

## **CLASSROOM STORIES (S2E7): Heart of Europe Study Abroad Reflections (2023)**

*[ Classroom Stories theme fades in ]*

*[ 00min 09sec ]*

### **NICK CASTILLO (Host):**

In this episode, we hear from students who took part in the Spring 2023 Heart of Europe Study Abroad Experience with Professor Josh Spero. Students prepared thematic reflections on their travels and interactions with the sites and people they encountered from Amsterdam to Poland.

*[ Classroom Stories theme continues ]*

### **PROF. JOSH SPERO:**

Eight days, six cities, three countries. It was quite a journey.

*[ Classroom Stories theme fades out ]*

### **PROF. JOSH SPERO:**

I call this trip the heart of Europe trip because you can see the Netherlands here where we arrive, and then Germany and Poland. Each one of them I asked to put up slides or sew together the pictures, but also to pick a one word theme that was meaningful to them. And you'll see those themes as we walk through the presentation together.

*[ Classroom Stories motif fades in ]*

### **STUDENT TRAVELER 1:**

So my name's Genevieve. I'm a senior Nursing student, and I chose "Monumental" because I felt like everything on the trip was bigger than what we could see. Like, everything was almost, like, too much to understand and really take apart.

There was so much history there that you can't even, like, fathom how people could do this to each other or what – how horrible humans can be to one another.

*[ Classroom Stories motif fades out ]*

### **STUDENT TRAVELER 2:**

My theme was "story." Sometimes the interesting ones are just right in front of your eyes. This one right here: the statue in the Netherlands is called The Lady on the Bench. But come to find out, her name is Anna Pavlovna. She's actually a princess from Russia and she marries King William the second. And they had five children. The one thing she struggled with was her culture being from Russia and living in the Netherlands, being the queen of the Netherlands. It was probably a lot for her. There are stories to be told everywhere, not just from books – and to see these for myself in my own eyes. It's pretty phenomenal.

## **CLASSROOM STORIES (S2E7): Heart of Europe Study Abroad Reflections (2023)**

### **STUDENT TRAVELER 3:**

I chose the word “journey.” I find when you're traveling, you remember the views. You remember like the people you're with, but you always remember like those little stories. So a lot of these like the picture of this water bottle because all the water in Europe was like all sparkling and none of us were used to that.

All these pictures of Henry taking photos of me and this big pierogi guy.

*[ laughter ]*

But I really wanted to draw attention to Dr. Spero. I wanted to travel to Europe since I was a little girl. It was like one of my main priorities, even before becoming a nurse. Like I wanted to go to Europe, and I'm very lucky to have made the trip with him. He changed my life. I can't wait to go back to Poland, experience Krakow and Warsaw again, because I really didn't think it was going to be that beautiful. I was honestly stunned.

I know my parents are – they're very happy that I was able to make the trip with somebody that well experienced.

*[ 02min 50sec ]*

### **STUDENT TRAVELER 4:**

The pictures described themselves, honestly. “Authenticity.” That's the – I believe that's the central station of Amsterdam – that was magnificent. This as well. The Wieliczka salt mines. Incredible. I didn't even know I was going to be walking into an underground church made of salt – completely! Yeah. And it just has a certain kind of aesthetic that you just you really can't see anywhere else.

It's beautiful. I definitely want to go back, and I feel like my life has been changed forever.

### **STUDENT TRAVELER 5:**

My name is Karla. I'm studying Communications Media, Graphic Design and International Studies. I don't know if anyone has heard of Bauhaus. It was an art school in Germany. It was kind of revolutionary, and it changed the way that a lot of things were done in Germany. And this includes architecture in one of their campuses. You can see how that modern approach also and their way of thinking – that was very, very cool to see coming from a design perspective.

### **STUDENT TRAVELER 6:**

My name is Rachelle. I'm in the [indecipherable] program. My word is “visionary.” The reason I picked “visionary” is because they look to the future and they try to use sustainability. They don't waste electricity. They don't have the AC going with the dryers and taking a shower for 30 minutes. So I think it's visionary because we only can use our resources here for so long.

## CLASSROOM STORIES (S2E7): Heart of Europe Study Abroad Reflections (2023)

[ 04min 15sec ]

### STUDENT TRAVELER 7:

So my name is Henry. I'm a sophomore in Psychology. One thing that he talked about that really stood out to me was how Rhine-Waal has a team that each year goes to this international submarine competition where they build a submarine. And, in fact, they even managed to come third. That was pretty cool. Stood out to me.

