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# Broadening My Educational Experience

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*University of Dayton*

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## I. Broadening My Educational Experience

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*Alexis Bovell, Undergraduate Student, International Studies*

Good Afternoon. My name is Alexis Bovell. I am a senior majoring in International Studies with a concentration in Peace and Global Security. I have completed minors in Human Rights, Political Science, and Spanish.

For as long as I can remember, I have appreciated different cultures. My father and my



*Panelists, from left: Carlos Rodriguez, Alexis Bovell, Mark Rasmussen, and Breann Porter*

maternal grandmother are from Trinidad; so I always wanted to learn and understand a world I was not able to see and experience on an everyday basis. I noticed my experience growing up was different than most of my American peers as a result of my family's diverse customs and culture. This opened my eyes to the impact culture has

on a person and who they are. This fascination grew into self-determination to understand not only my own family's culture and history but those of others as well. Any opportunity to learn about a country's traditions, religions, and historical background sparked my attention.

This past summer I had the opportunity to study abroad in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala (Xela). While in Guatemala I lived with a host family, The Garcias. I lived with my host parents, their three sons, the wife of one of the sons, their three children, and three dogs. Throughout my first three weeks, I had to mentally and emotionally adjust to being in a foreign country where I was consistently vulnerable.

Once I made the conscious decision to accept my vulnerability and to welcome uncomfortable situations that I would encounter—due mostly to the language barrier—my life changed. I stayed away from spending most of my time with UD students and, instead, immersed

myself within the Xela community. Before I knew it, I was so immersed I forgot it was only temporary. I fell in love with my host family, my host brother became my best friend, and I built close friendships with Guatemalans whom I still keep in touch with today.

My daily schedule was consistent. I would attend my intensive Spanish classes, where my professor and I would go to cafes, El Parquet Central, and even bars. After class I would volunteer at an all-girls school, where I taught English for an hour. I joined a popular student gym and would go every day after volunteering. I would then spend my afternoons with my host brother and our friends. I fell in love with Xela and all the beautiful people I became close with.

Prior to studying abroad, I did not expect to create such strong relationships, and I was not prepared to leave them. My connection and love for Xela, my host family, and new friends was so apparent that by the end of the six weeks, other students were making bets on whether I was going to get on our returning flight.

To enhance the University of Dayton's inclusive community, I believe studying abroad should be required for all students. UD offers so many amazing opportunities that allow students, faculty, and staff to connect with the global community. The financial burden that accompanies study abroad experiences, however, is a barrier for many. In addition, many students are not even aware of possible scholarships and education awards that the University and partner organizations offer. It would be extremely beneficial for the University to find ways to allow students to use their study abroad scholarships for all types of international programs, organizations, and universities.

If more UD students can experience the vulnerabilities and face the various common challenges that come with studying abroad, they will then be able to better empathize with current international students on their campus. If that can be achieved, the University of Dayton will undoubtedly transform into a more inclusive community.