and would always make a conscious effort to say "elevator". Once I was with a friend who was looking for his parking ticket in his wallet. After flipping through everything, he finally found it, and I commented, "Oh, was it stuck between your notes?" He burst out laughing, and exclaimed, "You're in America, these are bills!" This other time I was in the cafeteria, in line for a red apple. When it came be to my turn, the server asked what I had wanted, and I replied, "May I please have a red apple?" and I got a green one. I share this story with

my friends back home all the time; we pronounce “red” and America pronounces “rad”, it was a lot of effort, changing what I had known and said my whole life because people could not understand what I was trying to convey.

Being away from home in a foreign land, the freezing weather, and how early it'd get dark outside, I felt rather unsafe walking home after 8. I shared this concern with my roommate from Brighton and she had advised me to get a pepper spray. So one Saturday morning, we run after Bus 1 and made our way to Meijer. Searching through the wide, white aisles, we couldn't locate pepper spray anywhere. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw “Family Protection”. I thought we were finally at the right place since pepper spray is a form of protection, and pointed it out to her, “Hey, it might be over there under Family Protection and...Planning”. As I read out the last word of that sign, it dawned on me how mistaken I was. We stared at each other for a good few seconds and laughed it off. It was embarrassing but at least now I have a pepper spray. For future reference, and to spare you of potential humiliation, pepper spray is actually under outdoor activities.

I tried, I really tried, to do things the way Americans did. To prepare for the upcoming winter, I went to Walmart and got a pair of snowboots. Those big and chunky ones that were so heavy but looked really cool, like what a SWAT team would wear! I was so happy with my purchase that I couldn't wait to bring them out for a walk. The very next day, sometime at the beginning of November, I went out with a couple of new friends I had made, using the opportunity to show off my new buy. As we were walking, my friend from Macomb County went, “Alice, why are you wearing those boots?” I beamed, someone had noticed them! I proudly told everyone that I had just got them on sale the day before. But one of my friends explained to me that in Michigan, we don't bring out the boots till it gets really, really cold. She added, “It's ok though, everyone knows you're international, so it's a rookie mistake.” Feeling dejected, I went back to my room that night and placed those boots back in their boxes, tucked away in my closet. They were not to come out again till the first snow had touched the ground.

Despite my somewhat trying encounters, I have loved and love my journey at State so far. I have been active, sometimes overly active, in reaching out to people, joining new clubs and forming new bonds. This past year, I travelled out of state no less than 6 times with the Mock Trial Club. The

nights we'd stay up to practice our opening or rebuttal, run out for pizza and ice cream at 2am in the morning, drive 12 hours through the night to get home from Pennsylvania after a weekend long of tournament, trying to make it back in time for my 8am class, hitting up Philly Cheesesteak joints while in Philadelphia, and seeing the city lights again after being confined to East Lansing.

It was all so different, the good and the bad. Things were no longer near and accessible, buses or trains could not take me right to where I want to go. I spend a good 20 minutes every morning putting on layers of clothes. I miss the food from home, and my childhood friends who already understand everything there is to me. But I do not regret my decision in coming here, in stepping out of my comfort zone and leaving everything I ever knew, in looking to explore. When I first got here, I did not know a single soul. Now, I have close friends whom I'd laugh with till my stomach hurt over a silly inside joke, hit up campus center cinema for free movies, and whom I can lean on when I miss home, or get a bad grade, even cry and wallow with over a boy. They say if it's easy to achieve, it's not worth it. This has been enduringly painful and sometimes embarrassing but so worth the joy I get at the end of the day. It's not all happiness and smooth sailing but when I persevere and make it through, it tastes so sweet.

The changes are subtle and gradual but I can confidently say, I am no longer the same person I was when I first stepped onto campus over a year ago. And for that, I have become stronger and better, shaping me into the adult I want and aspire to be. In the meantime, Michigan continues to amaze me. It'd be 30 degrees out with everyone in winter coats and scarves, then I'd see this guy walking around in shorts. I guess that's what we call Spartan's will.



Dear Classmate X

Benjamin Angobe Eshiwani

Dear Classmate X,

I hope you have been well since we last saw each other. Sorry to begin like this, but the way you gazed at me during that Social Inequality class, the one on malaria, got me a little concerned. Sure, the disease burden of malaria is borne disproportionately by Africans, but that was no excuse to look at me with fear

and pity. I also appreciate that you listen when I speak, but I wish didn't have to repeat everything due to my 'peculiar accent.' I wish you understood the crocodile-infested rivers I've crossed to share a classroom with you and what it's like for me to live a day on this campus. Maybe that way, you would listen a little closer, observe a little keener, and talk a little kinder. But I never had a chance to sit down with you and share my story.