### STUDENT TRAVELER 8:

My name is Oscar. I'm a senior. I graduate, sadly, in a week and a half. I'm not looking forward to it, but we made it. [ *applause* ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

We took on a lot of different topics that might not necessarily be the stuff that you talk about every day. Rhine-Waal University is a university not known too much, just like Fitchburg State. You know, two universities that have power but not necessarily get recognized for their contributions and where they're located.

And obviously, the great things that they're doing over there and the great things that we're doing over here is pretty, pretty amazing, in my opinion, being the size of schools that they are.

The second picture with this I found in the bathroom, which is very uncommon for me to take pictures in the bathroom, I have to say. [ *laughter* ]

But I had to take a picture of this in it that you can't really see.

[ 05min 18sec ]

But it says the world is change by your example, not by your opinion. For me to be in a random bathroom, in a random university that I had no idea existed a year ago, and seeing that, it was very amazing to me.

### STUDENT TRAVELER 9:

I'm Brooke. I'm graduating in two weeks with a Bachelors of Science. [ *applause* ] Yeah, thank you. Thank you. I had the amazing – hopefully not once in a lifetime – opportunity to travel to three countries in ten days. It was truly life changing. And I'm taking everything I can with me to apply it to the rest of my life.

[ 05min 57sec ]

### STUDENT TRAVELER 10:

My word is unification. Trying to find a word was really, really hard, but then it became so simple to me after going through this lecture – which is kind of small – but we were in a lecture hall right here with Polish students, Ukrainian students, and we talked about their life compared to our

## CLASSROOM STORIES (S2E7): Heart of Europe Study Abroad Reflections (2023)

life. It really, really opened my eyes and honestly humbled me, comparing what my daily life is to their daily life.

It was really tough listening to their stories because I don't wake up every day the same way that they do. So unification was, I think, the perfect word for what I was hearing in that lecture hall.

[ 06min 29sec ]

### STUDENT TRAVELER 11:

So I'm Jason. I am one of seven nursing students graduating that went on this trip. You know, us nursing students, we stick together, we fight together. [ *applause* ]

My word, "family," if you look at the top left, the screen, you can see me with my cousins. So on the left is Pavel and on the right is Veronika. I got the opportunity to spend dinner with them and listen to what they had to say about the war in Ukraine and what the Polish people are thinking about the war in Ukraine – like what the overall vibe is in Poland, about Ukraine.

And honestly, that was such a life altering experience because it really changed my thinking and it really made me think that I'm way closer to this war than I thought it was.

### STUDENT TRAVELER 12:

My name is Isabelle. I'm one of many senior nursing majors. For my word, I did "preservation." Polish people have been oppressed for centuries, especially the Polish Jewish people. And in 1939, Warsaw during World War II, Warsaw was the most bombed city during this war. Everything was destroyed by 1944 with the Warsaw Uprising. And so the reason why I picked preservation is because usually when something is old, you have the opportunity to make something new and something more modern.

Most people take that opportunity. But for Poland, they wanted to make the buildings almost as closely as to what they were. And so all of these pictures here are really similar to how things were before the bombing. And I thought that was so interesting, especially when Polish people have been oppressed for such a really long time. They are really strong about their culture.

[ 08min 05sec ]

### STUDENT TRAVELER 13:

Hello everyone. I know you're sick of hearing this, but I am Sami and I am yet another nursing student and I graduate in two weeks. [ *applause* ]

I believe that I speak for everyone that was on the trip. When I say that when we were in Auschwitz Memorial, the only words I could use to describe it were speechless. Well, you could really hear a pin drop.

## CLASSROOM STORIES (S2E7): Heart of Europe Study Abroad Reflections (2023)

### STUDENT TRAVELER 14:

Hi, I'm Danny, and I am *not* a nursing major. I'm a senior mathematics major figure. [ *laughter, applause* ]

My theme was “injustice.” I chose the word injustice because right even from the entrance, you can see the horrible conditions where people were forced to sleep in rows just like Sammy and Olivia showed, and how people were tortured, abused. And if they were even allowed to live.

