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International Experience Reflection  
Study Abroad in London, United Kingdom

During the Spring Semester of my junior year at Cornell, I spent 6 months studying and working abroad in London, United Kingdom. I went to the UK through Cornell’s Study Abroad exchange program, studying at King’s College London (KCL). Living in central London was a significant change from my agricultural background as well as the small, suburban feel that Cornell’s campus provides. Nevertheless, my experience was fruitful, and as an economics student at KCL, I was able to learn much about the development process in emerging markets, specifically in human resource management. My experience abroad also afforded me the opportunity to do much traveling throughout eastern and western Europe, which has proven to be an invaluable experience. Given that, my experience provided me with a new, unfamiliar environment, the opportunity to do research on strategic human resource management as well as see several parts of Europe I had not previously seen.

Although I did not grow up on a farm, I grew up in a rural part of upstate New York and I have spent the last two summers working in a developmental sales program for Syngenta Crop Protection in the mid-Atlantic US. Considering my background and work experience, I did not have many opportunities to work or intern in large metropolitan areas. Thus, moving to and living in London was a cultural change. Much unlike any farm town that I had lived in, London teaches one how to “mind the gap!” (The last automated words spoken over the loudspeaker on the Tube, London’s subway system), not make eye-contact on a train, and most importantly, walk very fast. KCL, similar to Cornell, provides its students the opportunity to study and work with students from highly diverse and international backgrounds, except in an urban setting.
Given that, I am thankful to have been given the opportunity to have lived in this setting, despite how expensive London can be. At KCL, the diversity of a place like London was not lost, especially among the faculty that taught me while there.

Despite being a business major at King’s, I was able to make several connections to the American commercial agriculture sector. This was especially important in my interactions with my professor and fellow students in Human Resource Management (HRM), one of the classes I took while studying abroad. At the first lecture of the course, the professor showed the class short videos about Wal-Mart’s marginalization of its workers and the environment, and also about the US agricultural sector’s marginalization of migrant workers on commercial or “industrial” farms as the video proscribed them. My initial, preconceived thoughts on the film were both charged and defensive of US agriculture; to my surprise, the professor took a positive stance on migrant worker utilization in the US and was even conducting research on feasibility of migrant worker networks getting set up in Europe, given the changing population dynamics shifting towards increased immigration, especially in western European agriculture. After meeting with the professor after several weeks of classes, I helped do research on strategic HRM in the agricultural sector and even conducted interviews with growers in the US, who I had met during my internships with Syngenta, on their utilization of migrant workers. Seeing the parallels between two different continents’ agricultural practices in HRM was a great experience, and has proven to be one of my favorite college experiences.

KCL also afforded me the opportunity to go on a 5-week backpacking trip through eastern and western Europe. Once my final exams were completed, I had several weeks prior to heading back to the US. I used this time to visit several capital and satellite cities, including Berlin, Copenhagen, Krakow, Poland, Ljubljana, Slovenia, and several more. It was amazing
how quickly I was able to pick up on the language and culture of foreign cities for the short time that I spent in them. After traveling, researching and studying, and adapting to new cultures, I would highly recommend, and have recommended, to any student that I meet to study abroad. Of course, I would specifically recommend going to KCL in London, but I believe that by getting out of one’s comfort zone in a foreign country, living and studying, one can have an invaluable experience that can only strengthen one’s character. That being said, I hope that this clarifies the positive aspects of studying abroad (there really aren’t any negatives!). I really enjoyed my experience in London and Europe, and it has given me a connection to a place that a majority of people will never get an opportunity to experience, and for that I am grateful for this experience through Cornell and look forward to the opportunity to work and live abroad again.