So, I write you this letter, taking my chances and hoping that at least you'll scan through it. I am Benjamin Angobe Eshiwani; but just call me Eshi. Next, I should tell you where home is for me. But, for me, home is a complicated concept. I could say home is Kenya as I often say while introducing myself here. Or I could say home is Africa, but that would be pretty imprecise— Africa can fit the land masses of the US, India, China, Eastern Europe and still find some change for Russia. Or I could say home is that claustrophobic, single-room house in the slums of Majengo which I shared with my mother and my sister growing up. That place which teems with rusty iron sheet-roofed and mud-walled houses, where you have to skip streams of sewage to reach the road. Only that that home was razed down by an inferno a year before I landed in Lansing. So, let's say my home is where I live and love. Today, Michigan State University is my home: this campus, this East Lansing community, this South Wonders dorm room, these CATA buses, these chefs at Case, this bike I ride on, this MasterCard Foundation (MCF) scholarship. Like most journeys in life, the journey to this new home has been full of hills and valleys, triumphs and disappointments. And neither is it over. Each new day I find out something new. I'll give you a taste of it all...but let us not get ahead of ourselves here.

When that life-changing email landed in my inbox saying I had gotten the MCF scholarship to attend MSU, my hopes of attending university outside Kenya were dying. I had already received regretful letters from numerous schools. These rejections took me back to those grim days four years earlier: when I had emerged top in my primary school exams yet my mother could not raise my high school fees. I sat in that single-roomed house with her, mulling what would become of my future. Would I end up in crime and drugs like most youth in my hood? Mother implored me to not lose faith: "if the doors opened last time, they surely won't stay shut now." When I saw that email, all of Majengo heard my screams for joy. I hugged my mother, broke into a lipala dance and called my friends in celebration and thanksgiving.

Five months later, I would find myself and my whole 'clan'— (you know what they say about it taking a whole village to raise a child)—at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. For the first time, I would not only see a plane up-close, I would also enter its guts and let it fly me thousands of miles away from home and life as I had known them. All this felt dreamlike. But other struggles, better struggles, began. Like the struggle to use the self-service check in system. I — alongside fellow MCF scholars Expery and Naomi who I was traveling with

— fidgeted at the screens unsure how to proceed. We feared asking as it would betray our newbie traveling status. After a queue had formed behind us, a Delta staff checked us in and handed us our boarding passes. About an hour later, we boarded the Delta Boeing 747-400 to Amsterdam. I had wanted the window seat so I could bid Nairobi goodbye as the buildings waned into distant dots. But I settled for a middle seat and wrestled with the mixture of excitement and trepidation that comes with that a first flight and a voyage to a foreign space.

Twenty two hours, two connecting flights (one delayed), six disappointing in-flight meals later, we made it to Lansing. The first thing that struck me was how bright the sun shone yet it was almost 9 PM. In Majengo, you never walked outside after 8 PM without fearing being robbed. And yet here we were at 9 PM, the sun not only bright but hot too! Driving to campus, I was also surprised by the serenity and acres upon acres of greenery. A part of me must have bought the myth of the US as one giant Times Square: tall buildings, bright lights and concrete streets.

Settling in was smooth (thanks to the warm support of the MCF and International Students Offices). Fitting in has been a little harder though—I doubt I have done it completely. Maybe no one ever does. I've had some comical experiences. My first time at Case, I requested one of the chefs to take back my spinach and lettuce for cooking only for him to chortle while informing me that these vegetables are eaten raw here. In Kenya, my mum would prepare herbs that remained bitter after cooking; so I, mistakenly, imagined how bitter vegetables would be if eaten raw. I had a similar experience when I learnt, almost the hard way, that in the US published prices rarely include taxes. I was checking out stationery at the bookstore at Grand River when the clerk told me my bill was eight dollars more than I had on me. Audrey helped me pay and later explained to me why the bill was higher than I had reckoned.

