Studying Abroad in Palmerston North, New Zealand
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Receiving the Honors Enrichment Award allowed me to travel to Palmerston North, New Zealand for a semester where I took courses in zoology, animal science, philosophy, and world development. Apart from a family trip to Canada, I had never been out of the country, much less on the opposite side of the globe. Because of this, being in New Zealand opened my eyes to so many new facets of the world including different cultures, education systems, and world views.

I loved being exposed to so many people with different backgrounds and ideas. It was really eye opening to discover small differences between growing up in America and other countries, and how this shapes social norms and the way people think. Massey has a large international population, so I was able to learn about many different cultures, beyond just New Zealand's. My favorite thing about New Zealand's culture was how friendly and sociable everyone was. This attitude made it easier to make lots of casual friendships. There are many people that I would be introduced to or have an interaction with only once, but after that, they would say hi and have a conversation with me every time I saw them. It made me realize that the American's definition of friendship is unnecessarily tied to knowing someone for a longer period of time, but it is possible to make friends simply by being open to meeting new people. Additionally, this friendliness was extended into kindness by people I had never even met. There were many instances where I was helped by complete strangers when I needed to borrow items like ski clothes and school supplies, or to get rides to places since I didn't have a car. People were always willing to help if they could, and seemed genuinely happy to do so.

Growing up in the same town for my entire life made it really easy to assume my experience of life was the norm, and I forgot how big and varied the world really is. Studying abroad in a different country, especially one that had so many students from other nationalities, really opened my eyes to the amazing diversity of our Earth. It helped me see how growing up in different cultures and education systems shaped people as individuals, and interacting with these people exposed me to different perspectives and opinions. However, despite all the variety I observed, the biggest lesson was learning that we have much more in common with each other than we do different. At the end of the day, we could relate to struggles of being college students, family and relationship drama, challenges associated with being young adults and more. We could share passions like hiking and skiing, interests like animals and veterinary medicine, and religious beliefs. My view of the world simultaneously got bigger as I met more people, and smaller as I came to understand that we weren't so different, and it made me want to experience more of it.
I also loved the opportunities I had to discover how beautiful the country is. From the green, rolling hills to the dramatic snow-capped mountains, New Zealand's environment packs so many feats of nature into a small amount of space, so I was able to see an extremely varied landscape in a short amount of time. Everywhere I was able to visit was stunning, and despite not having a background in Earth science, I could appreciate the geological phenomena that shaped the landscape, and I learned more than I ever thought I would about these natural forces and formations.

When I wasn’t traveling, I actually did get some studying done. Originally, I had not planned to take very many animal related classes while I was studying abroad, but after some scheduling issues, I ended up in a zoology class that re-ignited my passion for veterinary medicine and has led me to pursue a zoology minor. I loved getting to do dissections and learn about animal physiology, and I have no doubt that this new knowledge will help me as I pursue a veterinary career. Additionally, I had the opportunity to volunteer at the canine nutrition unit, equine hospital, and a wild bird rescue, which gave me new insight to animal care and handling in a different country, which is something I hope to be involved with in the future. After graduating vet school, I hope to work in other countries, and spending a semester in New Zealand has given me the confidence that I am able to move away from home for an extended period of time to do something I'm passionate about. Aside from these, the skills I have gained like self-sufficiency and advocacy, logistic planning, and managing my mental health will be invaluable as I continue to develop and live independently.

My goals for studying abroad were to make new friends, explore new places, experience a different culture and teaching style, and get involved with something animal or veterinary related at Massey. I was definitely able to accomplish all of these goals and more. I met so many wonderful people in New Zealand and learned about their culture, and I was able to travel all around the country, learning about the landscape and significance of places as I went. Being a student allowed me to challenge myself with a different education system, and while I found that I prefer the style of my home school, I learned valuable skills that will help me in my future academic endeavors. Lastly, I was able to volunteer at multiple animal facilities and work with some animals that I had never been exposed to before. Its hard to know what to expect from a study abroad experience before you actually get there, but while some things didn't turn out the way I thought they would, other parts completely surpassed my expectations and overall I accomplished the majority of everything I hoped to do.

I am so thankful to the Honors Department for giving me the opportunity to experience each of these things, and I know I am a better student and individual for having done so.