

HEAR THEIR VOICES 2020

Students share their reflections on learning outside the classroom while studying abroad.



ARCADIA UNIVERSITY
THE COLLEGE OF GLOBAL STUDIES

Hear Their Voices

Please enjoy this collection of student writings completed while on their study abroad programs with Arcadia University in 2019.

Some of these reflections are extensions of their academic program, but others are completed voluntarily as personal expressions of their own experience.



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“Much of the Arcadia experience studying abroad is the encouragement of self-driven exploration and learning. One of our hallmark goals is to foster confidence, independence, and self-awareness in students, such that they're equipped to recognize how far they've come and how much they've grown while on our programs. It's endlessly rewarding for us both to watch them shine and to imagine how they'll put their efficacy and agency into practice in the future.”



Andrew Law, Ph.D.

Academic Dean

The College of Global Studies, Arcadia University





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Arcadia's Co-curricular Learning Certificate (CLC) provides students with a formal incentive to enhance their not-for-credit development through an essay, presentation, montage, video or journal.

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The Co-Curricular Learning Certificate (CLC) provides students with a unique opportunity to encounter and engage with local culture. Whether it is volunteering with a charity, joining a sports club or choosing a theme of their choice, students can take charge of their learning experience and ensure that they continue to push themselves out of their comfort zone.

These experiences play a significant role in their overall learning while abroad and how they express their developing sense of self and place in the world.”



Dr. Chris McMillan
Instructor, Arcadia in London

Treatment of Women in Myths and Art With a Focus on the Classical Period

Sari Stissi • Earlham Athens Program • Earlham College

Something that I am passionate about is the treatment of marginalized people because that significantly affects me as a gay woman of color. An essential question that I need an answer to when entering a new culture is, “How does this culture treat its marginalized population?” It affects how I have to live in this new culture and can reveal a lot about it at the same time. If this project were my sole focus over my time here, I would have gone in-depth into the treatment of more than just one marginalized population, but I did not have the time nor resources to be able to realize that. Therefore, I focused my attention on women in Greek culture, especially in Ancient Greek myths and art. I wanted to hone in on the period of Ancient Greece because it seems like the Greeks of today and many groups around the world hold that period, with a specific emphasis on the classical period, in the highest of esteems and put it on a pedestal. So I sought to answer the question, “How were women depicted in Ancient Greek myths and art, and what conclusions about the culture of that period arise?”

To paint the picture of the treatment of women, I decided to go to museums and do research. In terms of museums, these are some of the museums I have visited: the Acropolis Museum, the Museum of Ancient Greek Technology, the Ancient Greek Agora Museum, the Museum of the Mysteries of Eleusis, the Kerameikos Museum, the Museum of the Castello Ursino, the Delphi Museum, the Marathon Museum, the Museum of Mycenae, the Museum in Thebes, the Museum in Vergina, the Archeological Museum of Thessaloniki, the Roman Agora Museum of Thessaloniki, and the Archeological Museum of Aegina. The Museum of the Catello Ursino is in

Catania, Sicily, but had Ancient Greek pottery and other forms of art from that period, which is why I included it. I have made sure to go to as many museums as possible, which allows me to have a large sample size of data on which to base my claims. At each museum, I’ve spent about two hours combing through the displays and taking notes and pictures. Then, to complement my museum research, I read books and sources about Ancient Greek myths to give more context to the art that I saw, and that took about six hours or so.

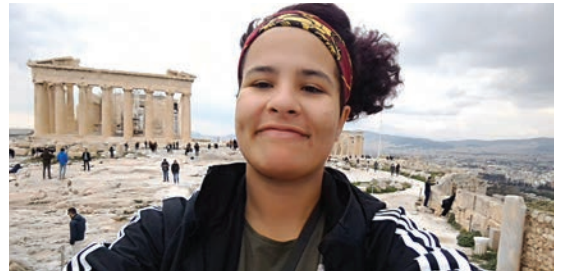
Something that I noticed at the museums is that many of the statues, figures and statuettes of females often have their heads broken off when many of the male equivalents don’t. I think I have only seen one statue that is a depiction of Artemis that still has the head attached. Generally, there were fewer sculptures of women, but even fewer have survived well, unlike the multitudes of figures of men. Furthermore, it is apparent in even the earliest works from the Ancient Greeks that the women depicted are rarely naked while most of the men statues are entirely naked. Female genitals are seldom present in these artworks, but male genitals are everywhere. In talks and tours and the descriptions in museums and articles, they always say that the Greeks greatly admired the male body, but there has never been a mention about the Greeks revering the female body. Instead of taking the time to define the female form, they just covered them up.