A little secret just between us: in Kenya, I was pretty famous. I had appeared on several national newspapers and on TV reciting a solo verse for Bill Clinton. Random people would greet me on the streets and ask if I was the “from rugs to suits” guy (a reference to one of my poems). I had many friends and a gorgeous girlfriend by my side. But in the US, no one knew me. My noisy and mischievous side had to play low key. Early on, I stayed indoors...till I knew Tinder! I created an account, uploaded my hottest photos from my modelling days and liked a few beautiful girls. And this is how I met Audrey: the most beautiful and kindest soul I've met here. We hang out, teach each other dance moves, go to movies and drive around Lansing. Over time, I have gained confidence to initiate conversations and air my opinions. I have learnt that respect for diversity of identity and opinion is what makes MSU great. For me home is a feeling and the MSU society has made me feel at home and a full member of the community through their cultural diversity and ways of embracing multicultural heritage.

As a lover of dance and fashion, there's also a lot to compare between the two

cultures. I am amazed at how most students at MSU appear to subscribe to a 'school uniform' of school-branded wear and specific brands. True, I have a couple of MSU tees but I am also a big fan of eclectic fashion styles. Partly because my mother is a tailor and my home in Majengo is a stone-throw away from Gikomba market, a popular second-hand clothes market where you can get any clothing item—from puffy winter jackets to colorful beach shorts—for as little as a dollar. As for dancing, forgive my not-so-subtle bragging, but I have always been that guy in the circle that others wait on to bust a move. Still, dancing to me is not just fun, it is a powerful form of artistic expression too. I am already in the Gumboot Dancing Club whose dance styles are inspired by protesters in the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa.

Studying in America is a great privilege for me, considering the fact that I lived in a slum, a place where clean water is scarce, diseases caused by poor hygiene are prevalent and lacking basic services like electricity, running water and medical care. Now I can shower as many times as I want, eat as much as I can and enjoy the serenity of a beautiful campus. MSU is providing an ample and convenient environment for studying, and a diversified education that broadens my knowledge beyond my career.

Oh dear, here is a lot I can share with you but time and space won't allow it today. I would love to hear your story too; I hope you write back. Moreover, I hope we can meet up so I can share with you some of my aspirations: like moving my family out of Majengo, working with the World Bank to aid in the development of Africa and entering politics back in Kenya.

Your classmate (and future friend?),

Eshi.



Office for International
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Office of Study Abroad
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

MSU is proud to have one of the nation's largest study abroad programs - one that spans the world and helps to build international understanding through education. The annual Study Abroad Essay Contest aims to capture the essence of education abroad by encouraging students to reflect and write creatively about the unique living and learning experiences that study abroad provides.

Studying outside of the U.S.A. produces powerful insights into the differences among the cultures of the world and deeper understanding of our own culture(s). Writing and submitting an essay gives students the opportunity to reflect on, and share, their experiences so we may grow our own understanding of the world and our place in it.

OSA Essay Contest Winners



A Balancing Act - 1st place
Jackie Guzman



A l'Etranger - 2nd place
Jack Weyhrich



In Their Shoes - 3rd place
Molly Cook

A Balancing Act

Jackie Guzman

Through my fifteen-week stay in Costa Rica, I quickly learned the importance of balance in all aspects of life – something that Ticos (the nickname Costa Ricans have affectionately given themselves) know all too well.

I can recall so many instances where being more balanced would have been valuable. For instance, when planning my first trip. We didn't have a free weekend until a full month into the program, and my friend Morgan and I decided we would pack up for the beach. The week leading up to our trip was full of planning: how to get there, where to stay, how much spending money to bring, what to pack... the list of considerations seemed endless, only made worse by our anxiety from having to navigate the public transportation system by ourselves for the first time ever in a foreign country.

The one thing that we promised ourselves would not be the cause of any stress was food. We went to the market before our weekend trip and bought all the fresh fruit we could carry: mangos, berries, pineapple, bananas... we were set for a weekend of relaxation and did not want to spend big bucks on touristy restaurants. We woke at 7am that Saturday morning, gathered our belongings, and began our trek to the bus stop, dragging our heavy bags of fruit behind us. We took two taxis and two buses before we got to our final destination. We entered the kitchen of the beach house where we were staying, ready to finally unwind after a long day of travel. We opened our bags that we had been lugging around all day and, lo and behold, our fruits had turned to mush! They were warm and sticky and we had a hard time separating what was edible from what was not. We salvaged what we could and decided to cut some pineapple and mango before they got any worse. We vowed never again to waste so much time and energy on something as fragile as fruit and laughed after realizing there was a grocery store up the block and rows of mango trees along the sidewalks.