As you can see in that picture, up in the top, right, that was where there were hundreds and hundreds of faces of these people who had their headshots taken as a way to keep track of who was in the camp. And it was just really powerful and horrible to see. And that was before they moved to tattoos. So there were hundreds and hundreds of more people who followed those individuals.

And we were also able to hear about some of the stories of the people in those images and the families that came through and their attempts to try to survive. And that was extremely powerful.

Another thing that really stood out to me was this sign – it means “work will set you free” or work leads to freedom – which is just really powerful coming into this camp and seeing that all of these people were led here saying “Work will set you free,” when in the end not many of them were actually able to come out of it alive.

But also it was really beautiful how they memorialized this area where so much tragedy happened, how they tried to make this place where so many horrible things happened into something beautiful and something meaningful to honor those who lost their lives.

[ 10min 00sec ]

### STUDENT TRAVELER 15:

I chose the word “inconceivable” because when I was there, that was really the only thing that I could think was just that everything seemed; it just felt unreal.

And I feel like I speak for a lot of my peers also that we've learned about the Holocaust and World War Two our whole lives. But it was never really something I could, like wrap my head around.

This is an actual traincar that was used for people. It seemed so much smaller than I thought it would be. And to think it was what like three or 400 people that was put in each of these. And it was just rows and rows and rows and rows and rows of these on a train track. This was coming in every day. This was a regular occurrence, and it's just unimaginable.

This was the remains of one of the biggest gas chambers that was there. It had actually been bombed when Nazis left because they were wanting to erase any evidence of what had

## CLASSROOM STORIES (S2E7): Heart of Europe Study Abroad Reflections (2023)

happened. You can never obviously, like, walk inside of this one or anything, but the much smaller one we did and that one felt enormous.

And so then to see this one, which was probably three times the size and to know that there was another one, just like it, was also terrifying.

This was, I thought, a really beautiful thing that they did. It's called "The Book of Names." This was just pages and pages and pages. It was a little over 16,000 pages. And each of the pages had just hundreds of names of people who were known victims of just Auschwitz, not even all the other camps, just Auschwitz.

And I think that they said that they actually need to update it and it needs to be updated with over a million more names. The pages were enormous and just lists and lists and lists of names.

That was really hard to look at. And then the only other thing it's hard to see here, I just wanted to take a picture of it because even though this whole thing was really sad, they just had some really like pretty flowers and stuff in the area, really pretty trees, and it just kind of gave me a little – too just to also remember that not everything that was terrible, I guess stays terrible, that it can it can come back around, there can be regrowth and rebuilding.

And that was inspirational to me.

[ 11min 59sec ]

### STUDENT TRAVELER 16:

My name is Chase, another senior nursing student. I will, I will not lie. I was most excited for Germany, but when I got the Poland, it won me over. Not even 80 years ago. We kind of forget how that is not that far away. People are still alive that experienced this.

Many Jewish families and people were taken from the Warsaw ghettos and many went to Auschwitz, which we visited. Just so much brutality and so much hardship that's depicted within these two photos. This was a country that was wiped off the earth. It was off the map. On the map, off the map. And then back on. Over 80 years, this country has solidified itself as one of the most, if not the most important country in Europe right now.

The country that was first invaded, 1939 Poland, that was to provide the start of World War II to now being one of the most flourishing countries economically and just in general.

And then I like to talk about the last part, too, was the group. I saw resilience within our group. We get on a plane, we fly 8 hours, cramped. The only thing good about it was the beef stew. [ *laughter* ]

## **CLASSROOM STORIES (S2E7): Heart of Europe Study Abroad Reflections (2023)**

*[ 12min 57sec ]*

*[ Classroom Stories theme fades in ]*

So we hop on a plane eating airplane food. You're on the plane for 8 hours, you hop off and we start going, we're rollin, we're tired.

But as you can see, we all have smiles on our faces because we almost conjure that that resilient energy from these places. We went to push through this trip to finish it off strong.

So I think history spoke to us, and we became resilient.

*[ Classroom Stories theme fades out ]*

*[ 13min 20sec ]*

*[ Perseverantia Network Theme fades in ]*

**PROF. JOSH SPERO:**

This is Professor Josh Spiro in Political Science. And you are listening to Perseverantia, the Fitchburg State Podcast Network.

*[ Perseverantia Network Theme fades out ]*