My Future in the Global Environment

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As defined by the Global Studies seminar, culture is the shared ideas, ideals, and artifacts of a people that they create and sustain for mutual survival and the perpetuation of their way of life. According to this definition, just about every aspect of daily life reflects one’s culture and the cultures of others. Technology and social media has had a profound effect on making the world smaller and more understandable. Through the internet, people around the world can be on the same page with current events. It’s also possible to connect with just about anyone anywhere in the world at any time. As the world gets smaller, the need for people to be culturally competent grows and needs to be a part of daily life. One can broaden her understanding of world cultures through participation in cross-cultural events, reading books and current events, and immersing oneself in another culture. However this cultural insight is achieved, one’s ability to research, understand and become involved in other cultures will make her a more diverse person and a more effective business professional in today’s global market.

A student in a large public university, like the University of Cincinnati, has the distinct advantage of being exposed to a wide variety of cultural experiences. Initially, the student moves to campus and is met with a new living environment and new roommates. Meeting classmates and understanding their different backgrounds and skills sets is a great opportunity to begin exploring other cultures. As someone who attended private Catholic school during grade school and an all-girls Catholic school for high school, being in the classroom with boys and people of different religious affiliations was a cultural learning experience for me. Often, it was enlightening to sit back and try to understand how differently people think and how one’s background influenced their point of view on current events and discussion topics. As students came together it was interesting to witness the diversity among them. Students from Cincinnati became aware of the different values and ways of life between residents of the Westside versus the Eastside. Students from across Ohio brought their hometown pride of their sports teams and regional slangs and customs. Other students from across the United States came to UC for specific programs, for athletics, or to experience life in the “big city”. While these students came here for what UC and Cincinnati have to offer, they also brought pieces of their American culture with them to share. Finally, students from around the world, especially from Asia and India came to UC to earn an American education to bring back to their country. Additionally, they bring diversity in culture to the campus as they share their traditions and customs. Taking time to meet and understand people on UC’s campus is a productive way to expand one’s cultural understanding regarding global affairs.

Being a student at the University of Cincinnati and a Cincinnati resident, the opportunities are seemingly endless to explore the cultural diversity of this area. On campus, many student associations try to involve students of all cultures with their traditions and customs. Worldfest was the culminating experience where students could witness traditional dances, participate in cultural discussions, and experience the foods of the world. The book, *A Moveable Feast*, proposes, “Food is an agent of transformation, taking travelers to a deeper and more lasting understanding of and connection with a people, a place, and a culture” (George 9). The Clifton area provides an extension of cultural diversity through its pure, ethnic restaurants. This diverse selection of restaurants weren’t always available. It is through the dedication of many immigrant entrepreneurs that authentic international cuisine is provided. In *Palestine Speaks*, the students learned the Arabic phrase “*beynatna khubz wah milah*, which means, ‘between us bread and salt.’ It is a nod to the deep tradition of hospitality in this region and means that once people share a meal together, they have a foundation for friendship” (Malek 16). Whether one desires Asian, Indian, Mexican, Italian, or American cuisine, the local restaurants provide a culinary experience to share with other cultures. In the area at-large, Cincinnati is also rich in cultural traditions and celebrates through fairs, festivals, parades, and restaurants. These events are open to the public and invite students from around the globe to gain a greater understanding of Cincinnati’s “salad bowl” of cultures. Through these cultural events, people in the Cincinnati community have the opportunity to expand their cultural horizons and palettes and gain an understanding of international cultures through foods. Whether a new dance or a new food, the courage to explore something new enables a person to learn about a culture and gain a greater understanding of the world at-large.