We can see the differences between male and female depictions more clearly if we look at a specific example. One of the fascinating portrayals I found in the museums is the depictions of Medusa. There has been a recent effort of reclaiming the Medusa myth. She had previously been treated

as a villain because she was raped or had sex with Poseidon, and people now see the deep-seated misogyny hidden in that myth. In nearly all of the modern depictions of Medusa that I have seen, picture her as either a beautiful white woman with snake hair or a person with white woman features but with scales, green skin, and snake hair. Beginning this research, I expected the Medusa depictions to be similar to how most of the other people are depicted except with snake-like hair to denote that it was Medusa. When I visited the first set of museums, I could not recognize Medusa on the vases or armor or artwork. Medusa in these ancient portrayals had a big flat nose, an enormous mouth, kinky curly hair, and a wider face than any other of the characters depicted. After seeing this consistent depiction of Medusa, I realized that she had black characteristics. No other god or goddess or mortal or hero is created or drawn with these characteristics, but Medusa, a villain, is.

What I am describing is wildly different from the pre-Hellenistic matriarchal period of Greece. A lot of the archaeological evidence found during the pre-Hellenistic period were female votive figurines, and the myths uncovered were not violent or warlike or judgmental. The pre-Hellenic Greeks did not explicitly create myths with plot design, intrigue, or dramatic tension in mind. There is no rape, and the goddesses are not inherently cruel or violent. The goddesses are revered and loved, but there is still the understanding that goddesses have great wrath and power. Sometimes the goddesses invoked wrath on the people; however, this was not deemed evil or terrible like goddesses that are wrathful in the Hellenistic period.

Before, I felt that the fact Ancient Greek Mythology had both gods and goddesses was terrific! Most major religions now barely have any female people that are integral to the faith, and I was excited to see that there was more than one goddess and that one was even the goddess of something considered very manly: hunting. What I see now is that the Greeks of the Classical period hid the misogyny. It was not very overt, so I could not spot it immediately, which is something that I still deal with today in modern times. A lot of shows in our popular media, for example, seem to be progressive on the outside, but when we dive deeper into them, we realize it still has a lot of stereotypes perpetuated through it. The things we consume as humans like stories, art, music, articles, books, television shows, movies are all significant to our socialization and our lives. If our socialization is laced with something like misogyny,



life as a woman becomes difficult and dangerous, so I think it's essential to unpack the things we consume to spot things like that and make an effort to phase them out. The things we need to delve deeper into includes history because I have found that history has become severely doctored by those who write it. I have learned early in life that the winners write history, but people doctor history even more than I imagined, and this experience helped me see that. I now understand that nothing is safe from the influence of man and that everything should be examined and thoughtfully critiqued.

Going to these museums and archaeological sites helped connect me with not only Athens but many parts of Greece as well because each museum has a section about things found in their location, which gives me a glimpse of that city in the past. They connect the history of that place to the place it is now, and it brings me closer to that area. When you compare the past to the present, you start to notice more things than if you solely looked at one or the other. I felt like I was creating a bond with the city itself.

A lot of people idealize the past and proclaim that we should go back to certain times in history, but no time period is perfect, and doing this kind of research exposes that. We cannot have a better future if we romanticize the past and get stuck in outdated ways of thinking or acting. Looking at the past can inform our future and make it better for everyone.

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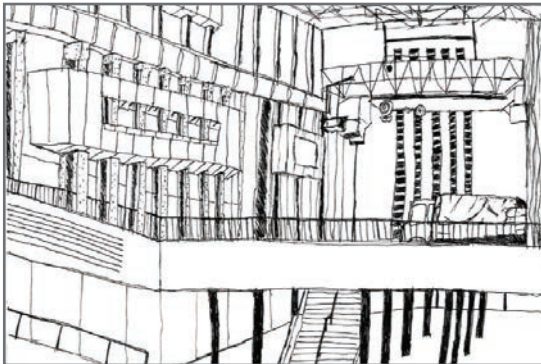
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U.K. Sketchbook

Tony Lu • London Internship Program • University of Texas Austin

I am an economics major with a certificate in computer science and a minor in business. Despite this I have always had an interest toward drawing and the types of architecture in a new place. Traveling to Europe, I thought it would be a perfect place to work on my skills and appreciate the surrounding history. During my time in London I was able to complete six sketches that are across the different places in the United Kingdom, London, Bath, Wales, Dover. They depict the interiors of museums to the scenery of the countryside. The mix of modern to rustic created very fun drawings to make. These places that I have drawn are what made me gain a better understanding of past cultural and historical influences that happened in the U.K.



