

Scholar Final Report

There is a saying that I keep bumping into through out my involvement with the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship, 'There is a reason Ambassadorial comes before Scholar'. While this isn't very elegant or so striking with its though provoking wisdom, I do believe it is a vital idea for all scholars to understand and realize. The Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship program provides a unique and life changing opportunity of the world youth. While government scholarships, other private grants, and university provided funding almost always demands their recipients are the best by their grades and standardized test scores, Rotary searches for those who are superior in their spirit, heart, soul, and intellect. Rotary asks us to spend a year of learning that is not entirely focused on books but on people, culture, our world, and our places in these spaces. I feel extremely privileged to have been chosen for such an amazing experience and can assure anyone reading that what Rotary has given me has not only given me the ability to grow, learn, and change in ways I could have never imagined before they happened nor would have been possible any other way, but also has provided me with an experience that has allowed me to give back to others in innumerable ways and magnitudes.

To be completely honest, the actual time I spent class was perhaps the least enjoyable part of this year in many ways. As compared to other years of my college career, this was not my most studious; I did not spend a majority of my year consumed in my sociology texts, although I did do my best to make sure they didn't gather dust either. I spend most of my year learning from the culture around me, from my Indian friends, from my senses, and from all the things that exist in Delhi, and India, outside of the college walls. I know that this year here would not have been half as meaningful to myself or the people around me if I had spent the entire year consumed with my studies, ignoring the new world surrounding me. I did enjoy sociology as a subject because it allowed me to analyze the new culture that surrounded me and my place in it from a very different vantage point. I especially enjoyed my Indian Sociology course and, more specifically, the feminist movement in India section. Since my study year has been in an all girls college with in Delhi University, this issue is perhaps more real to me. After spending hours upon hours discussing my friends fear and hatred at their fate of arranged marriages, their generally second class status in society because of their gender and the other eerily real abuses that come with being a woman in India, I felt extremely connected to this portion of my course work. As an unmarried woman in Delhi, I have felt this second class citizenship and I've come to loathe it.

My course work has also helped my in my future, for the rest of my undergraduate degree, as well as my future careers, in many unexpected ways. Firstly as a typical undergraduate with sincere intentions to improve the world that surrounds me, I came to Delhi quite confused on what my degree should actually be in. I had considered a future in sociology and after a year of study, I can confidently say, it is not for me.

The experience of living in Delhi, which is in a whirlwind of infrastructure development, has shaped my future academic and career goals significantly. I came to Delhi not sure if I was going to return to my undergraduate degree immediately

afterwards, unsure essentially everything connected to my education and professional future. I leave Delhi confident in my major of Environmental Science, in returning to Northern Michigan University to finish my degree, and in my desire to pursue post graduate studies, however distant they may be. Seeing what I have of India and being exposed in such detail to life in Delhi, has furthered my interest in sustainable and self sufficient development and sparked a specific interest in waste management as it pertains to recycling and reusing material in our infrastructure development.

“There were so many fewer questions when stars were just the holes to heaven”
- Jack Johnson

While I am aware that the above are lyrics to a pop song, I do believe a lot of the changes that have come out of this year lend themselves to this lyric. While the things I have seen and what they have taught me about my sponsor and host countries and, indeed, the world and my place in it, are some of the treasures I now value most in my life, they definitely didn't come easily nor were their ramifications as easy to accept or sugar coated as the ideas they replaced.

Foremost, and first to be shattered was my idea of the rest of the world, specifically of India. Perhaps I should say my lack of ideas about the rest of the world and India. My brain went as far as documentaries I had seen, books I had read, and, possibly, National Geographic. I was not closed minded but there are many things about the rest of the world and your self you can only imagine once you have seen them and only come close to understanding once you've lived them. I did not imagine Delhi to be an 18th century Mughal city state, I was quite surprised to find a brilliant new metro system, cell phones in pockets of everyone from old college professors to rickshaw pullers, and a large plethora of American fast food chains. I was amazed by and am still quite intrigued by what Delhi entails. In the thralls of a complete infrastructure overhaul, the capital's development was a lesson in its own. While wading through feet of water in the streets, I realized that transforming a city from its centuries old state to a modern, smoothly functioning capital meant you may have one of the best metros in the world but the sewer systems were still on the to do list. That especially in such a bustling place as Delhi, which is a city that may sleep but when it wakes up is home to 12 million people, doesn't come in the snap of a finger; sustainable development comes from years of planning, thought, inconveniencing construction, failures, and lessons learned. As for being an American abroad, this was quite a year. In a sentence, everyone loves Barack Obama, sees us as floundering in debt, and begins nearly every question about America with 'Well, you see in the movies...'. While these are worth a chuckle, they are also worth some thought. In the three countries I've been in the last year it seems unanimous that the world sees Barack Obama as the beginning of a new era in the world and as a glowing ray of hope. This is quite a weight to carry on our shoulders and reinforces the huge importance of a renewed involvement of civilians in our government.

Also I saw one of the most important roles of my year here, on a personal level, was to forever abolish the mental connection of life in America to what is produced in our movie studios. While it felt horrible to see that most of my friends considered a decent amount of what they see in movies like American Pie to be close to the truth, it felt equally good to share with them my life which, I feel, hits more closely to what it is to be a young American.

