

Study Abroad Reflection

When I chose Language and International Health as my major, back in 2019, I knew studying abroad would be one of my favorite parts of the curriculum. As a freshman, I had dreams of going to Spain, submerging myself in the culture and the language, as well as traveling across Europe. It wasn't until my sophomore year that I realized maybe I wanted more. My Spanish professor at the time had done a presentation about the Córdoba, Argentina program and this sparked an interest in me. I had never thought about going to Latin America, simply because of how much I wanted to go to Spain, but after hearing this presentation I knew I would get more out of studying abroad in Argentina.

Before leaving the States I was extremely anxious about what my time would be like abroad. There was only so much research I could do, and I knew that I could not dwell on what I was reading without actually experiencing it. I had so many expectations of what I thought Argentina was going to be like, but tried to keep those at bay so that I did not project my thoughts onto the country as a whole. Some goals I wanted to accomplish throughout this experience was to increase my Spanish language proficiency, try new things, and enjoy myself while immersing myself in a new culture.

The city that our program took place in was called Córdoba. It is the capital of the second biggest province of Argentina. Upon arriving in Córdoba, I noticed a difference in the terrain immediately. I arrived in the summer time so the air was hot and the plants were green. I noticed that even though the temperature was high, it was not humid like summers usually are in the U.S. A fact that I learned after arriving in Argentina is that it contains the highest population of italians outside of Italy. I was surprised at how European people looked, including my host family. The people of Córdoba, and

Argentina in general were, in my opinion, a lot nicer than people are in the U.S. I had the pleasure of meeting so many wonderful and helpful individuals and even strangers. Most of the uber or remi (taxis) drivers we had were super nice and understanding of our, at times, horrible Spanish. Some other ways that Argentinian culture was different from the U.S. included the food palate (a lot more grain focused), the prevalence of smokers (higher than the U.S.), and the timing of meals (dinner is eaten very late).

I took 5 classes while abroad ranging from the history and culture of Latin America to Español y Salud (Health and Spanish). I highly enjoyed all the professors I had for these classes, especially José, who taught our history course. When I had our first class with him I thought he was a very serious person, and that his class was not going to be enjoyable at all. I was completely wrong. As I got to know José I realized what a big personality he had, and how much he reminded me of my own dad. He was always telling jokes, trying to pull pranks on us, and make class fun, even if some of the topics we were learning were heavy.

Another big part of my study abroad experience was my internship that I completed at a local dispensario, or health clinic. Throughout my internship I was exposed to the inner workings of the healthcare system in Argentina, and got to have a first hand glance to some of the disparities that are faced by the citizens. I had the opportunity to shadow two of the nurses there, Gisela and Milagro, as well as the pediatrician Paola. As I shadowed these professionals I realized the great difference in quality of health care between Argentina and the U.S. It is widely known that the U.S. has very high quality healthcare facilities and services, so going to a country where the standards are not as high I found myself having to remember to be culturally humble.

Oftentimes certain practices would be done in the center that would be seen as inappropriate or against certain rules in the U.S. and I had to remind myself that we are not the ideal, and that certain cultural norms in Argentina may not be the same in the U.S.

In all my study abroad experience gave me a new outlook on my own culture, as well as myself as an individual. As cliché as it sounds, the people I met, activities I did, and even foods I tried, opened my eyes to the depth of culture that lies outside the boundaries of the U.S. I also became very aware of the influence and advantage of being a native English speaker. My host parents once shared with me that when they traveled to the United Kingdom it was very hard for them to navigate because of their lack of English knowledge. The stories they told me about how hard it was to get around, along with how much “learn English” propaganda that I encountered throughout the country made me realize how privileged I am to have been born in a country where English is spoken. Learning Spanish for me is a desire whereas learning English for them, and many other individuals in the world is a necessity.

I would say I reached all the goals I made for myself during my study abroad experience. Being forced to speak Spanish everyday with my host family, who did not know a lick of English, my professors, and virtually the rest of Córdoba allowed me to grow in my speaking ability and communicate myself more effectively in the language. I also grew in my writing, listening comprehension, and grammar skills through the various classes I took at Universidad Blas Pascal, the University in which we studied while we were in Córdoba. I hope to someday return to Latin America as a Global Health professional, and use my Spanish language skills to enhance services and

bridge the gap between English-only and Spanish-only speakers. I owe a lot of who I am today to the challenges I overcame while abroad, situations I had to deal with, and people I met who made me understand more about myself.