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SEF

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Reflection

SEF has supplied me with an experience that I can look back on that will be just one defining moment of my academic career and life as a whole. I had the pleasure of working with three amazing German professors who are so passionate about their work and teaching as a whole which impacted my academic studies. I figured out how to operate and problem solve in a foreign land with little help and understanding of the language. Finally, I got to learn about other cultures and how to properly uphold, respect, and adapt to another countries way of life.

Having three teachers for one class was such a unique experience. More than one person working on a course takes the entire course to a new level. Herr Stübing, Lutz, and Volker, my three German professors, each worked years to perfect the course we took in three weeks. The course ranged from history to pop culture and politics to etiquette. They individually took the lead to teach, bring their own style, and thoughts. I had to adapt to their different teaching styles throughout the course. Herr Stübing was my original teacher at NIU who came on the trip. He had an upbeat and playful teaching style while Herr Lutz had a monotone and to the point way of teaching. Both required me to come into class with different mindsets. Sometimes they would switch off in the middle of class and require to be ready and willing to adapt in an instant. The material was well planned out as well. I have never gotten to learn about a topic in class and then go to see what I learned later that day. For instance, our class learned about the Harz mountains

and the mining that took place there, in the morning. Then, later that same day, we went down into one of the mines in the Harz mountains. I will never get an experience like that back at NIU. I cannot learn about the Alamo, for example, and then go visit it later the same day. This study abroad program actually showed true value of what I learned and how to apply it. Not only did I apply the in class knowledge that I gained while I was there, I also got to use my skills I gained in my first year at NIU as well.

The biggest take away I took from traveling to Germany is a lifelong skill. I figured out how to problem solve and navigate my way around unfamiliar ground in an uncomfortable environment. I have never traveled anywhere far distance by myself. SEF has given me the great opportunity to leave the county by myself and travel. At the start of my journey, was so clueless on how to get around even American airports and let alone public transportation. As I traveled out of the U.S. to the UK and had to figure out public transportation, I realized I could think on my own without a guardian taking the lead. This was by far the most eventful and changing part of the trip. While in Germany, our class traveled to different cities and towns where we were let loose for hours at a time. Navigating a town and talking to locals who speak a different language for hours at a time is also another great experience that SEF gave me. I can go to any town in the states and be perfectly fine to talk to strangers and walk around. When it comes to being in such a forging place, its makes you feel so little in a way. I have never went around from place to place and felt out of place. However, after weeks of living in Germany, I slowly became more comfortable navigating a new place. SEF has allowed me to adapt and gain valuable life skills that I will definitely and surely use the rest of my life.

The final area that the SEF has helped me enrich my life is from the new culture I got to experience. I have lived 19 years in a town smaller than 2,000 people surrounded by corn and farmers. The only kind of culture I know is a small town, very friendly type of people. Even in DeKalb was a slight culture change for me. Nothing compared to going to small towns in Germany and just existing in the environment. I learned so much on how the lifestyle is compared to mine and most of America's. In class, we had a day where our teachers helped us adapt and explain differences in ways we hold ourselves. The biggest ones that stuck out to me and by far the hardest to adapt to was the way they act and sound at the dinner table or any time they eat for that matter. At home with my friends, we are a loud group and just enjoy eating together. When we were in a group in Germany and sat down to eat for the first week, I was constantly told to lower my volume. As time went on, I learned how to hold myself at the table and in public. By the end of the trip, I felt fully immersed and integrated into the culture.

My time abroad will stick with me for a very long time. I learned so many valuable life skill and knowledge to further my education as a whole. None of this would have been possible without my fantastic teachers who helped guide my learning, my parents working very hard to help me out with the trip, and the SEF who helped push me to achieve a program abroad. This whole summer abroad has been like nothing I will do ever again. Not once have I learned so much about the world, myself, and how to be flexible in a short amount of time. The SEF, overall, sent me on this trip because without their support, none of this could have ever been possible. I am extremely grateful for the program to be available to all students on campus who want to further their education and learning experience as a whole.