

### *Study Abroad and Internship Reflection*

My study abroad experience took place in San Ramón, Costa Rica during the summer of 2022, with a third-party exchange program, USAC. The culture was different and similar to my culture in many different aspects. Differences included a rainy very vegetative environment, taking public transportation (taxi and bus), outdoor classroom settings, and my host mom only knowing how to communicate in Spanish. Similarities included walking to class, learning in a teacher to student instruction setting, taking exams, eating meals at the dinner table with my host family, hanging out with new friends, and studying at coffee shops. During my time in Costa Rica I was fully immersed in the culture. I communicated with my host family, teachers, and other locals on a regular basis in Spanish. I felt very aware of my own culture during the beginning of my study abroad experience. It was at the beginning that I had to adjust to new cultural changes, like putting my toilet paper in the trash can instead of in the toilet! I experienced the greatest culture shock when I would be surrounded by my whole host family, and they were all talking super-fast and offering me lots of food. It was an incredible learning experience to be a part of that ultimately helped shaped me into a more diverse individual.

My academic experience while living in Costa Rica was excellent. I took Spanish classes that were very helpful in refreshing my grammar knowledge. Taking Spanish classes while trying to speak Spanish on a daily basis, helped solidify and enhance my abilities to communicate with the locals. We were required to present a research project at the end of the semester and take examinations. I also took a global health class. This class was taught by an emergency room doctor from Costa Rica. He taught me a lot about the health care system in Costa Rica. I learned how a universal health care system actually works and received real world examples of cases in the hospital. Lastly, I took a cooking class for fun. This class covered

traditional food recipes that make up Costa Rican culture. I learned a ton and ate great food. We prepared gallo pinto, patacones, different types of fresh juice, burritos, arroz con pollo, and much more. I learned the history behind why traditional Costa Rican food is so special to their culture and how to prepare various meals.

Another part of my academic experience was the internship. My study abroad experience was heavily impacted by COVID-19, as a result there were no onsite internship opportunities during my time in Costa Rica. In order to fill the needed internship credit, my advisor allowed me to write a 10–15-page research paper in Spanish on a health topic of my choosing and give an oral presentation of my work. My LIH 4000 credit was administered as a class through Canvas. There were weekly assignments due that assisted my completion of the final research paper. My advisor and I met in person every other week to touch base on my progress and receive feedback. I researched diabetes in Costa Rica. I choose this topic because of the prevalence of the disease, the impact it has had on my life and firsthand experiences of the culture in Costa Rica. My final research paper and presentation were graded by a Spanish professor at Clemson. This credit was completed during the fall semester of 2022.

In summary, my study abroad experience in Costa Rica came with many learning opportunities that ultimately prepared me to be an independent, diverse, Spanish-speaking citizen. I learned how to order my food in another language, how get around in an unknown place, make new friends, eat new foods all while having an open mind. Studying abroad came with many challenges, many moments of “I want to go home,” and lots of life-long memories and new friends. I am forever grateful for my time spent abroad. Not only did it help shape me as a person, but it helped shaped me academically. Much of the information included in my research paper for my internship credit was learned while abroad. In addition, I am now a

confident, proficient Spanish speaker. I am able to communicate with people in Spanish and one day, I hope to use this skill in the hospital with my patients. My study abroad experience had an overall positive impact on my life. It enriched my academic experience while at Clemson and helped better equip me for being successful in the real world.