Even though many places that I saw I did not draw (I either was in a crowded area with no sitting room or was on a time crunch), I found a large Roman presence in the architecture across the United Kingdom. This was only noticeable to me because I was always looking around trying to find something to inspire me. Flipping through my sketch book I was able to

see the Roman presence as I had to draw a lot of columns no matter how big or small they were. Many were Doric columns with a few Ionic and Corinthian styles sprinkled throughout. Bath was named for the Roman baths and Dover has Roman lighthouses dotting the cliffs. On the walking tour in Bath, we came across this circle of houses that displayed all three types of columns on each floor. The British Museum had Ionic columns inside to frame doorways. It never registered in my head that the U.K. was occupied by the Romans circa 43 AD and this has influenced a lot of the technology and language that we use today. The Roman architecture is still prevalent and maintained in this age and is still being used despite how long it has been since their occupation. This has helped me learn more about architecture styles and what influences inspire people how to design their buildings.



“ These places that I have drawn are what made me gain a better understanding of past cultural and historical influences that happened in the U.K. ”



The Family Project

Karen McGuire • Arcadia in Rome • Villanova University

My experience with the Family Project this semester has been the highlight of my time in Rome. Every Wednesday from around 5:30 to 9:30, I would spend time with my Italian Family. Their family consisted of their father named Alessandro, their mother named Simone, and two thirteen year old twin girls named Giorgia and Camilla. They all had a decent English background. Simone their mother was the most fluent, as she worked at Alitalia Airlines and had to know English for work. Alessandro understood a good amount of English and both Giorgia and Camilla took English at their schools. Their apartment was in the same building as Simone's mother and father, and they both spoke some English as well. Through this experience, I have been able to learn so much. Not only was I able to improve my Italian, but I also learned more about Italian culture from this experience than I did through any other experience or class this semester.

When I first heard about this opportunity, I was very excited but also very nervous. Even though I am in Rome, one of the most historic and arguably beautiful cities in the world, I found myself never spending a weekend here. During the first two weeks I explored much of the city and what it had to offer, but after the first weekend, I rarely spent time in Rome out of eagerness to see other cities and countries in Europe. In the beginning I felt very rushed to see everything and I found myself thinking that I would never be able to see and do everything that I wanted to do. Having this opportunity to spend hours every Wednesday evening amidst all the traveling and schoolwork really helped me slow down and appreciate where I am. Sure I would sacrifice pretty much an entire evening once a week from hanging out with my friends,

but never once did I regret that because of how unique this experience has been. I immediately felt welcomed into their family and they have treated me with nothing but hospitality. Through late March and April when I started to feel very homesick and the traveling was taking a toll on me and all I wanted was to go back to Villanova and see my friends, the Family Project was a small semblance of home. Sure it isn't exactly like my life at home, but it was familiar, relaxing and a home-cooked meal. And for that I am so very grateful, especially in the times that I was more homesick than I have ever been in my life.

"Without the Family Project, I don't think that my experience in Rome would have been as positive as it has been."

On a typical day, I would head over to their home after my class ended at 5. Giorgia and Camilla would just be getting back from volleyball practice if they had it or from their grandparents' house. Simone would come home from work shortly after. If Giorgia or Camilla had English homework, we would do that next. Sometimes, their homework was shockingly difficult! After that, they would work on their other homework if they still had it. Typically, we would play board games or cards (depending on which one of them still had homework). Camilla and I often played a card game called Briscola, and Giorgia and I played a lot of Monopoly. Through their mom's insistent demands that they explain the rules in

English and through my minimal Italian, we could typically get the point across. Playing Monopoly actually came in handy in my Italian class because I became very familiar with words like pagato, ricevuto, presso, and casa/albergo. When all three of us were playing a game, we would play this game called Bellz, where you had a metal stick and the goal was to pick up all of your color bells without picking up any other colors. We would often play any combination of these games until dinner, where the 5 of us would typically eat together. The food was always wonderful. I got to try both pasta alla gricia and pasta all'amatriciana style (two of the four Roman pastas). They were incredible. I even got to help cook the amatriciana style pasta once and it was so much fun. Simone and I cooked the pasta while Camilla and Giorgia made a cake (with only slight trouble). Other times we would have meat, tuna, etc and fresh vegetables. If we didn't go for some gelato right when I arrived, we would either get gelato after dinner or Simone would pick up pastries from a bakery nearby. The food was always so amazing, and it was cool to see how Italians ate dinner and their traditions outside of eating at a fancy restaurant that does not represent Italian culture much at all.

