



(China Summer School Program – photo taken just outside of Shanghai)

Why Study Abroad?

When people ask me why should they study abroad I ask them, why not? Study abroad is a fun way to learn and get educated. Studying abroad did not cross my mind when I was in my first two years of undergraduate studies at GVSU, but then I decided to attend a Study Abroad Fair hosted by the Padnos International Center (PIC). It was overwhelming at first learning about all the options and programs out there. There are hundreds of program options and I did not know where to begin. My first step was talking to a study abroad advisor in the Padnos International Center. I asked them about procedures, transferring my courses back to GVSU, graduating on time, cost, etc. I felt relieved knowing that I could use my financial aid to help pay for my program cost and tuitions. There are many scholarships and grants that not many students utilize. I took the opportunity to apply for some scholarships and grants to help pay for my program cost. With the help of financial aid and scholarships, I was able to fully pay for my trip abroad.

I will admit that preparing to study abroad can be a long process. It took me about a whole semester just to plan out what I had to do (figuring out the cost, learning the types of study abroad programs, exploring what classes I should take, and applying to study abroad). PIC is a great office that is always willing to help students figure out what they have to do in order to study abroad. They have helped me numerous times with my application, the process, scholarships, transferring my courses, etc. They explained to me that there are several types of

study abroad programs, which are faculty-led, partnership and non-GVSU programs, and independent study abroad. There are options for internships, teaching, volunteering, and working abroad as well.

All students that want to study abroad have to go through the process of applying for study abroad. There were many steps that I had to go through and I almost did not want to study abroad because I felt overwhelmed. I always thought that attending college was hard enough, so having to go the extra mile to work through the whole process of study abroad was not on the top of my “To Do List”. Also, being away from my parents and friends was scary to me. I was afraid that I would not be able to survive being away for three months. I was not quite ready to make the commitment, but I just knew that I had to do it.

There are many options when it comes to the length of a study abroad trip. Some programs go from two weeks while others last a whole academic year. There are a variety of options for students because many people have other commitments. It is understood that some people will not be able to study abroad for a whole year or semester. This is why there are many short term programs for students to have the opportunity to study abroad yet not have to be gone for a long time. Again, the options for study abroad are endless. I remember that I chose to study abroad for three months because that program length felt neither too short nor too long to me. I was able to leave the country for a good amount of time without having to be away from my family for too long.

When I got everything figured out and was ready to leave the country, the feelings of overwhelming anxiety and fear was not there anymore. I was ready to go on an adventure. My study abroad trip was a life-changing experience for me. All of the knowledge that I gained changed my perspectives. I was so used to my own comfort zone that when I left my “bubble,” I learned to be more independent and accepting of others. I enjoyed seeing a different side of the world, learning from different cultural perspectives, and experience something that was outside of my comfort zone. I not only learned a great deal about myself, but also about the world. Study abroad is a great opportunity for all students. It is an opportunity to learn and study outside of the classroom and see the world right in front of your eyes.