The longer I stayed in Costa Rica, the more I recognized the importance of

achieving balance. This idea was especially illuminated as I worked on my senior thesis on Costa Rica's goal to become carbon neutral. My job was to travel around the country to interview community leaders to discover what their strategies were to achieve greater environmental sustainability. One answer that resonated across the board was trying to achieve balance in all ways: relying on fossil-fuel transportation while trying to use the least of it as possible, providing quality service while minimizing the use of natural resources, making a living while prioritizing the environment over money. Quickly I realized that trying to balance opposites was not just the concern of a few, but something that has been ingrained into Costa Rican culture.

Take the concept of a lazy Sunday: this idea could mean many things to an American, namely sleeping until noon, staying in PJs all day, maybe binge-watching Netflix and ordering in pizza. This serves as a stark contrast to my experience in Costa Rica.

On Sundays my host mom, Lilly, would go to the farmer's market and I accompanied her whenever I could. We would wake up at 5am to the sound of roosters (mostly just coming from her pet parrot, Lola). We would quickly get ready and wait for her sister – I guess you could call her my host-aunt, Ana. The two women would meet in the street and begin wheeling the same mini-carts they've been using weekly since the market first opened 20 years ago.

Normally, we would spend an hour or two there, buying our groceries but also socializing with all the neighbors that Lilly might not have seen since last Sunday and may not see again until next. Here, they get their local news, taunt each other for supporting this week's losing soccer team, congratulate each other on their latest feats, or send condolences to each other's loved ones. Some ask if I'm related to Lilly ("she has that one dimple just like your cousin, doesn't she?" they say). Lilly jokes and says yes, I'm her American daughter.

We exchange light conversation for heavy produce and finally make our way back home with loaded carts and empty stomachs. Together, we put away the groceries and Lilly instantly gets to work in the kitchen. When breakfast is ready, she calls down her son and family, who live in the complex above us. There are four of them: Andres and his wife, Arleth, along with their two kids. The kids come down in their PJs, eyes still droopy from having just woken up.

Pretty soon, all six of us (seven if you count Lola – remember that parrot?) are gathered around the table, talking, laughing, and eating until our stomachs can truly hold no more. Sundays are the only days that we are all able to share a meal together, so we each have at least a week's worth of stories to share.

One by one, we all start to clean up our dishes and put away the leftovers. Afterwards, with an empty afternoon still ahead of us, Arleth and I decide to join her kids in playing games. We spend three or four hours playing Jenga and teaching each other card games. The front door is left open and we take breaks whenever something interesting passes by: maybe bulls carrying traditional carriages or a neighbor stepping in to say hello.

As the afternoon lights begin to fade, Arleth's youngest brother, Roy, stops by to see what we're up to – with an additional card player we're able to launch into even more rounds of games. This goes on until the sun has almost set, about 5pm, and it's now time for dinner. Lilly has already begun to prepare the next meal; today, it's thinly sliced steak topped with a fresh passion fruit sauce, next to a salad sprinkled with farmer's market strawberries and topped with a homemade anise dressing. Also on the table are fried yucca and roasted peppers. Lilly was probably a gourmet chef in another life and this is the best meal I have had in Costa Rica – maybe the best meal I have ever had.

We all eat, talk and lounge once again, and with the added company of Roy we're able to keep the conversation going for a little while longer. Even when we think we've run out of things to say, they start to ask me questions about the US and I ask them about Costa Rica. Pretty soon, we realize that it's already time for the Sunday soccer game (but don't worry, even the TV runs on Tico Time, meaning that it's behind schedule). Slowly, the night winds down and we each head off to bed to get ready for a big week ahead, knowing that the next Sunday won't be too far away.

The family that I lived with were pros at living in balance; they work while resting and rest while working and their leisure time is purposefully spent building close relationships. They grocery shop with family, get to know their local farmers, support sustainable agriculture, soak in the sun while getting a morning walk, and catch up with their neighbors all in one go.

American culture often teaches us to live in extremes. We work to max

productivity then find every excuse to overindulge because we deserve it after all the hard work we've done. Sometimes living to the extreme means trying to plan every detail of your weekend trip, down to the exact food you'll eat and when. And sometimes those plans crumble and you're left with an accidental smoothie in your backpack. Living in balance can show you that sometimes it's better to let go and trust that things will work out – maybe things will go as planned, maybe they won't, but it's easier to adapt after the fact than it is to waste time planning for every possible outcome. As long as you have what matters most: family and friends to surround you, a place to sleep, and some food to eat – everything else will find a way of working itself out.