Dinner was always such a wonderful and family-based experience. Although Italians typically embrace the idea of family more than Americans, that has not been my experience at home. Growing up, my mom always cooked dinner and we ate as a family around the table unless it was a special occasion. Even in college, I would say that my friends and I eat dinner together pretty much every night. This is one of the things I missed most since coming abroad—dinner around the table with my family or with friends who have become family. Being able to sit around the table with a homecooked meal every Wednesday and talk was always my favorite part of the Family Project. We always talked about such interesting

things too. Simone and Alessandro were really intrigued by the fact that my mom is Japanese and grew up in Japan all the way until college. We talked about how healthcare works in the U.S. and in Italy and Simone and I talked about what it was like to raise two teenage girls and her life in general. I loved hearing their stories, and I cannot stress how much I learned from them through our dinnertime conversations. This was my glimpse into Roman culture. I appreciated this immensely because it is so easy to think I understand Roman culture just by watching people in restaurants or by watching teenagers smoking outside of a bar at all hours of the day, but really, true culture can't be experienced without interacting with a person repeatedly and seeing how they live. For that, I appreciated the Family Project because without it, I think I would have gone home with a less developed (and more negative) understanding of Italian culture.

Without the Family Project, I don't think that my experience in Rome would have been as positive as it has been. It was a great way to take a step back from a very fast-paced lifestyle and to stop and appreciate where I am. I got to see more of Rome when my family would take me on little excursions around the city, and I certainly got to learn more about Rome from its politics, economic structure and some of its societal problems. It helped me with my homesickness immensely and it reminded me a lot of my family back home. It gave me a much better appreciation for many of the things I took for granted living at home. The Family Project has been such a unique and rewarding experience, and I am so grateful to Arcadia for giving me this opportunity. It will certainly be one of the main things I talk about when people ask me about my experience abroad. I would absolutely recommend the Family Project to any student studying abroad!



Edinburgh University Folk Society Involvement

Nicole Hessler • University of Edinburgh • Northwestern University

When I was packing for my semester abroad, I wondered if I would take my violin with me. Depending on the amount of space I had in my suitcases, it might be too unwieldy or expensive to dedicate my carry-on to a single musical instrument. I'm so glad that I happen to be an efficient packer who doesn't need an additional carry-on bag full of belongings! I have definitely furthered my musical abilities and understanding through my involvement in the Edinburgh University Folk Society (FolkSoc) with my trusty fiddle.

Although it took a couple of weeks for me to hear about FolkSoc, I was welcomed into the group heartily when I came to my first ceilidh band practice. We were to learn the set of four tunes that accompany the Dashing White Sergeant dance in ceilidhs.

The sheet music was displayed on a large monitor, but they informed us that reading music was not a prerequisite to being a band member, and that not all members of the band could read music.

Instead of the typical read throughs that I would expect in my music groups at my home university, they taught the tunes

by playing a short bit and having us repeat it back. I found it extremely easy to follow along, as I am a skilled sight-reader. However, found it somewhat frustrating that the teacher would not play exactly as the sheet music said, but I accepted that there may be multiple variants of a tune. (Later when I brought up the discrepancies between the written and played music, I was told that the tunes were notated in a simple skeleton, but that each musician knew the true style of the piece and also added their own style.)

At the end of the practice, they announced that the FolkSoc formed a professional ceilidh band, and that members could be given paid gigs if they performed at three charity ceilidhs and demonstrated knowledge of all the sets. At this point, I wondered if I could become a band member within a week, as I could probably read every set without too much trouble. I asked, "What's the sheet music situation at these ceilidhs?" because I wondered if I needed to bring my own music, or if it would be provided, or if everyone played from memory. I was informed that music was not allowed, as it was considered unprofessional. I instantly regretted reading the music so much, as I realized that I could barely remember a single tune from memory, even after practicing them for two hours.

