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Study Abroad Reflective Essay

During the spring semester of my junior year, I studied abroad in Seville, Spain. In Seville, I lived with a host family, took classes, and worked as a medical intern at Clínica Santa Isabel. To be honest, I had no idea what to expect. I anticipated that adjusting to life in Spain would be challenging, but beyond that I had no clear vision of what my experience would be like. I intentionally chose to go in with an open mind, free of specific expectations. This mindset allowed me to fully embrace my experience without disappointment and encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone. My goals for studying abroad were to improve my Spanish proficiency, immerse myself in different cultures, and grow as a person. Having achieved my goals, I now want to explore the cultural differences and insights I gained from my time in Spain.

Living in Spain, I noticed some cultural similarities to my life in the United States, but overall the differences stood out to me more. Both cultures place a high value on family time. In Spain, I shared all three meals with my host family, including my host mother and sister and on Sundays, we even gathered with my host grandmother. Everyone came home from work to enjoy a meal together and spend quality time as a family, which is something I also value in my own culture. However, Spain and the United States differ significantly when it comes to work-life balance. In Spain, there's a strong emphasis on taking time to relax and enjoy life. A prime example of this is when businesses often close for a siesta in the afternoon. Spaniards take this time to either nap or socialize. In contrast, the U.S. generally emphasizes more focus on work, with less time for breaks. In the U.S. the pace is faster and the balance between work and personal life is less integrated compared to Spain. These cultural interactions in Spain shifted my perspective by showing me the importance of balancing work with personal life. It made me realize how easy it is to get caught up in the fast-paced lifestyle of the U.S. and reminded me of the value in slowing down to spend quality time with loved ones.

One of the key academic experiences I had during my time in Seville was working as a medical intern at Clínica Santa Isabel. Adjusting to such a professional environment in a different language was both challenging and rewarding. At first, I was completely overwhelmed with communicating to native Spanish speakers. It was difficult to fully engage and understand my colleagues with all the medical terminology, their accents and slang. But as I grew more comfortable and gained confidence in my language skills, I was able to participate more in patient care and discussions. Over time, I began to form strong relationships with my coworkers and patients, and the experience became incredibly rewarding. My experience as a medical intern at Clínica Santa Isabel reinforced my desire to pursue a career in product sales, specifically within the medical or pharmaceutical industries. Interacting with healthcare professionals and patients gave me valuable insights into the products they rely on, motivating me to combine my passion for sales and the healthcare field.

The experience that had the biggest impact on me was living with my host family. One of the biggest challenges I faced was being away from my own family but Manuela (host mother) made me feel so welcomed and loved, which eased my homesickness. Another challenge I faced was adjusting to a completely new lifestyle, but Manuela helped me every step of the way making the transition seamless. Her support not only helped me adapt to my new life in Spain but also changed my outlook on myself. I learned how to be more adaptable, and it made me realize how important it is to embrace new experiences. This experience has given me more confidence in facing future challenges and has made me more open to living and working in new, unfamiliar environments which is why after graduation in May, I will be moving to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to start a new adventure on my own.

My key takeaways from studying abroad in Seville are the importance of cultural adaptability, effective communication, and resilience in overcoming challenges. Living in a new country, adjusting to a different lifestyle, and working in a professional environment where I had to navigate language barriers were all experiences that helped me grow personally and professionally. The skills I gained, like adapting to new environments and effectively engaging with diverse people will be invaluable as I begin my career in medical or pharmaceutical sales. I am forever grateful for my experience in Seville, Spain and will carry all that I have learned in my next chapter of life!