

Team Reflection Section

For the Cross-Cultural Communication and Diversity assignment, our team, team 24, opted to attend a Day of the Dead celebration with the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. The Day of the Dead, otherwise known as El Día de los Muertos, is a celebration that occurs every year on November first and second. We picked this event because none of us are of Hispanic descent, and we were curious about what this cultural celebration looked like. Before attending the celebration, we discussed our preconceptions regarding the Day of the Dead and its festivities. We thought that we might be alienated in some sense because none of us are fluent in Spanish, and we were unfamiliar with the traditions. The name 'Day of the Dead' sounds morbid so we thought it would not be very joyous. In addition, we were unsure if it would be like the United States celebration of Halloween since it occurs around the same time of year. Upon arrival at the celebration, it became clear that our preconceptions were mostly incorrect. We were welcomed with open arms despite our lack of cultural knowledge, and we got to learn about the holiday. During the event, we had the opportunity to listen to a presentation on the traditions and pastimes surrounding the festivities. We were challenged with the idea that the dead are believed to return to Earth during the celebration to be reunited with their loved ones. The idea is quite different from anything we believe in typical American culture. We also found that the holiday is joyful, not sad, because of this concept of gathering. Through this experience we learned that we are all accepting and open-minded people. This event proved to us that despite what we personally believe, we can all appreciate the beauty of other cultures.

Individual Reflection Section

My experience as an International Student from Sri Lanka is quite unique compared to my team members as they are all Americans. I'm new to the US in general and seeing the subcultures of this country is amazing. Before going to the event, I thought the event was going to be something similar to Halloween but scarier and dealing with dead souls, but it turned out to be totally different. I got to know that Día de los Muertos celebrates death as a part of the human experience: Every living thing will eventually die. Every human being, no matter how beautiful or well-dressed, will eventually be exposed as nothing more than a skeleton and skull. The half-decorated calacas and calaveras recognize this duality. As I'm a Buddhist I relate to this because the main philosophy in Buddhism is the four noble truths are: existence is suffering (dukkha); suffering has a cause, which is craving and attachment (trishna); there is a cessation of suffering, which is nirvana; and there is a path to the cessation of suffering, which is the eightfold path of right views, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Buddhism sees reality as a process and a relationship rather than an object or a substance. Buddhism teaches that any material things are subjected to attachments as it leads the cycle of life, also celebrations and events are very rare in Buddhist traditions which opened my eyes thinking how other cultures celebrate and get together. As a minority international student, I noticed that each minority culture is quite similar in a nutshell, we're trying to stay very connected with our own people unlike the majority because we know there's no one for us when we need them. From what I have seen the people here are very individualistic, as opposed to the people in our country, and I noticed that it is not the case with the students that I met during this event, they're very family oriented like us. I'm from Southern Asia where the dominant religion in the region is very different from the West. The origins of Día de los Muertos can be traced back to Aztec traditions commemorating the dead. The Aztec Empire ruled over much of modern-day Mexico and Central America, although few Native Americans in the United States followed Aztec traditions. It's improbable that they'd adopt Día de los Muertos customs. Also, from my history knowledge I know that Spain and Portugal conquered most of Latin America, while the British and French colonized the United States and Canada. Religious festivities are influenced by national traditions. Despite the fact that both Spain and France were Catholic countries, Spaniards celebrated All Saints Day with family

gatherings, feasts, and festivities. Few people in France commemorated the day. The native communities colonized by Protestant British and Catholic Spanish explorers were treated very differently. Native ideas were frequently infused into religious teachings by Catholic missionaries. They combined Aztec traditions with All Saints Day to create *Da de los Muertos*, which incorporates aspects of both festivities. In addition, Spanish explorers were more likely to marry indigenous people, resulting in a hybrid (mestizo) civilization in which cultural adaptation is a way of life.

Response to Question Section

How would you incorporate what you learned in this assignment in an engineering teaming situation?

I always knew that diversity is a key element in engineering, after this assignment it made me clear how different thought processes improve the very nature of the team. Ability to work with other humans is part of engineering, that's how we survived generations without going extinct as humans. From stone age to now the progress is surely brilliant, but we know we can do better if we all learn to collaborate with each other that will bring the best in our humanity. During the event we painted skulls in various colors and designs, the end results of each skull look different from each other. What does this say about each other? Even though we're in Engineering each member was different and no one's version of the skull was bad, we produced the same task, but the outputs were different, that's essential in Engineering. What I really learned in this assignment was to encourage the whole team to come up with as many designs and outputs as possible at first, those ideas are prototypes for a final greater product. Finally, knowing how to relate with other people who are different from me and make them happy is a key element for success in teams.