

At the beginning of this course, my impression was that global learning was just learning about the histories and cultures of other places. Now, with the perspective gained through the experiences and resources provided by this course, global learning means to consider networks that connect nations and communities that are many miles, or an ocean apart. It means to understand that systems that have controlled international exchange of culture and goods, and how these systems have evolved or stayed consistent over centuries, as well as who these systems benefit, who they oppress, and who has the most power in them. A comprehensive global education must include considerations of ethical concerns, both environmental and humanitarian.

This course has taught me to consider and discuss uncomfortable things and to fully confront why they cause discomfort or shame. It has also taught me the many ways a nation can be researched from afar, and that research from as many angles as possible is still not a substitute for witnessing a culture and environment as a living, breathing, real thing. Costa Rica is a complex patchwork of culture due to its colonial history, and a bastion of environmental preservation. It has one of the highest literacy rates in North America and a health care system that is far more progressive than in the U.S. Costa Rica's resources are a cornerstone of their history, economy, values, and cultural diversity. The export of bananas and coffee directly led to the construction of the railroad connecting San Jose to Limon, which made Limon one of the most important cities in Central America for trade and commerce. The construction of this railroad also led to the immigration of people from the Caribbean and China (who were exploited in various ways for their labor), ultimately creating a melting pot-like mix of cultures.

My perspective upon starting this course was heavily influenced by the nationalism that saturates the American education system, perpetuating myths of American exceptionalism and teaching from only the perspective of American political and economical interests and influences. I had learned about the way The American exceptionalism myth was used as propaganda, but I was still somewhat surprised when I learned that Costa Rica has a higher literacy rate than most states in America. This was a huge revelation for me about how well propaganda works, even after it is identified as propaganda. Learning about Costa Rica's social and ecological advancements has dislodged the chauvinistic worldview that I was sure I didn't have prior to these experiences. I've come to realize that global learning is especially important for Americans because we are intentionally inundated from a young age with the idea that America is the very center of everything that matters in the world, so we must redouble our efforts to combat these ideas and consider history and current events with empathy, and a variety of perspectives.

Over the course of the Journey, I was very interested in the intersection of environmentalism and agriculture in the values of Costa Rica's government. Our guide, Arjeri, said that environmental protections were so thorough in part because of the revenue brought in by environmental tourism. Aside from tourism, the other main industry in Costa Rica is the export of produce suited to tropical environments. The research and environmental preservation being done at CATIE is a sort of microcosm of the way these two industries interact. Environmental well being is their top priority, but they also don't completely eschew the pursuit of commercial agriculture and profits. The seed bank is a failsafe for the loss of biodiversity that

often comes from land development and climate change, but the seeds being stored there are mainly for food sources. CATIE balances their consideration of the environment with their consideration of human welfare in a way that doesn't separate humans from our reliance on the ecosystems that surround us and that we ultimately are a part of.

When I wrote the first letter of reflection for this class I was sort of parroting the ideas that I thought would be taught in this course, without fully understanding my place relative to these ideas, or the way they manifested in the real world. As I write this letter I find myself more curious about other countries and other cultures than I was before. My curiosity is no longer passive. I want to travel more after this experience, and with the same thoughtfulness that was cultivated by this program. I now consider it a sort of necessity to learn about other countries with the same care and detail that I have learned about the U.S. and to hear perspectives of people from different places, even though I may never visit these places myself