

How UNCW has prepared me to become a Global Citizen by Marissa Vincent

My experiences at UNCW have allowed me to evolve into a person that is motivated to incorporate sustainability and service in everyday life. This motivation has grown from the various opportunities UNCW has provided me with and can be explained by the trajectory of my academic career at UNCW. Along with gaining invaluable experiences, the opportunities I have gained from UNCW have taught me two important lessons about being a global citizen: that it is an evolving task that can be a part of my future career and that I can be a global citizen from my own home.

The first international opportunity I experienced at UNCW happened during Spring 2018. I traveled to Iceland for 10 days, as part of the Honors Happiness Emphasis course. We studied countries with the highest happiness indexes, then studied abroad in Iceland, which is rated one of the world's "happiest" countries. We learned about Icelandic culture, interviewed locals about what makes their country happy, and traveled all over the country. I loved learning about Iceland and experiencing such a beautiful country that is very different from the U.S., but I honestly was not deeply motivated to be a global citizen at that point in time. During Fall 2018, however, I took my first International Studies course, Honors Introduction to International Studies. The course satisfied an honors requirement, and I knew I would enjoy learning more about world events. I didn't expect that I would love the course so much that I would be motivated to minor in International Studies. I was already majoring in Biology and Spanish and thinking of minoring in Chemistry. I had no real need to take on another minor. After learning about the Mexico City Policy, a U.S. policy that prevents government funding to international family planning organizations if they provide abortion-related services, I knew that I needed to take more international studies courses. I had never heard of the policy and my unknowing simply disappointed me. I thank this introductory course for sparking my interest in being a more global citizen. While I gained invaluable experiences from learning about and traveling to Iceland, at that point I still did not realize how important it is for me to prioritize having a global perspective in my life.

After taking on this new minor in International Studies, I knew I wanted to travel abroad again. As a Spanish major, I was also set on finding an opportunity to study in a Spanish-speaking country. I wanted to have enough time to make real connections abroad, but I could not afford to spend an entire semester abroad. The only problem with a summer opportunity was that I also couldn't afford to miss-out on getting hours at an animal hospital for my veterinary school applications. When I discovered the opportunity to intern on an animal farm at EARTH University in Guacimo, Costa Rica, I knew I had to go. This internship was the perfect opportunity for me to gain large animal experience, gain more Spanish acquisition, experience a new culture, and learn about sustainability. During the summer of 2019, I flew to Costa Rica, took my reserved taxi to EARTH University, and had an even greater experience than I had expected.

At EARTH, I attended an animal physiology course and worked on an animal farm for 5 to 6 hours every day. I milked cows, fed and washed the pigs, and guided, fed, and harvested feed for the sheep. I learned about farm diseases and infections, forage management, ethical

farming, and agronomy. The campus was also completely self-sustainable and home to students from over 40 different countries. The food was grown and produced on the campus farms, our food waste fed the pigs, and the animal waste produced energy for the campus. We showered in cold water and used no AC. While these conditions were very different from what I was used to in the U.S., I was perfectly comfortable and realized the privileges that I have in the U.S. are simply not the world's reality. At EARTH, I made connections with students from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and the U.S. I was able to visit a home of a friend in Costa Rica and explore the cities of Monteverde and Jaco on the weekends. After this experience, I knew that what I really wanted to do was make an impact. I want to promote inclusion, diversity, ethics, and sustainability just like they do at EARTH. All veterinarians contribute positively to society and will have a meaningful impact on the lives of both animals and humans. I realized, however, that I wanted to be part of a change. The experience confirmed my passions and highlighted to me that my goals are possible when pursuing a career in veterinary medicine.

During Spring 2020, I was supposed to live with a host family in Oaxaca, Mexico for 10 days. The entire semester, my fellow students and I had studied the Oaxacan experience not only in Oaxaca, but in Wilmington. After buying my tickets, I could not wait to go to Oaxaca, learn and experience a new culture, and gain the Spanish practice and acquisition that I needed and felt I could only get from living with a host family. When the threat of COVID-19 increased and borders began closing, I was devastated. I had been wanting to experience living with a host family for a couple of years, and this trip was perfect for my schedule. While I missed out on traveling to Oaxaca, the cancellation allowed me to learn even more about what it means to be a global citizen. I learned one of the most valuable lessons, that I did not have to travel to keep a global perspective and make a positive impact on the world.

Due to the pandemic, I had lots of free time on my hands during the end of the Spring 2020 semester. Despite classes moving online, I stayed in Wilmington to work at the animal hospital. As most people did, I felt isolated and the need to do something. I received various emails from Dr. Boomershine and the Spanish department, explaining the need in the community for Spanish-speaking volunteers. After learning about these service opportunities, I realized that there were plenty of opportunities to practice my Spanish and learn more about a culture without even leaving Wilmington. I decided to sign up to help deliver food boxes and groceries to Latinx communities in need. The food boxes consisted of fresh, local produce that many of the communities did not have access to. I also began helping deliver lunches to communities that relied on school lunches. While schools had closed down, New Hanover County Schools continued to make lunches for their children. Going door to door, asking if children needed lunch that day broadened my perspective. This experience opened my eyes to the inequality and food insecurity that many live with just right down the street from me. We produce enough food in the world to feed everyone, yet millions don't have access to it. Food insecurity is a global issue, and I learned that I can help by donating just one hour of my day.

Before coming to UNCW, I only had one main goal for my life, to become a veterinarian. My plan was to take all of the necessary prerequisites and do my best to get into veterinary school. That goal remains today, but now it is more complex. I have realized that I want to

pursue veterinary medicine, while contributing to a more global, diverse, and sustainable world. My international studies courses have taught me how important it is to continue to learn about what is going on in the world and what role I may play in it. My service experiences have allowed this role to be tangible for me. My abroad experiences have broadened my perspective and shown me where my interests really lay. From my first year as a freshman, to the semester of my graduation, the opportunities UNCW has provided me with have allowed me to realize that I have various goals for my life that revolve around making a positive impact on the world and that I can pursue all of these interests in my future as a veterinarian.

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