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Cultures and differences that make the world interesting

The world would be uninteresting, unvaried, and colorless if we were all culturally equal. I was born in Venezuela, a country where both European and South American cultures exist. Before I came to the United States, I assumed most cultures were similar to those in my country. I quickly learned that I was not open-minded about cultures.

I had a very narrow view of the world due to my limited travel experience prior to studying in the United States. I had never imagined how drastically different some other cultures might be. However, when I began studying at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, I quickly discovered cultures were very different in some aspects such as clothing, politeness rules, and beliefs. I had never experienced diverse ideas. For instance, in my country, corporal punishment and the death penalty are not legal or socially accepted; most Venezuelans believe that the death penalty is inhumane. However, after a heated class discussion on the topic, I learned that many of my Saudi classmates felt that the death penalty and corporal punishment were good because such penalties decrease crime. Because this attitude was new to me, I became intrigued and wondered why some of my classmates felt so passionately about the topic. I considered possibilities as upbringing or childhood. In my religion and ideals, corporal punishment and the death penalty are unacceptable; most people think that the only one who can make that kind of deep decision is God. This experience was a valuable lesson that showed me that the world is full of differences in beliefs, religions, and ideals, but with respect between others, these differences are not a problem.

When I arrived in the United States, I was not tolerant of other cultures. It was difficult for me not to feel irritated when people were direct in sharing their thoughts or when I observed behavior that would have been considered disrespectful in my culture. During these times, I was forced to demonstrate self-control and remain respectful. I realized that this was very important in order to avoid problems or misunderstandings. One thing I did was to think about the students' culture. This helped me understand why they behaved in these ways. I then began to wonder if my classmates thought that *my* behavior was wrong. This is when I realized that everybody behaves in the way that they think is good. As a result, I gained a better understanding of different cultures. This experience has helped me be more respectful and understanding of those who are culturally or religiously different to me. These realizations changed my tolerance of my classmates and the world.

Prior to studying in the United States, I thought that there would not be any drastic cultural differences between the United States and my native country. As I encountered others of very different cultures, I realized that I was not open-minded about these differences. However, being in the United States has taught me how to resolve this cultural intolerance. As a result, I have made numerous friends, and I feel like many of classmates are family. Differences make the world more interesting. Life is full of experiences that help you become a better person, and thanks to this, I can say that I am a better person today because I have a better understanding of others.