A l'Etranger

Jack Weyhrich

For my essay, I have chosen the French title “A l'Etranger,” which translates to the word “abroad” in English. In French, however, it has a greater connotation, one that I think better represents my experience. The word étranger is means both strange and foreign in English, and so the common French expression à l'étranger more precisely translates to: in the strange/foreign (land). I had been to France twice before, and I had already been acquainted with Paris, but this summer, living and working in the city on my own, my ten weeks felt very strange and foreign. So much of what I experienced was different than what I was expecting after my previous visits. At times, the city seemed beautiful in ways I never before imagined; in other moments, I felt lonely and alienated in a culture so different from my own. My time working in Paris had its highs and lows, but I learned to adapt to it all. For the first time in my life I was a stranger, and I know that has re-shaped the person that I am today.

While I living in Paris had challenges of its own, my time in France was really defined by my work experience. The French workplace is incredibly different from the American workplace. Even in Paris, the cultural center of Europe and the financial hub of France, the pace and organization of work culture is often at odds with the American approach to productivity. The work week is 35 hours, lunch breaks are long and always honored,

and everyone uses all of their guaranteed six weeks of vacation each year. Knowing that, I think many Americans would assume that the French are very unproductive. In my experience, however, this is seldom the case. As I learned, the French take more breaks than Americans, both during the workday for coffee breaks and throughout the year for long vacations. When they resume their work, however, they pursue it with great intensity, and they always work for perfection.

One of the greatest personal and cultural lessons that I learned there is that of independence. In the French workplace, independence and autonomy are valued far more than in the American workplace. The effect of this is so strong that when I started my first day of work, I was given a desk and an email account, but no instruction whatsoever. This made my first few hours in a foreign workplace feel even more unfamiliar. I had been warned this would happen, and that I would need to reach out to my co-workers to find things to work on. The challenge then, for Americans, is navigating the ambiguity of a much more fluid work environment.

My first day was rough. Two hours in, my boss arrived, and for about five minutes he introduced me to another intern that I could work with. Aside from one brief meeting a few weeks later, that was the last time he interacted with me directly. I was completely on my own, but it's the same way for most French workers. In the French workplace, it's the responsibility of the employees to find meaningful work for themselves. The upper management provides only a general vision, and everyone else is expected to work somewhat independently toward that goal. The task-based style of the US workplace would be viewed as overbearing and far too rigid by French standards. It took me a few days to get accustomed to this format, but it forced me to interact with a lot of my co-workers early on to find ways to pitch in. That ended up being a great way to get to know everyone and to feel comfortable in my new work environment, especially since I had to communicate entirely in French.

After the first week, I had projects coming to me from a lot of people. Some days were slow, and other days I had four people needing me to work on different things all at once, but that kept the work from being too mundane. Although I know that the American workplace won't likely be like this, I learned to appreciate the flexibility and independence that come with working in this way. I feel that my bosses really respected my ability to handle important things without being micro-managed or constantly evaluated. That said, I feel much more confident now, knowing that I can

adapt to new styles of management and new working environments.

Being able to apply what I have learned in class, and understanding the types of careers that will allow me to do that, are both important goals to me. With my degree in French, there is no question that I was able apply what I have learned at MSU – I spoke the language there practically all day, every day. To me, any career in which I can speak French would be related to that discipline. More directly, however, my translation work fits closely with the type of job that one might imagine for a French major. While I have already had some translating experience, it was interesting to translate and edit more business-oriented documents, as I did several times during my internship.

Today, I have a far better understanding of business practices in France than I had before that summer. I had some ideas of what working there might be like, but the concrete experiences that I had showed me so much more. I now feel very confident that I could work in a European business setting. Personally, I would like to see myself working in a liaison role between American and European firms at some point in my future career.

