



4-21-2023

Far from Home

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Recommended Citation

Matta Chang, Daniela, "Far from Home" (2023). *Honors Theses*. 3707.
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Daniela Matta

Thesis Reflection

As a Film, Video and Media Studies major, I decided to make a documentary for my Honors College Thesis because it was a great opportunity to apply the concepts and techniques, I learnt during my years at WMU, such as documentary techniques, the rule of thirds and, three-point lighting,

Far From Home is a talking heads documentary about the experience of International Students who move to the US to go to college. The reason for the documentary to be about International Students was mainly because I am an international student myself. Throughout the years I have met many others, from different backgrounds and with different opinions, and even though there are some things we have in common; I know the experience of studying abroad can vary depending on the person's culture and situation. I thought it would be interesting to explore the different experiences international students can have and common issues we encounter throughout our time abroad, to bring awareness to the WMU community.

The importance of documentary films is that they can tell unknown stories and bring awareness to certain issues. Most people think being an International Student is a cool thing, and that it is fun to study in a different country and learn new things, however, from these short interactions with students, people cannot possibly know what International Students actually go through. One of the main issues the interviewees had in common was the reason why they moved to the United States: to have a better education and more opportunities for their professional career. This makes moving abroad sort of a sacrifice, they are sacrificing their friends, family, culture, in order to have a better career outcome.

One of the issues brought up by different students was language barriers. Students reported having to repeat themselves multiple times before the other person can completely understand what they are saying. The reasons for this are the different accents and also words employed, as some students mentioned having learnt British English. Cultural shock affected some students, especially those with no previous exposure to the US culture. There were differences in how people treat each other, the weather, the size of Kalamazoo and how people talk to each other.

Another thing most interviewees shared was being unable to make friends, and as a result, feeling lonely and homesick. When asked what they think of American people, many said they are nice people but don't interact with them as much as they do with domestic students. Even though some felt lonely and homesick at times, other students reported to be having a good time studying in the US. Food was another common thing International Students miss the most from their respective countries. While some can find a cultural restaurant nearby, others really miss the taste of their country's signature dishes.

Finally, regarding work opportunities, it was learnt that the F-1 visa the students have allows them to work on campus for up to 20 hrs. Most of them think WMU does offer enough employment opportunities for students, and many have taken advantage of that. Off campus

work is a more tedious process, as they have to get different permits to do so and find an employer that would sponsor them.

International Students can have a challenging experience when studying abroad, as they often go through many issues that people don't know about, such as language barriers, cultish shock, loneliness and homesickness. People are used to seeing International Students on campus and not even think about the sacrifices they make to be there. It is important that people know what these students can go through in order to minimize the issues and help them have a more pleasant experience when studying in the US. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for them.