No matter! I resolved to play in my dorm and practice playing all the tunes from memory. But at the same time, it was hard to find time to practice between school and travel and the internship search. Still I attended at least one FolkSoc meeting a week every week, and this helped me to learn a couple sets. As an added plus, the society socialized at the pub after each meeting, so it also helped me to make some Scottish friends.



Before I knew it, my first charity ceilidh was upon me. I didn't know many sets, and I had neglected to print any music, so I simply brought my laptop so that I could study the tunes offstage between sets. When no one objected to my last-minute cramming, I decided to play, sight-reading from the laptop. The band seemed surprised at how quickly I could learn a piece. However, not every set was a success, so I decided to simply dance for the sets that were too fast for me to read. In general, the ceilidh was a success, but I felt a strong need to learn more sets and memorize the ones I knew.

Since then, I've played a few more ceilidhs. I am still far from a perfect fiddler, but I have a better musical appreciation for a few Scottish concepts:

1. The ability to play hundreds of tunes from memory
2. The ability to recall the beginning of the next tune while still playing the end of the current one
3. The beauty of playing a piece extremely fast
4. The taste for choosing appropriate ornaments (double stops, grace notes, glissandos, etc.) and other variations (pitch, rhythm)
5. The ability to pick a piece up by ear

While I don't intend to form a ceilidh band when I return to the U.S., I do think some of these skills will help me in my musical performances to come. For example, as a singer in an acapella



group, I'm grateful for the opportunity to improve my taste for ornaments, as I need to choose appropriate embellishments when I solo. And the skill of learning by ear is incredibly important for whenever sheet music is not available, which is the majority of the time.

What I find strange is that these skills are still important for the music genres I typically play, yet even as an experienced musician, I struggle with them. But because they are emphasized so much more in Scottish folk music, I have this opportunity to round out my musical knowledge and supplement my existing musical skills.





Student Blogs

We encourage students to blog while abroad as a way to record their experience and share it in real time. It also gives future students and advisors a glimpse into their world abroad, as it happens.

studyabroad.arcadia.edu/blogs

“Wifi everywhere, a latte at Starbucks... Foot locker in Rome? Really? Really.

The world is getting not only smaller but more homogeneous. Study abroad, except for some specific places, is less of an exotic adventure than it is an inner journey and a cultural exploration process. Because yes, behind the H & Ms, or the ability to continue watching your Netflix shows in Dublin, Cape Town or Athens, the world is still full of fascinating nuances. Why do people go so late to bed in Spain? What are the troubles and tribulations of Cubans getting to their workplace. Why do Catalans want to split from Spain?

The moment is now. Your blogs are some of the pages of this beautiful, amazing, sometimes weird book that is the world.”



Dr. Jaume Gelabert

Academic Director for Spain and Cuba Programs

LGBTQ+ Leadership: My Journey into the Bright Future of Young LGBTQ+ People in the Workforce

Jake McCrea • London Internship Program • Arcadia University

My name is Jake McCrea, and I am a proud gay man from a town just outside of Philadelphia. I am currently a third year at Arcadia University, based in Glenside Pennsylvania, and I am now studying here in London for the academic year. I am an International Studies Major with a concentration in human rights and public health, and I am working on a minor in Political Science. While I am in London I am part of the internship program, I am currently working with a venture philanthropy organization called Alfanar, which means 'Beacon' in Arabic. They help women and children refugees in Egypt, Lebanon, and other regions in the Middle East by funding organizations that refugees start up on their own in their respective countries. I heard about this event through Polly Penter who works at Arcadia in London as an Associate Director of Student Services. If you end up coming to London, Polly, along with every single one of the staff members, are truly kind-hearted people...



On October 19th, 2019, I attended Pink News's LGBTQ Leadership conference in central London. As an out and proud gay man, and someone who is interested in becoming a leader in whatever field of work I decide to go into, I was beyond ecstatic to attend this event. But at the same time, it was a somber memory of how far we have to go to gain equality in the world for all people in the community. Specifically, our transgender brothers and sisters, as well as the bisexual community and many others. In addition to this sober feeling, I thought of those who were, unfortunately, victims of blind hatred. Specifically, Matthew Shepard, a young gay man, that was murdered on October 12th, 1998. Shepard died the same year I was born. My parents and many adults in my life remember this egregious hate crime. I thought of him as well as many of my other brothers and sisters that lost their lives to suicide or a hate crime on this day. So, I decided privately, to dedicate my day to them, and I dedicate this article to them as well.

