

Crossing Borders: How my International experience has affected my view of the world

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I distinctly remember the day when I held two papers in my hand. One of them was an appointment letter from one of the top hardware companies in India and the other was a letter of admission from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. It was a day when I had to take a potentially career-changing decision. Accepting the job offer would have meant joining one of my dream companies at the expense of higher education in a field of my choice. At the same time, studying abroad would have meant moving away from kith and kin for a long period of time and fending for myself in totally alien conditions, something which I was highly skeptical about. It was then that I remembered a saying that education in a foreign land is an extremely enriching experience and that higher education is never an exercise in futility. This prompted me to opt for the latter and as I write this after spending almost 8 months in the United States, I must admit that I am proud of the choice that I made.

The initial few weeks in the United States had me reeling under a huge culture shock. There were several things that amazed me and some of them still continue to do so. Firstly, Charlotte was a huge let-down for me because I imagined it to be a buzzing city with huge skyscrapers and streets filled with people, something on the lines of New York or Los Angeles. Instead, I found it to be a place where cars outnumber people on the roads and where the chances of meeting someone on the streets after 9 pm is lower than that of the Charlotte Bobcats winning the NBA crown next year. Also, the lack of safety on the streets at night was a bit disconcerting. However, the greenery and vast stretches of open spaces was pleasing to the eye and the freshness of the air was intoxicating.

Secondly, I found Americans to be extremely friendly with even strangers greeting each other on the streets. I was amazed by the excellent driving sense and adherence to the rules. Thirdly, the fact that professionals with years of experience attended courses with students having no work experience was something remarkable. It gave the feeling that the doors of academia are always open to people who want to further quench their thirst for knowledge. I was overawed by the sprawling campus and it took me nearly two days to explore its length and breadth.

As far as academics are concerned, it has been an extremely rewarding experience. The lecturers are extremely knowledgeable, easily approachable and they lay equal emphasis on both theoretical and practical side of things. Their way of teaching and the manner in which exams, projects and quizzes are conducted ensures that there is a firm foundation to understanding and the nuances of any topic are firmly grasped. Being a sports fanatic, I noticed a lot of emphasis on sports, fitness and athletics which was a very welcome change from the largely academic nature of education in India. When I played soccer for the first time on campus, the sight of 20 people from as many countries chasing a round object, setting aside all petty differences was one which will remain etched in my memory forever.

The highlight of my stay in the United States so far has been the visit to Global Café, which is held every Friday in a church nearby. I have been interacting with people from all corners of the globe and the experience has been extremely rewarding. I am enthralled by the different cultures, way of living and beliefs and I firmly believe that one can learn a lot and grow as an individual by sharing one's experiences. Also, my close tie with an American family has allowed me to delve further into the American way of thinking and lifestyle and has brought out several new revelations and cleared a few misconceptions.

These factors have led to the belief that we are all basically the same with the differences in cultures, lifestyles, thinking, ideals and religion adding the much needed spice and variety to life. It would benefit us all if we could acknowledge these differences, cherish them and learn from them, rather than use it to discriminate among people. Thus, it would be fair to say that my international experience has been an extremely rewarding one and my quest for a higher education has also helped me become a better person.