

Reflective Essay: Global Competency

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Before my experience abroad, I felt a disconnect with the Thompson Rivers University (TRU) campus and Kamloops community; with the large population of international students, I felt as though I could not relate to what their time in Kamloops felt like regarding the sociocultural, economic, political, and environmental differences they were experiencing. I wondered what it would be like to leave my hometown and be the one who must work to understand a way of things, whether that be language, social norms, the education system, or even differences in infrastructure.

The disconnect I felt was inhibiting on several levels: internally (1), I felt like I needed to challenge my perception of the world around me; I had been living on autopilot for too long. On a community level (2), I wanted to feel as though I could relate to my international classmates who would talk about the differences between their home country and Kamloops. On a national level (3), I wanted to better understand political tensions and government motives. Lastly, for my education (4), I wanted to learn the benefits and challenges of international business.

Firstly, I was challenged to think independently and interact with my surroundings, hence eliminating autopilot, from the moment I arrived in Edinburgh. To demonstrate how easily I found differences from Canada, I think back to how I navigated getting from the airport to my dormitory. Though I chose Edinburgh in part because I was worried about facing a language barrier, there were still many things that were unfamiliar to me. I must have spoken with 10 people before managing to arrive at my dormitory without a cellphone plan or Wi-Fi. Edinburgh does not offer free Wi-Fi in public areas, restaurants, or cafes like Canada does, contrary to my belief. Additionally, I was not very familiar with bussing or

identifying buildings and signs coming from a vastly dispersed city. I remember noticing that road signs were nailed to the sides of tall, identical buildings, and much higher up than in Canada. I learned that this is to save space and accommodate for the dual-level city busses that navigate the small roads and tight corners. I was additionally overwhelmed by foot traffic while carrying my large suitcase and learned quite quickly throughout this small journey that 'dormitory' is not a familiar word to folks of the United Kingdom (UK); it is known, rather as a 'flat' and the term 'flatmates' is used instead of 'roommates'.

Secondly, I achieved my goal of wanting to understand how it felt to be within unfamiliar surroundings and behaviours as my classmates at my home university may have felt. In Edinburgh, they grade classes with one 50% assignment and one 50% final. When my first assignment came along, I spent as much time working on the assignment as I would have spent on an assignment back home. After I received my grade, I did more poorly than I anticipated. I said to one of my Scottish classmates, "How do you have time to do these big essays for five of your classes?" My Scottish classmate replied, "Five classes? Most of us consider three classes as a full course load". From there on in, I came to better understand that a much deeper understanding of the subject was expected at university in the UK where students divide their time between only three classes, as opposed to five.

My third and final goal was to better understand political tensions and government motives, as well as challenges and benefits in international business. The latter component was taught to me through my class, International Marketing and International Business. One of the presentations I did in my international business class gave me an idea of government corruption, motives, and political tension. The topic was

the Venezuelan oil reserves; the Venezuelan government made the country's oil reserves state-owned, though this caused problems such as a lack of expertise and productivity, which caused the country's primary economy driver to plummet. Furthermore, it is suspected that the government used the oil to illegally bargain in international deals with surrounding countries, another reason for the profit decrease. Other more visible examples are the international trade effects of Brexit and the history behind the Republic of Ireland being separate from the UK. For example, I was not able to have connecting flights to Dublin, otherwise this would complicate my entrance to Scotland. This synthesis of tangible and intangible cases has allowed me to have a more holistic perspective when understanding business situations, an important characteristic for empathising with the parties involved to make the most ethical business decisions.

To conclude, with this knowledge, I now find that my compassion for, and connectivity with, individuals in my community of different ethnicities and nationalities is greater. The importance of this is to create more inviting environments for others, whether that be in a professional or casual environment. When we can embrace perspective shifts, we are more likely to create balance within our society which creates a better standard of living and quality of life. I believe in the ripple effect; one compassionate person is sometimes all it takes to change someone's day, and that change is passed on through everyone they encounter.

Looking forward, I hope to bring these cultural understandings into my business endeavours to create a workplace with better inclusion and an environment where everyone feels comfortable to contribute ideas that stem from different backgrounds. I

believe this will create stronger businesses and happier employees, and hence a stronger economy with a better quality of life. I am beyond excited for this Fall 2024 semester in Innsbruck, and I am so thankful to have this opportunity and funding. I hope others are inspired by the moments I plan to capture while I'm there and that they use my giveback project to make a study abroad semester to Austria feasible and exciting for them as well. The more individuals who take up this opportunity, the more fulfilled students TRU has, and the more inclined we are to help our neighbours.