We started off the morning with a small breakfast and a meet and mingle of my fellow peers attending the conference. Afterward, we then moved on to an amazing interview with Lord Chris Smith, for those of you who do not know him, let me give you some facts. Lord Smith was the first Member of Parliament (MP) in the U.K. to come out as gay; he moved up the political ladder swiftly, and in 1997, he became the Secretary of State for Culture. He was at the forefront in a push to restore free admission to national museums and galleries in the U.K.; in addition, he became a member of the House of Lords in 2005 after he stepped down from the House of Commons that same year. Lord Smith has a long list of accomplishments, and is a deeply inspiring man; he left us with one quote about leadership that really struck me, "Leaders exist at all levels... Leadership

is about building relationships, secondly, you will never be a good leader unless you know yourself... Know yourself."

... I have never attended an event quite like this one, so the day was full of firsts for me as well as a great learning experience. So, through the day you had the choice to choose where to go to listen to LGBT leaders in certain fields such as law, banking, or leaders in issues such as Bi-visibility or International LGBT rights... After the break out sessions, we all went to the lower floor for some casual drinks, as well as some networking with companies that were part of the event such as Goldman Sachs, Boston Consulting Group, and Linklaters.

... One session that I found really helpful, not only to myself and other LGBTQ+ peers but a session that can really help any young professional was the session called "HR tips for LGBT Candidates". In this session, the overall theme was how to make yourself and your CV stand out amongst a huge pool of candidates while applying for a job. We all got tips from our leaders such as Jackie Kelly, and Kris Vauck. In this session, we discussed as a group some of our hardships that we face when interviewing for a potential internship or even a job, for instance, the delicate balance of being personable yet professional in an interview. Or we discussed how we can ask questions during an interview, or do research beforehand to back up these questions and make them stronger. For instance, we talked about being bold and asking the person you are getting interviewed by the company's stance on LGBTQ+ issues, or any issue that you feel needs to be talked about or represented because that is part of your identity. One very big thing that I took away from that session, is asking the tough questions. Often companies will have an answer on how they promote diversity in their company, but in the event they don't, you just might change their minds. The generation of young minds, our generation, is bringing these issues up more and more. If a company finds that they are losing potential workforce due to them having no policy or just a footnote of policy on diversity, they will change their views and most likely revamp their diversity sector of the company.

Now I will talk about one of my favorite breakout sessions of the day, and that was "International LGBTQ+ Rights"... The speakers were spectacular, and they talked about how important it is to be not only concerned about LGBTQ+ rights domestically, but it is important to be concerned about those in our community that live in other countries as well. One of the amazing speakers at this talk was Rupert Abbot, he is the executive director of GiveOut which is an absolutely astounding charity that is working to give support to organizations around the world fighting for



LGBTQ+ rights. Since getting started just last year, they have vastly helped fund organizations around the world in places like India and the Middle East... In addition, we talked a lot about Transgender rights around the world, something that is not as focused on in many ways. There was a poignant discussion on how it feels like we are in a "tug of war" with Trans issues, as well as other issues in the community around the world, due to the fact it feels like we make wins in some places but then the next day, we hear of some horrible new law in some country that seriously harms those in the LGBTQ+ community. We ended with a few talking points that I feel is important to share, the first point is that we all need to be very wary of where we send our money for donations, because sometimes an organization may say they help all those in the community, but that is not the reality if you dig around. So if you are invested in a cause, call and ask questions, specific questions about all the letters in our community, because we all matter, not just a select few. The second biggest point that I found to be very inspiring and prevalent, is to get involved. Join LGBTQ+ groups, or if you are in a place that does not have one, start one up. Be an advocate, stand up for yourself and others not only in your home country, but around the world.

... We also had the chance to talk to some of the speakers that were talking to us through the day which was a great opportunity. But most importantly, we got the chance to practice our networking skills and look into future careers with some of the companies that were present. I truly had a marvelous time at this event, and really loved that I had the privilege to attend this event... I hope that through this article it inspires you, whether you be part of the LGBTQ+ community or you are straight, together we can make a better change for everyone.

