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## Message to Future Seita Scholars: Studying Abroad in the Dominican Republic

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Zakira Khwarlyan

CEHD 3050: Seita Scholars Study Abroad

Dr. Lewis

### Final Project Choice C – Photo Essay

#### **Arriving to the Dominican Republic**

The process to apply for study abroad was very simple, I just had to respond to some questions. When I got to the Dominican Republic, they let me stay at a nice hotel with a nice breakfast, and studying abroad pays for pretty much all the costs, so everything was free. You do events, classes, and activities like visiting public schools, private colleges, and public colleges, and you learn about the difference and get to know a lot of people. For instance, when I arrived in the country, I learned that when in public places, people are expected to wear clothes covering their shoulders and legs. At first, it was difficult to adjust to the culture, but we eventually came to understand and appreciate the differences. Some of the days we have simple assignments that we do in class, and when you're done for the day, the professor will communicate with you and ask you questions about how you feel and what you learned. When we come back from our activities, we have free time to ourselves to have dinner, talk to other people in the Seita group, or make friends and do whatever we want.

#### **Experiences from Studying Abroad**

During my study abroad experience in the Dominican Republic, I had the opportunity myself learning about culture. Staying for a couple of days in the country, learning about their culture, doing activities, and beginning to socialize with the people out there. I learned that the culture is

very welcoming and different from American culture, like the food, dancing, and music. When we arrived, we had a dance lesson, where we learned the bachata, pictured below, which is a traditional dance in the Dominican Republic. It was uncomfortable to dance in public at first, but when the servers at the restaurant joined us, it felt natural and enjoyable.



For academic learning, we went to two different colleges. One was public, where everybody was very smart, but they don't have to pay so much money to go to college. When we visited the private college, pictured below, many individuals grew up rich, and it was eye-opening to see how differently the private college students and public college students treated their professors and viewed their assignments. We found the public college students to be more welcoming and open with us compared to the private college students.



What I learned academically is education is not always about money to learn because some of the kids in the private college were not smarter than the kids in the public school. In public school, pictured below they didn't have as many resources as the private college, but the public-school students were very grateful and appreciative of what they had. One student mentioned they wanted to be a lawyer, but because of their lack of resources, they didn't think they would be able to reach their dreams. I was able to talk about my own experiences and the things I achieved even through my hardships. Through this interaction, I learned to be grateful for what I had, which made me think about how America always focuses on material objects, like the brand-new iPhone or other objects that don't really give us value.



### **Tips for Studying Abroad**

1. Don't be afraid to talk to anybody in the country you go to. If you talk to a stranger, they will talk to you back and even try to help you out, even if you can't speak the language. I had the opportunity to talk to a stranger, and they were very nice.
2. Before you go, try to learn the basics of the language. For example, words like "Water", "Bathroom", "How much does it cost", "Where is this", and other basic stuff, so you can

start to have a conversation with them. I had the chance to include my language skills a little bit in Spanish daily, which allowed me to build connections with the people. A lot of people in other countries don't speak English; a majority of the people who speak English are upper class.

3. Don't be shy to explore the culture: their food, their dance, everything. I always wanted to learn how to dance the Bachata, and I learned it in the Dominican Republic. I attended a dinner, and a guy came to teach us how to dance altogether, but I asked him if he could teach me by myself, and he did.
4. Make sure to do your assignments on time. When your professor asks you to do your journals, do them so you don't forget about them. I forgot about one of my journals, so I had to go back, and it was really hard to remember what happened so I could write about it.
5. Don't be afraid to try street food, especially the ones that are cooked in front of you. The street food in the Dominican Republic was delicious. The mangos in DR are so fresh, you just have to wash it and peel it.
6. Involve yourself with your study abroad group. When I went to study abroad, there were a lot of people I did not know, and I had to interact with them. Some people were not interacting with the group, so they just wanted to go back. It's really important to be involved with the group and get to know them and ask questions to make your study abroad easy. I have anxiety, so it was hard for me, but I made so many friends, and that made the study abroad more fun. Seita Group is pictured below.