I also developed greater independence outside of work. I lived on campus last year as a freshman, so living on my own in a sprawling foreign city afforded me a far greater amount of independence. I was wholly responsible for my own well-being, and aside from going to work and finishing my online course through MSU, I could spend my time however I wanted. Living in such a pedestrian-friendly city and having access to a robust metro and bus system, all of Paris and its metropolitan area was available to me. I visited a few suburbs jogged through many of Paris's impressive parks and gardens, and I didn't forget to visit Paris's world-renowned restaurants and fresh markets. I also had the great luck of making some lasting friendships with some of the students who lived near me. One was a French film student whom I visited in Chinon at the end of my trip, and another was a Swiss-German, whom I plan to visit later this year. The experience of living on my own, cooking for myself and solving problems in a French-language city, prepared me as much for independence in the real world as any of my experiences at work.

Overall, my internship provided what I had hoped it would provide. I learned to navigate a foreign business culture and experience life from the perspective of a European for a few months. I missed home more than I expected; but I met great people in Paris, and that made it easier. I became

very independent, living like any typical European young adult might live after graduation. The experience was challenging at times, but that is what helped to make it such a formative few months. This program and my internship placement have afforded me so many opportunities, not only in my professional development, but in my personal development as well. I gained far more in these past few months than I could have if I didn't take the risk to work in another country for the summer.



In Their Shoes

Molly Cook

In my Nike sneakers I got my first glimpse of Irish soil. My first interactions with the people were cultivated through tired eyes as I managed to listen to our guide talk about their beautiful country and culture. I listened as the customs agent asked me a question in a thick accent, and gave me a quaint smile to greet me into Ireland. First impression? Pleasant.

In my rain boots I learned the history of Galway, Ireland from a sweet old man named Liam. I witnessed the amiability between the people as he greeted a few men with a hello and a wave of his cane. I saw the friendliness and shy waves of children in strollers as they made their way through Kennedy Park, which I learned was famously named after our own John F. Kennedy. I saw the ways of nightlife while it poured and I stomped through puddles on the cobblestone. Bartenders gave you a smile and joked around even when they knew you were a traveler. First impression? Comfortable.

With no shoes I saw a whole other side of Ireland. I was isolated in a small dorm room in the middle of Antrim, Ireland which is infested by green fields and farms only. I witnessed the quiet solitude one could find in the heart of Ireland's beauty and nature. The social impression I had obtained from the country now been challenged by the small town twenty minutes away that seemed deserted except for a person here or there. First impression? Confused.

In my hiking boots I discovered the true history of Ireland: the Gaelic community, language, and ways of life. A woman showed me their traditions of making food and upholding the house, which sported dirt floors and a kettle over the fire for cooking. Their historic meals and treats they make was demonstrated for us, and she offered for us to taste samples to distinguish the difference between their food and what we would find in the cities. She sang an ancient song for us in the native language of Gaelic, and explained how they are one of the villages who still rely on the traditional Irish language and practices. First impression? Eye-opening.

In my heels I had the opportunity to witness an iconic Irish production: Riverdance. The story of Ireland's struggles and rise to independence portrayed through song and dance was uplifting and entertaining, let alone known worldwide as a professional renowned production. I saw how invested these actors were into the performance and how well they showed the emotion and suffering of the Irish people. Truly a show that changed my outlook on the history of Ireland and how appreciative I should be for my ancestry. First impression? Amazing.

In their shoes I stepped for two weeks, my existence feeling like I had been thrown into the bodies of the Irish people for longer than I had imagined as I discovered the history, horror, and hierarchy of the small island. I walked the cobblestone streets and rode the crowded buses in search of a way to understand a way of life not only for them, but for myself back home. First impression? Inspired.

In my shoes I stepped back on U.S. soil with a new outlook on life and a sorrow for leaving my short-lived life in Ireland. The culture I was immersed in felt like a routine and the ways of my own people felt more foreign than where I had just been. The appreciation for friendliness and history I obtained was phenomenal, the roots I saw they still had tied down in their culture and put to use everyday was inspiring. Study abroad made me think and see in ways I have not before and I can owe that to the dear citizens of Ireland. The culture difference will impact my career in Psychology for the better and I feel the about of communication I learned to require will benefit working with families and children. Final impression? Changed.

Thank You

Thanks to all who helped make this event possible including:

- **The Office for International Students and Scholars**
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Congratulations

To all of the 2016 Essay Contest winners!

Office for International Students and Scholars

Talitha Tukura Pam

Jingyi Yao

Benjamin Angobe Eshiwani

Office of Study Abroad

Jackie Guzman

Jack Weyhrich

Molly Cook





In celebration of the winners of the 2016 International Student and Study Abroad Essay Contests, we hope you will share in the lessons learned through their experiences and at the same time, broaden your own world view.