

Final Reflection Paper

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-Virginia Commonwealth University-
-International Consulting Program-
-Cordoba, Spain-

1. What was the most meaningful experience (i.e., had the greatest impact on you as a person) that happened to you during the entire ICP program? What did you learn and how it will affect the way you behave or approach new experiences in the future?

There were so many meaningful experiences that happened over the two weeks while I was in the ICP program. It honestly feels like it is too hard for me to narrow it down to just a single event. Probably the most heartfelt experience that I hope I can remember for the rest of my life was at the end of the last day. A large group of us had all met up at a club and had danced for a long time. The dancing was incredibly fun especially since it was with many of the Spanish students that I had grown attached to: Irene, Ismael, Alba, Ana, and Antonio and it was filled with so many laughable and youthful moments.

However, that was not necessarily what was the most meaningful part of the night since many of the other nights in Cordoba were already full of drinking, dancing, and laughs. The most important part of the night was at the end when all of us managed to talk outside the club. It was definitely a difficult moment for me having to say goodbye to many of the Spanish students since I knew that there was a chance that I would not be able to see them before getting on the train back to Madrid the next morning. I was on the verge of tears having to say goodbye to Antonio since we had become particularly close in Richmond and Cordoba. It really hit me hard when Alba said to the group "Guys, tonight is not a goodbye, it is a 'see-you-later'." It made me realize three things: 1. that the bonds that we created during the program were real and that the bonds can be felt on a global level 2. The bonds created can last a 3. I will be going back to Spain and to Cordoba to see my new friends again in the future.

2. If you had a chance to conduct business in your host country again, what are the two most important lessons you learned from your ICP consulting experience that would improve your preparation and/or performance?

If I ever had to conduct business in Spain again, I deeply feel that it would be impossible without speaking Spanish. I witnessed many of my fellow monolingual Americans flounder at the prospect of speaking the language of country that we lived in and it regularly hurt me on a deep level knowing that those who could not speak could not truly be immersed into the people nor the culture of the country. I believe that without speaking the right language it is impossible to connect to those that you are trying to develop relationships with which extends to any business scenario.

Learning the time-tables and the pace of business was also incredibly important. Trying to get accustomed to breakfasts and siestas was a very different procedure than what I was used to as an American. I learned a lot about patience and learning how to do conduct a professional environment with people that do not necessarily see things the same way or live the same way as I do on a daily basis.

3. What are the two most important things you learned when it comes to working in teams and how did the ICP experience affect your approach to team work in the future?

During the Richmond portion, I learned a lot about leadership and creating direction for my group members. Many of the members in my group were soft-spoken either due to personality or self-doubt about their English skills. I felt like many of the people in my group looked to me to be one guiding the way under stress and bringing out the best in everyone along the way.

While I felt that I was a de facto leader of my group in Richmond, in Cordoba, I tried my best to change my position in the second group. I felt that it was important to learn how to wear multiple hats and be prepared for a wide-range of personalities that can come out under very different circumstances.

4. What did you learn about how to tackle challenges, i.e. project ambiguity, communication issues, and cultural differences?

One of the biggest things that I learned during ICP was the power of asking questions. In the end, I felt like being able to acquire as much information as possible regardless of the redundancy or minutia of topic ended up being incredibly important in every case that I employed inquiry as a primary tool. By asking questions I learned critical details about the businesses I was consulting, my peers whom I was working and creating bonds with, and much more on many different levels.

5. What were your expectations of the ICP before you began the project and how did your experience match up with those expectations?

I honestly tried entering into the program with as little information as possible besides the common line of “consulting work for companies in Richmond and Cordoba”. I feel like it helped in a way since it helped me be more open and prepared for any and everything, and funny enough, close to everything that could have happened did happen. My experience overall was serendipitous and I would recommend anyone else doing the program to not develop many expectations besides what they are given by the faculty beforehand.

6. What could have better prepared you for the project, traveling and cultural experiences?

Of course, I wish my knowledge of the Spanish was much stronger than what I had, I felt very limited in my ability to communicate to people outside of the program which affected my overall agency to do the things that I wanted to do. I also wish that I packed more efficiently since my bag was an overall nuisance to deal with when travelling.

I also learned never to travel to another country with more than 4 or 5 people who have relatively homogenous goals for traveling. It frustrated me deeply to have to nearly babysit other group members since they could speak no Spanish nor could they figure out to stay aware in new environments. As a result, I do not plan on going anywhere outside of the US with as many people as I did during the ICP.