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Gained Perspective on the Importance of Access to Quality Healthcare

Studying abroad changed my life. I know that is likely a common opinion among students that have had the opportunity, but, truly, the combination of studying in a different place and living there, opened my eyes and mind to new horizons that I previously did not know existed. I am especially grateful for the added perspective this gave me while preparing to enter my field of work - public policy. Being able to work in public policy requires the ability to understand, empathize with, and advocate for those you aim to serve. Learning to exist within cultures outside of the boundaries of the United States strengthened those abilities in me immensely.

Over the course of my four years as a World Scholar, I had the privilege of studying in Rome, Italy for four months and Budapest, Hungary for 17 days. Spending my entire Spring semester of my first year of college gave me the chance to fully immerse myself in the incredible Italian culture. I adapted to the social and cultural norms and expectations, including, but not limited to behavior and appearance, and I learned how not to stand out or how to appear less as a tourist and more like a temporary resident. I learned to navigate daily operations and interactions, remaining safe in a foreign area, and unique health requirements due to Covid and my personal needs. It was a perfectly imperfect process. Though I got lost in buildings, got on the wrong train and ended up hundreds of miles in the wrong direction, said the wrong thing sometimes when attempting to use my limited Italian language skills, and likely made any other mistake one can think of at least once during my time there, I would not change a thing. Every smooth-sailing moment and every obstacle was essential to the growth that I was lucky enough to experience. I now know that no matter where I end up in life, in a familiar location or not, a comfortable situation or not, I am fully confident that I will figure it out.

Though my second time abroad was shorter in length, it was not lesser in magnificence. I had the opportunity to try and make authentic Hungarian food; learn and understand the history of the country, their land, and their people; experience the day-life and night-life of the locals; and see two other incredible countries on day trips - my peers and I visited Bratislava, Slovakia and Vienna, Austria. Not only do I have faith in myself to adapt to any situation, but also to notice and value the beauty in it. I learned to notice and remember details of my environment, and to be grateful for both the big and little things.

Studying abroad impacted who I currently am on a day-to-day basis, but also affected my outlooks that I will utilize in my career. Public policy operates in many different ways and involves many different parts, and these differences vary even more intensely when looking at different countries. One form of policy that I am interested in working with is healthcare policy, and I got to both learn about and experience the impacts of healthcare policies while abroad.

In Italy, I was fortunate enough to continue my lifesaving treatments that I need to keep my autoimmune disease in maintenance. I had my own head doctor in Rome and received IV infusions at a hospital in the outskirts of the city. Only two employees that I encountered, including my doctor, spoke English, so navigating these appointments was pretty intimidating and confusing at times. I got lost in the hospital both times for forty-five minutes; my nurses did not speak english, so I had to let people poke and prod at me without being able to communicate with them; and after my treatment, I had to go down to the payment office to discuss four-figure charges with a language barrier. I got my infusion twice in Italy. The first time, everyone was very kind to me, but the second time, a nurse rushed in, interrupting, and aggressively inserted my IV without saying a word; it hurt for the entire two-hour infusion. I also experienced all of this during the height of Covid-19, where testing and vaccinations were required; there were

testing sites on the street, and I had to test before I could enter the hospital each time I got my treatment, again, with providers that did not speak English.

Getting to experience this aspect of another culture taught me a lot. After returning to the states, back to my doctor where I felt comfortable, I realized I had gained a much stronger, more empathetic understanding about the importance of access to quality healthcare. Language barriers, financial hardship, location, and quality of available care are some of the many factors that contribute to unequal healthcare. From a policy standpoint, a few different paths of action can be taken when trying to improve equity in healthcare and access to quality care; improving existing care and creating new resources are two possible courses of action.

For my capstone project, my group and I worked with Black Mothers in Power, an organization working to decrease maternal and infant mortality rates, and increase access to quality care. We supported the organization by researching the policy problem of disproportionately high Black maternal mortality rates in Wilmington, Delaware. We gathered information such as current statistics of infant and maternal mortality rates, the importance of medical literacy, disparities felt by birth givers, demographic data, Wilmington-specific data and rates, and the feasibility of the organization's plan - to create a birthing center in Wilmington, Delaware. This was a policy analysis project through which we were able to give policy recommendations and assist in creating a proposal that would be utilized to request funding for the center.

Our final presentation can be seen at this link: [Black Mothers in Power Campaign for Location in Wilmington](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1UP0Pq8I3-cI-WoRsOBPrUR1p8mWPfk2d2f9FH9IeNj4/edit?usp=sharing) (https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1UP0Pq8I3-cI-WoRsOBPrUR1p8mWPfk2d2f9FH9IeNj4/edit?usp=sharing).

Living, studying, and requiring healthcare abroad taught me the importance of not only the access to quality care, but also the gravity of medical literacy. The fear instilled and harm done when people are forced to make uneducated decisions or given low-quality care are both detrimental and avoidable. No matter where someone is living, people must be able to make educated, autonomous decisions regarding their body and should be free to receive whatever care their body and mind require.

As a University of Delaware World Scholar, I am indescribably grateful for my opportunities to see the world through a different lens, to gain perspective, and to experience and admire cultures beyond my own. I am now a significantly more confident, self-assured, independent, advocating, and appreciative individual. Whether I need to walk into a medical building, hop on a train, break through a language barrier to seek help, or talk to a new friend with a different background than my own, I now know that I am fully capable of figuring out how to do it. I am forever indebted to the World Scholars program, my family, my professors, our partner programs/universities abroad, and my friends for making these adventures possible, and for being part of what made them so impactful. I hope to use what I have learned, to carry these lessons with me through the rest of my college and professional careers, in order to effect positive, lasting change.