Before I left I had said quite frequently that I hoped this year abroad would give me something to feel patriotic about. But this was a bit of an empty statement. While I earnestly meant it, I did not know how it could possibly be achieved. I am nineteen and as such spent all of my teenage and adult life with the Bush administration, seeing my country waste immensely, and give the example to our youth and to the world that the way to deal with your sorrows and feuds was to simply invade and kill. Naturally I felt disconnected from my country. I could not identify with anything I saw as American. But this year abroad has helped me see things about my country of which I could feel immensely proud and allowed me to meet other Americans who are acting as ambassadors of goodwill.

Growing up in a country that, since September 11th, has highly demonized Islam, I am so thankful for the appreciation and respect this year has given me for Islam. After traveling to Indonesia, a country whose population is 98% Muslim, I was so happy to have built friendships in the country, to have made the connection for the people I was doing relief work for, between the help I was giving them and myself and my country. It felt amazing to give out food, school supplies, and soccer balls and be able to say 'this is from your friend in America'.

While in Sulawesi, I met a young girl, Reni, who was volunteering in a garbage dump to help the families even poorer than hers to organize into a community organization to help lift each other from poverty. Reni is a young, beautiful girl who wears a tight burqa and has a smile that could win anyone's heart in a moment. After chatting with her for a while through my friend who is rapidly translating between Bahasa Indonesia and English, I learn that she has finished high school, is working here at the garbage dump to earn credit to collect her high school diploma, and would desperately love to go to college to become a teacher or a nurse but has no hope of being able to pay for that.

After thinking a while about the amazing scholarship I am currently on, I asked her how much would her entire college education cost. Her eyes became huge and she said after some time, perhaps 20,000,000 Rupiah, which is about two thousand dollars. Considering the funds left over from my scholarship year are much more than that, I told her I would like to see if I could pay for her college. Subsequent emails were made to many Rotarians and through out Makassar, Indonesia, to prepare a budget and the project was approved. This work in progress is one of the things of which I am most proud. The bond that has been created between Reni and I is not only across national, cultural, and language barriers but also across religion. The greeting between followers of Islam is 'Asalam Allakum' which roughly means may God take care of you and the response 'Allakum Asalam' means may God take care of you as well. One of my favorite things is to greet people with 'Asalam Allakum' and to see huge smiles burst on to their faces and to get a beaming reply of 'Allakum Asalam'. The power of words and the respect they can grant or take away has been a huge lesson of this year.

The next question asks 'how would we describe Rotary to our family, friends, etc.' However I may suggest it be changed to how DO we. Rotary is amazing organization and has made such an impression on my life that I can't help but talk about it daily. I have suggested many of my amazing, passionate bright friends apply for the scholarship. To me Rotary means reaching across all barriers that exist in our world without stepping on the toes of anyone. Rotary means uniting as a global family and drawing

from our collective resources to help each other grow and improve each of our lives. I think the first paragraph of this report describes how I feel and speak about Rotary and the Ambassadorial Scholarship.

What Rotary has provided has been helpful, no doubt, but I have found in my sponsor country, I rely on Rotarians who aren't my Sponsor counselor. I would definitely like to see it become mandatory that any scholars assigned to India have Hindi lessons for the North or Tamil lesson for studying in the south. While my course work has been entirely in English, the world outside of the college walls is not. While fluency is not necessary or expected a base to grow upon after arrival is. I arrived in the country not even knowing 'Namaste', while this was my fault directly, I do think it is Rotary's role to prepare us.

Homesickness and culture shock hit me with such intensity I spent hours in my first week here frequently plotting ways to get to the airport and return home with out my host Rotarians realizing fast enough to stop me. I do believe some of these things could have been lessened through more preparation and perhaps copious amounts of advise from past scholars, I don't think I would want them to be. The hell that was my first week or two here, believe me I was in physical as well as mental pain with my spinning head, made the rest of this experience so amazing; it gave me perspective, shocked some of the innocence and naivety out of me, and forced me to grow so much as a person that I think my mind and soul have done ten years worth of maturing in nine short months. In short I hold this growth as one of my most precious treasures from this year and would not give it up for a whole fully funded year abroad again. (Although, make no mistake, World Peace Scholar, here I come!) I don't know that there is much advice I would give to a scholar preparing to leave that wouldn't spoil that hellish miracle for them. I do however beg that if another student is traveling to Delhi University or India in general and would like to talk to me I would absolutely love to be in contact with them.

Before I left Marquette, I had talked of starting a Rotaract club and I would like to pick up this ambition and evaluate its practicality when I return. I also attend meetings of my sponsor Rotary club regularly when I am in Marquette and will continue to do so as long as it is okay with them. Last year and this year I have and will sit on the interview committee for the scholar from our district. I thoroughly enjoy this participation and will definitely continue as long as I am invited. I look forward to staying involved in local events and service projects hosted by the Marquette clubs. I am excited to attend the District 6220 Conference in May and to speaking to clubs through out the up coming years about my experience and the program. I cannot say what my future holds but if my life works in that way I would love to see myself as a Rotarian in the future.

If there has been any doubt in the above, please let me express my most sincere gratitude for this amazing experience. When I was at my orientation last year a past scholar who had since become a Rotarian said 'I have been graduated college, been married, had children and grandchildren, and I can say this will be the most amazing year of your life.' She couldn't be more accurate. Thank you.