Navigating Race Relations in a Mestizo Culture

Ariana Davis • University of Havana Summer • Temple University

At first, when everyone said that there was no racism in Cuba, I was very skeptical. No one could really blame me though as a queer Black woman. Even in my liberal home state of New York and the very Black city of Philadelphia where I go to school, microaggressions and even blatant acts of racism occur more often than people like to acknowledge. But after three whole weeks, I now understand that there is no institutional racism in Cuba.

After the 26th of July Movement won the revolution of the 1950s against the dictator Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro as el comandante sought out to end job discrimination against Black people in Cuba. In the 1960s, he established many anti-discrimination laws to help close the economic gap



between the Black and White Cubans. The implementation of a communist economy supported this, as the property of the wealthy was re-distributed to the lower class. Around the same time, many people started to claim that there were not different races on the island and that everyone was just Cuban. This is a sentiment that is still heavily supported today, otherwise known as a mestizo culture.

Taking the mestizo ideology into consideration, it would be a stretch to say that all forms of discrimination (including social) have been eradicated. Back in the 2000s and the Battle of Ideas Campaign, many advocated for Black students to study at the University of Havana, an educational center that was mainly filled with white students. And from what I have seen, there is a lot of colorism. Tourism, the most popular job sector in Cuba, has more lighter-skinned people compared to darker Cubans. Colorism, unfortunately, is an international issue that is slowly being recognized and addressed, so it would be impossible to expect to be immune to the problem. But the thing that has made my experience incredibly enjoyable is seeing the widespread acceptance of different cultures within Cuban society. African beats and instruments are almost inescapable in their modern music. There are many cultural centers for the various ethnicities that are present on the island. There is not a lot of social exclusion related to race, seeing people of various races openly hanging out in a variety of spaces, something that is harder to come by in the States.

The racial component of Cuba is very complex, as much of its society and history. It is not perfect, but it is very much on the right track of progress.

Bridging Differences

Annie Josephick · Victoria University of Wellington · Arcadia University

Kia ora everyone,

I don't feel as if it is too difficult for me to assimilate to Kiwi culture—I have New Zealand's prominent Pākehā population to thank for that. For anyone reading this that isn't from New Zealand (which I assume is almost everyone reading this), Pākehā is the Māori term for New Zealanders of European descent (aka white people). It isn't hard to adjust to the culture in Wellington because well, it's full of mostly white people and isn't that different from the city I live in back at home. I have the privilege to feel comfortable in Wellington because I am a white American, and I understand that any POC or individual that comes from a place that isn't heavily populated with white people will not have the same privilege I have while living here. In recognizing this privilege, I've learned that being a white person in N.Z. is not universal. Being a white American is entirely different from being a white European. The places we come from greatly affects how we assimilate into Kiwi culture, and I have found that my POC and European friends have a more difficult time adapting to the culture here.

The issue of cultural differences is one that I have encountered quite a lot since I started living in Wellington. These differences I can see very clearly in my friends from Europe. From the United Kingdom to Denmark, the Netherlands, and Germany, the cultural differences between America and these countries have been pretty noticeable and sometimes hard to wrap my head around. I think this may be my biggest obstacle in my time abroad. I thought I'd have issues adapting to the Kiwi culture, yet what really troubles me is assimilating to and being considerate of all the different cultures coming from the other international students around me. I constantly have to remind myself

that my thoughts are not universal, nor are they deemed the most "correct" or "right" thoughts. What's even more difficult is interacting with friends that know English as a second or third language, making some concepts and thoughts get lost in translation. This has led me to have some really eye-opening conversations with friends that I will be forever grateful for. I had premeditated ideas of how things were supposed to be and how people were supposed to act based on where they came from, but when I was really able to get a taste of these different cultures, I realized my assumptions were very far off.

Cultural differences are tough to deal with. I'll admit, it's sometimes very frustrating having conversations of racism and whiteness among other social issues with the international students here. These conversations have served as a way for me to be critically reflective of myself and my position in the world as a white, upper-middle-class, American woman. It's important to stay open-minded when having these conversations and to be aware of how your views are different from others. In this way, it's easier to get points across, instead of just full-on arguing with another person over cultural issues. It's also crucial to accept that people's minds can't be changed easily, and you can't always expect to change them either.

I'm glad that these conversations are happening though. I've never been so out of my comfort zone before now, and I think this is a great time to learn more deeply about myself and the people around me. I know that if I hadn't chosen to study abroad, I wouldn't have been exposed to this new environment and been able to grow so much.

Here's to more growth in the future.



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