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Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person

10-29-2012

Person to Person in England

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Recommended Citation

Ekstrom, Lisa, "Person to Person in England" (2012). *2012-13 Field Notes*. Essay. Submission 2.
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Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in England

Something surprising to me about the lifestyles of British students, including the girl I interviewed, was how different a school week looks in terms of studying and social time. Monday through Friday in the evenings is when students go out with friends, even if they have class early in the morning. The weekends are when students stay in and do their studying. Students are only required to receive a 40 percent in their classes during their first year at university. Living in a dorm on campus makes this very noticeable. The library is also a good reflection of this. When I go to the library during the week, it is completely empty. Whereas at Linfield, if you go to the library in the evening on a week day it is full of students getting assignments finished for the next day. Back home, the weekends are when you go out and socialize with friends and, for the most part, weekdays are for studying.

The girl that I interviewed shares some of the same interests as me, including our major. She also wants to be a teacher; however, her schooling has been very different. In England, you are only required to go to school until age 16. Then, you have a choice to find work or continue to A Level or college. This is a two year program where you study in the field that interests you. This program prepares you for university, which is a three year program where you earn your degree. Most of the students here chose their career path when they were 16 years old and have been studying in that field for years. In the states, it is common to graduate high school having little idea as to what you want to do with your life. I share the same major with the girl I interviewed, but she decided on that career long before I did. That also makes it challenging to be an international student taking courses in England. Since the tutors expect students to have plenty of background in the subject matter, there is little time spent on reviewing material. For example, I am taking a geography class on the

physical landscapes of Britain. I have little knowledge in the field of geography and am unfamiliar with the terminology, making it challenging to keep up with the tutor.

Traditions are just as important here as they are back home. For example, it is very common here to eat a roast on Sunday. The girl I interviewed told me that her family eats a roast every single Sunday. Not every family does this, but many do. Almost every restaurant and pub offers a Sunday roast, and if you order it on Sunday you get a discount, as if it is encouraged to eat this meal on Sunday's. My family definitely doesn't eat the same meal once a week, unless it's the week following Thanksgiving. The girl I interviewed said that having this meal every Sunday was a way to get the family together and socialize. She said that all the family members make it a priority to be at dinner on Sunday's. I think that this is a great tradition. I know several families back home who struggle to get the whole family together for meals. It's definitely a matter of prioritizing.

After living in England and interviewing one of my British friends, I realized that British and American cultures are similar in most ways. From my experience at the University of Nottingham, there are more similarities than differences between the two cultures. Besides the fact that students rarely study during the week and the slight changes in vocabulary, I don't see any noticeably large differences. This is why I think it was fairly easy for me to adjust to life here because of the similarities of the two cultures. My experiences meeting and getting to know British students and adjusting to life in Nottingham have been positive so far. I am excited to continue learning about British lifestyles and meeting new people.

Interviewee: Sophie Garrett (Friend)