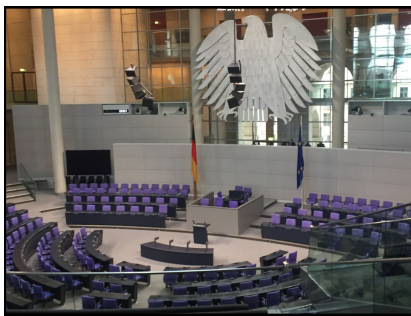


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Hungarian Immersion through Math

On occasion, math is actually the least confusing language.



Mathematics has the reputation of being a very insular discipline. Mathematicians themselves will joke, “How can you tell that a mathematician is extroverted? He’ll be looking at your shoes instead of his own when you first meet!” To some extent, there is truth to this. On more than one occasion, I’ve been so engaged in my problem sets that I missed dinner entirely without realizing it.

So, it was not without reason that I came into this semester slightly concerned about how I, and the other fifty people in the Budapest Semesters in Mathematics (BSM) program, would manage to pull ourselves away from our classes long enough to travel, explore, and experience Hungary. Three weeks and three hundred photos in, it turns out that my concern was mostly misguided. In fact, if anything, now I’m concerned with getting more culture in my math classes. I’ll explain.

MICHAEL
BOGGESS

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CLASS OF
2017

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MATHEMATICS

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BUDAPEST
SEMESTER IN
MATHEMATICS,
ST. OLAF
COLLEGE

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BUDAPEST,
HUNGARY



Hungarians are very left-brained. Even to a foreigner, this much is clear. I see it reflected in the logical efficiency of the public transportation and city organization, the avoidance of structural redundancy in the Hungarian language, and the disproportionate historical fecundity in mathematics and the sciences of a country with a population just shy of ten million.

This semester, in addition to taking a number of classes designed to be culturally Hungarian (i.e. Hungarian language, Hungarian Art and Culture), I'm enrolled in two math courses, Graph Theory and Conjecture & Proof, which are truly Hungarian to their core. Graph Theory describes certain mathematical objects defined by sets of vertices and edges which are useful in modeling different types of networks (e.g. social, neural, traffic), and which served as playthings of sorts for many prominent Hungarian mathematicians in the 20th century. Conjecture & Proof is the iconic Hungarian math class — a problem solving seminar in the spirit of Paul Erdős, a mathematician known for his tremendous energy and mathematical output (the latter to such an extent that it inspired the worldwide adoption of the Erdős number, an analog to the Bacon number representing degrees of separation from publishing with Erdős). This semester, I'm fortunate enough to have an instructor with an Erdős number of one!



Despite my best efforts in the survival language course, I am a dreadful Hungarian speaker. Fortunately, in my Graph Theory and Conjecture & Proof courses, my Hungarian aptitude isn't what's important. I can brush up against the shoulders of those who have come before me, steeped in the Hungarian tradition, simply by speaking a common language: mathematics. •

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LANGUAGE:
MATHEMATICS.”

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A Noteworthy Study Abroad Experience



WERONIKA
KONWENT

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CLASS OF
2017

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ORGANISMAL
BIOLOGY

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SIT:
RAINFOREST,
REEF, AND
CULTURAL
ECOLOGY

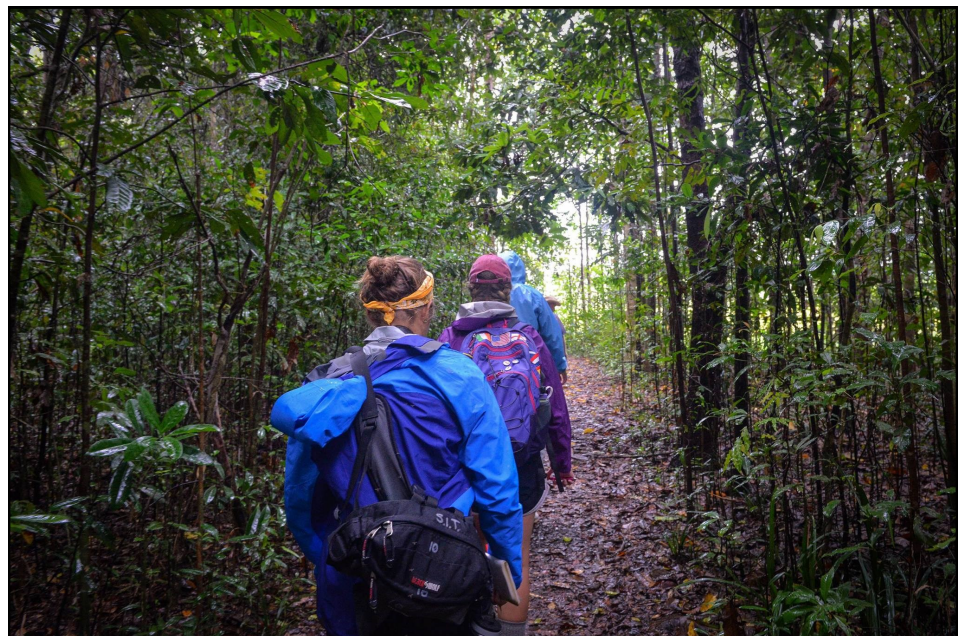
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AUSTRALIA

