Before I even came to college I knew I wanted to go abroad. I believed all those cliché claims that ‘abroad is life changing’, ‘a semester abroad is the best thing you can do during your college years’, and so on. Good thing I believed them, because it turns out they are all true. My semester abroad in Nepal was life altering, amazing, and paradoxically, the best semester I have had at Cornell. I had an amazing experience abroad at the Cornell Nepal Study Program but obviously it isn’t all sunshine and rainbows when you spend four months in a developing country. There were good times, there were bad times, there were times that I wanted to be back in America more than anything, but all those times are valuable and irreplaceable to me and have helped me grow as a student, citizen, and human.

The reason that I decided to go abroad to the Cornell Nepal Study Program was that I knew it would give me valuable experience working in a developing country. With my major of International Agriculture and Rural Development I knew that a study abroad experience in a truly ‘developing’ country would be more practical and would give me more experience in the field I want to work in. Because I went abroad to a developing country, I was lucky enough to get to do research and take classes about agriculture and development.

For the program I was taking part of in Nepal, there was a 4 week research period. After writing a proposal and meeting with advisors about my research I actually got to go out and perform the type of research that I was interested in. The research period of the Cornell Nepal Study Program (CNSP) was the perfect level of intensity for an introduction to research in a developing country. I was on my own for four weeks but had a translator who was involved with the CNSP program in the past. We had some contact with the program house in Kathmandu, but not an overwhelming amount. And the length of time in the field was ideal because it was enough to make sure you got enough research but not too long to the point where it was isolating and scary.
There were many other great opportunities besides the research at CNSP. I got to meet a lot of interesting academic characters from different disciplines studying and teaching in Nepal. I established some good contacts through these people that I could use in the future if I return to Nepal. The CNSP program also makes sure that their students get to experience the different aspects of Nepal, including trekking, going to religious sites, and celebrating cultural events with families. I am very grateful that CNSP put so much effort into getting their students around Nepal to do all of these things because I can now say that I experienced so much of what Nepal has to offer instead of just sitting around the program house taking classes.

I didn’t take any Nepali language classes before going to Nepal and I don’t regret that choice. Language classes obviously would have been helpful at the beginning of my semester abroad, but I found that the intensive language course at CNSP was sufficient for preparing me to get around Nepal and do my research. I would suggest that future students interested in going abroad to Nepal take Nepali at Cornell if they have the time and interest but I don’t think its absolutely necessary for that program. The study abroad office also does a good job of preparing students for going abroad to Nepal. There are many cultural differences that have the potential to be overwhelming but the study abroad office makes a point of having a thorough orientation to the program especially in the area of cultural differences.

If I had it all to do over again I wouldn’t change all that much. I think one of the only things I would do differently would be to make a better effort at meeting foreigners working in NGOs and INGOs to see what their organizations were doing there and what their lives were like. I say this because, before going to Nepal, that was the type of work I wanted to persue. Since going abroad and being in the lonely state of culture shock for an extended amount of time, I don’t know if that’s what I want to do anymore. Going abroad definitely altered my life plans. It might seems like I am bitter, but its actually the complete opposite; I am beyond thankful that studying abroad made me realize I am not comfortable working in villages of developing countries before I started down my intended career path that would have taken me to that exact situation. I now understand why it’s essential that
students with majors like International Agriculture and Rural Development study abroad.

The amount of things I learned about myself, about Nepal, and about the world while studying abroad really can't be quantified. It's very hard to even write a reflection paper on going abroad because the experience was one of such individual learning and discovery. If I was to boil down all of my thoughts about going abroad I would come up with this statement: I am so happy I went to Nepal last semester and had the opportunity to participate in such a unique and challenging cultural exchange, I would recommend it for every college student.