

Our trip to Europe reminded me of how to press pause on the stressors in my life and be sure to check in with myself to see how I am really doing.

I have noticed that I am a bit more conscious of what I wear and how I present myself after this experience. People in European countries seemed to hold others to much higher standards in this regard and I have noticed that my standards for myself have risen a bit with them. Previously, I would not have thought twice about running errands in my workout clothes, tank tops or shorts that are really short. My dad now wishes I had studied abroad sooner.

One thing that surprised me right away was the amount of walking people do in Europe. I don't think I have ever walked so much in my life. During the program, I tracked an average of 6.5 miles a day.

A quality I recognized in European culture was their appreciation for life. This was especially apparent in their value of taking their time. I observed the leisurely manners of people strolling, dining, and enjoying an afternoon gelato, all based on the complete indulgence of one's life in that very moment.

For students considering studying abroad: do it. Studying abroad is such a unique experience that nobody can teach nor take away from you. Being completely immersed in another culture allows you to discover not only what it is like to live in that respective culture, but also allows you to reevaluate your perspective on life.

My time abroad allowed me to gain valuable experiences that made me question and rethink how and why we do certain things in the USA.

I no longer half-live my life by being afraid of what others think about me or being scared to do something I wouldn't normally think to do. I will continue to try and be the best person possible, but I now live for the stories I collect and the people I meet along the way, even if that means incorporating a little spontaneity into it.

My advice for any students considering studying abroad would be to do it without hesitation. While there may be some uncertainty about going to a different country, it will be the best experience. I think to enjoy your time abroad though, you must get out of your comfort zone. Do things you may not normally do in the United States, embarrass yourself a little, have fun and experience life abroad.

One of the most significant differences in the European lifestyle was the introduction of public transportation and walking everywhere. Getting places in Europe involved walking to public transportation stops, mapping out other buses and trams, and sometimes getting lost. This type of planning for transportation was overwhelming to me at first, but once I had some practice, it was much easier than driving into a city, finding and paying for parking. I stayed in Europe for a few weeks after our program, and I can now confidently use public transportation in different countries and I'm finding comfort in something that used to overwhelm and stress me out.

My advice for students considering going abroad is to do it. It is a life-changing experience that I believe everyone should experience if possible. Not only does studying abroad give you a look into the world and the different cultures, but it also helps you learn a lot about yourself. Studying abroad is full of self-revelations and self-growth and develops a lot of self-awareness. It is essential to go in with an open mind and soak up every bit that you can.

As my entire experience abroad ends in a few days, I am sad to leave this journey behind, but I am grateful for the memories I have gained and excited to use my experiences to sculpt future choices that I make. I am forever changed for the better.

As I reflect on the program, I realize the confidence I've gained and how I've grown as a person. One day a few of us got on the wrong bus, but Dr. Dunn had told us how to correct the situation if this ever happened. I actually learned how to figure things out for myself when traveling without my parents telling me where to go. I would encourage other students to embrace the idea of studying abroad, and although it can be slightly terrifying at times when you think you're lost, you will not only learn what bus is the correct one, you'll also learn about yourself. This program exceeded all my expectations.

Much of my life before studying abroad has had the same outlook: spend frugally, work hard, and focus on things that will prepare me for the future. However, from meeting people on this trip and seeing how the rest of the world views their lives, I have reassessed these values and have answered the wrong questions for most of my life. The top three meals of my life have come from this trip, and I do not regret a single cent spent on these meals. In fact, I have not allowed myself to check my bank account until I land in the Charlotte Airport. I worked hard all semester to splurge on this opportunity of a lifetime. I'm going to have good food and good drinks while I am here.