

Grace Julius

Multimedia Capstone

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Lifechanging events of Studying Abroad

Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), gained a very diverse group of students during the fall 2023 semester. The positive outcomes of their experiences while studying abroad make their stories worth hearing. Prior to their semester, Grace Julius sits crying on her floor in Freeport, Illinois while she packs up her life for the next three months into one singular suitcase. She'll be taking a direct flight to London in a couple of hours and will soon consider the UK her forever home.

4,250 miles away, her future housemate, Nick is already on his way to Canterbury. He is 7 hours ahead of Central USA time, in Madrid Spain, and is on a bus with tears streaming down his face because he does not want to leave his mother. Grace and Nick will cry together on their last day because they have to leave each other.

At the same time, Zariah Scales and Reece Mullins are two students studying at UVA Wise about to embark on their school's first-ever study abroad trip. They had gone to the same school for years and had never met each other. They will become best friends.

Over in western USA, Olivia Dubrasky, is excited to return abroad, as she had done a trip overseas before. She has been set on attending CCCU for nearly 8 months, and her plan to do so never wavered. However, she's never had a roommate abroad before. She will become Nick and Grace's third housemate, and that house will become filled with so much love and memories.

All the way over in France, Cécile Lecouls is getting ready to hop on a train to London. She's lived in Europe all of her life and has known nothing besides that culture. She's looking forward to meeting new people outside of where she's from. She will end up being Grace's random partner in two classes. They're now 4,188 miles apart, but still stay in touch.

Finally, in Canada, Téa Lane is getting ready to go abroad for the first time ever. She originally committed to the year-long term at CCCU. She's a commuter and has never lived without her parents, she's nervous to see the dynamic of what living away will be like. She becomes roommates with Zariah and Reece and decides to only stay the semester because she does not want to experience this place without them being there.

The point of this is, is that all of these people have come from incredibly different backgrounds and cultures, and found themselves at the same place at the same time, meeting for no particular reason. The way that all of these people are connected to each other is what study abroad is all about. It provides a community. It expands horizons and encourages students to search for adventure outside of their comfort zone. The grand scheme of life has connected them, and woven them all into the fabric of Canterbury's history. These people credit the invisible string that tied them together. Every single one of them claims to be a better person because of their study abroad experience.

College life brings together a group of people that all have met simply because of chance. That chance then evolves into a lifetime of memories, friendships, and lessons. Although national college experiences are extremely important, students who study abroad, access a whole different toolbox of life skills that adds depth and complexity to the meaning of university life.

Studying abroad has many benefits. It is a melting pot of people from all different backgrounds, cultures, and nationalities. A study conducted by the Institute for the International

Education of Students, (IES Abroad), says that overall studying abroad makes you a better person. Over 95% of students state that their abroad experience boosted their confidence, increased their maturity, and left them with a positive outlook on the world and many different cultures. In addition, in a study from the University of California, “97% of study abroad students found employment within 12 months of graduation, whereas only 49% of college graduates found employment in the same period, marking study abroad students twice as likely to get a job after graduation, increasing their employability (Study Abroad Statistics Purdue).

In addition to the beneficial logistics, a lot of students choose to study abroad because they seek adventure and want to have life-changing experiences (Jason Medrano). When fellow study abroad students come into each other’s lives they initially form a bond over the fact that they all have thrill-seekingness as a commonality in their hearts and brains. This bond is referred to as “the study abroad bubble” (Rachel Birkley Associate Director of NCC’s Education Abroad). Once the time abroad ends, that bubble is essentially popped. The students return to their home country and are once again dispersed all over the world as if they never left. Although the place that they returned home to may not have changed, the person returning, has. Inherently, people from different corners of the globe, who met by chance, are now all connected by one singular thread. This one invisible string that ties them back to their study abroad university becomes embedded within them forever.

According to the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), research shows that “students who have studied abroad appreciate the complexity of global issues, have greater intercultural learning, and are more self-aware” (NAFSA). Reece Mullins agrees with this wholeheartedly.

“I’m from a small town in Virginia, where social aspects progress slowly. I had never been exposed to new cultures, and I never realized how much knowledge there is out there to not only learn about the world, but about the people in it. Being able to take classes in another country, traveling around Europe, it’s nearly impossible to not physically be immersed in the culture. When I came home, I felt almost a reverse culture shock..”

Reece was shocked at how everything had stayed the same and realized there were a lot of small-minded people he was surrounded by. He gained a new perspective about himself and his friends back home. “In order to grow as a person you have to be willing to see things from a different lens, and studying abroad definitely allowed me to do just that. I would never have the mindset I do today if it weren’t for studying abroad.”

As important as it is to learn about other cultures, it is just as equally important to feel comfortable with yourself. Olivia Dubrasky could not agree more with this.

“What I was really hoping to get out of studying abroad was more confidence, and I’m happy to say my confidence in myself as a person has increased as well as my confidence in navigating unfamiliar situations. The new confidence has led to me feeling so much better about my future, more than I ever have, which was definitely unexpected. I’m more confident in my choice of transferring to a different school, in my ability to succeed in my degree, and in facing new experiences. None of this would be applicable to my life if it weren’t for my time in Canterbury.”

Even though studying abroad gives students many skills, the journey of getting there can be a challenge. Making the decision to study abroad is one thing, but following through with it is a completely different story. That is what takes a boatload of courage. If it weren’t for the courage that all of these students accumulated from the deepest depths of their core, none of this

would have ever happened. Their footsteps are now scattered across the globe. However, their invisible string had to start somewhere. In a poetic sense, the thread accumulated its first little bit of length with NCC alumni Jason Medrano in 2022.

“Going abroad was the boldest and scariest step I had ever taken in my life, and it was the best step I have taken to this day. What inspired me to follow through with my choice was that the journey of getting abroad took so many trials, tribulations, planning, and mental preparation that I couldn’t let all that effort go to waste. I had everything to lose, yet everything to gain. I refused to let myself down. I did it for me.”

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