Reading about and researching different cultures can also broaden one’s understanding of global affairs. In Global Studies, students read three different books to explore the various aspects of cultural competence. Each book gave the students an opportunity to actively engage in additional knowledge of a culture or tradition. When reading *A Moveable Feast*, it was helpful to research the countries or the customs that were being discussed. Similarly, when reading *Palestine Speaks*, research on the wars and events that led up to the occupation helped gain a greater understanding of the plight of the Palestinians. Learning about different cultures and current events does not have to be so academic, though. Each day, “theSkimm” provides highlights of events around the world. While these are only snippets of information, this daily email newsletter provides an impetus to learn more about the world. Technology allows distant cultures to seem like close neighbors. In Becoming World Wise, Slimbach explains, “In a world that is smaller and yet more complex than ever, our educational challenge is to understand and value both our differences and our commodities, our separateness and our togetherness” (Slimbach 6). Sports are one example of how people from different lands and customs can celebrate their love of a game and retain their individuality and traditions. A person can learn a great deal about a culture by watching their sports. SportsCenter on ESPN provides insight in world cultures when it covers international sporting events like soccer and bike racing. Even more culturally informative is the coverage of the Olympic Games. The Opening Ceremony gives the worldwide audience a view of the traditions and customs of the host country. Throughout the games, the audience learns of the games, the athletes, and the cultures in which the athletes were trained. The Closing Ceremonies display the graciousness of the host country while offering a preview into the culture of the next host. Academic writings, news media, and sports broadcasting are additional means of increasing a person’s understanding of global affairs.

Immersing one’s self into another environment is one of the best methods of expanding one’s cultural knowledge. Any type of travel provides an opportunity to try new things, talk to ‘foreigners’, experience different points of view, and expand one’s cultural competence. In preparation for travel, it is important to learn some common phrases of the country, research the political and economic conditions of the area, and investigate cultural events that will take place during your visit. In addition, each time a person travels, she brings a bit of her own culture with her to share with everyone she meets. When students travel abroad, whether with a class or for pleasure, they lose a little bit of themselves and their home to the new culture. Nothing is the same when they return because they have experienced a whole new ‘world’. As I am about to embark on my first international academic trip, all of this advice will enable me to get the most out of my travel experience. I have done my homework and explored the many aspects of Montreal’s culture. I’m learning some French phrases, although my accent will surely reveal that I am not a Canadian! I’m also researching the foods and entertainment options to truly live the “Montreal experience.” According to George, “food offers a plethora of life-enriching gifts on the road, if only our minds and hearts – and stomachs – are open to them” (George 9). A world of new foods and experiences await me in Montreal. As Richard Slimbach states, “What’s important is that we should discover things that are new to us and feel the same wonder and elation as if they were new to everyone else” (Slimbach 4). I’m anxiously awaiting this learning experience and I can’t wait to share what I’ve learned once I’ve returned to Cincinnati.

Each human being plays a part in defining world culture and how it effects the global environment. As discussed in *Becoming World Wise*, “the irreversible mixing of the world’s economies and cultures presents us with more opportunities to realize relatively higher degrees of creativity, contentment, justice, and sustainability that have ever been known” (Slimbach 72). Reaching out beyond the simplistic routine of daily life will result in a fuller, more creative existence. When I travel to Montreal, it is important for me to leave my biases and prejudices at home. I have had several people tell me that people in Montreal are wary of Americans and that they are rude to visitors. Prior to taking this class and reading about being a mindful traveler, comments like this would have tainted my view of the program. Instead, I’m prepared to greet my host country with a polite “Bonjour!” ready to learn as much as I can about people, customs, and traditions of Montreal. The study abroad tour can be compared to one of the grand meals described in A Moveable Feast. “We feast on the love behind and within the offering, for a moment, a lesson, a gift, for companions and connections that will never be repeated and can never be replaced” (George 10). As I have learned about the global environment through this course, I realize that I must be an active participant in sharing the ideals and ideas of my culture and remain open and respectful to those of different origins. Through respect of fellow travelers, host citizens, and their corresponding traditions, a travel abroad experience can encourage an exchange of ideas while perpetuating the traditions that make each culture unique.

Understanding the global environment will be a key element of success in the future. As a business student, it is likely that I will encounter people from a great variety of cultural backgrounds. While to date, my cultural diversity exposure has been limited, courses like Global Studies and study abroad opportunities will enable me to broaden my scope and become more receptive to the traditions and customs that make us different. Even though my academic tour to Montreal is brief, it will inspire me to explore other foreign study opportunities in Germany, Ireland, and possibly Iceland! There were three guiding principles at my high school: Simplicity, Humility, and Charity. As this class concludes, I realize that these concepts can also guide me as a mindful traveler and responsible global citizen. By respecting the traditions of others while preserving my own culture, I will become a positive force in the global environment.

Works Cited

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