In the fifth grade my English teacher advised our class to keep journals. Something to write our thoughts in, that we could look back on many years later with fondness and a bit of pleasant surprise at the sensitivity of our fifth grade selves.

On my study abroad program I have 5 journals. And it's still not really enough. I have my all-purpose "Rite in the Rain" journal that survives intermittent rain and copious amounts of sweat while it's shoved in the waistband of my handy outdoor zip-off-at-the-knee pants. I have a thin and well organized lecture journal for those days few and far between when we actually have a sit-down lecture. I have a blog that functions as my fledgling effort at science and environmental education. I have a Natural History Field Journal that is graded every few weeks and is a mixture of things I see and learn in the field, egad! discovery moments, and overall synthesis. And I have my own personal journal that Mrs. Johnson recommended so many years ago, filled with poems and quotes and impressions of things I see and people I befriend.

That's what an immersive experiential study abroad experience is. It's having 5 entire repositories of knowledge and still struggling to make sense of everything that happens. That's because it's just life – it's recording how you felt watching the sunrise, what you learned about native bush foods on your nature walk, what you had for dinner (plus the mishaps that happened while cooking it), and the Dream-time stories the Aborigine elder recounted around the fire while you struggled to keep your eyes open and gazing at the stars. And part of the problem is that it's all





so special it becomes ordinary. I no longer exclaim every time I see a rainbow lorikeet flying through the streets of Cairns. It's no big deal to take a leisurely swim in a freshwater croc-inhabited river. Sometimes I brush the ants off of my legs or shoulder and sometimes I can't be bothered. Those entries are becoming less and less common in my journals. Those are normal day-to-day affairs. Instead, I think I've begun to see the big picture. Which I suppose is the end point of an immersive ecology course. What I learned in Bio 44 two hazy years ago is suddenly brought into sharp focus when I see it in action in the Wet Tropics. You experience something out in the wild, get to touch and smell and sometimes even taste it, and it begins to become comprehensive. You start to realize that fig trees in the rainforest actually follow the same patterns as corals on the reef. That the birds you wake up to every morning are the product of a specific and almost impossibly clever process of evolutionary diversification, even if they are awful alarm clocks. That for all the warnings you've received about everything in Australia trying to kill you, home has just as many snakes and spiders and scorpions, and that it's all just about knowing the rules of the land. That the rainforest, reef, and culture do share an ecology, and a history. But I have yet to read a single biology textbook. No tests. No frantically trying to cram my notes. No forcing myself to enjoy learning. Just me, observing, listening to my teachers while they point to things, and asking one of the two-dozen questions I constantly carry. And of course, writing it all down. At least thrice. •

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TEACHERS”

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Views from the Saddle



I hadn't expected to do much riding when I arrived in Cape Town. Having planned a month of traveling prior to arriving in South Africa, it would've been a little hectic to haul a bicycle on my back across two continents, and with such little time in the semester it didn't seem like purchasing a bike would make much sense either. Then, by a stroke of luck, I happened to find myself with a spot in the Cape Argus.

The Cape Argus, or The Cape Town Cycle Tour, is the largest timed cycle race in the world, and also a staple event in the cycling community in Cape Town. Over 35k riders take part in the event every

year, bringing women and men from all corners of the world together to ride 109km (about 68mi) around the Cape Peninsula. The event is incredibly popular, and tickets are said to sell out online within minutes of opening. The proceeds for the ride all go to charitable organizations in South Africa, and many of the recipients are offered complimentary entries in the event as well. Luckily, I was connected with one of these organizations, and was able to purchase a ticket through them.

Getting myself ready for the tour became my mission for the next two weeks after getting my ticket. The first half of this time I spent searching for a bicycle to either borrow, rent, or purchase at an affordable price. On afternoons I took the train across the city to various bike shops—each referring me to another or suggesting I look online on South Africa's version of Craigslist, a website by the name of Gum-Tree. I followed the second piece of advice, and by the end of the week I found a used road bike for a price well within my tight budget, and could focus my attention on my training.

For the next week I rode my bike pretty much everywhere I could. What I originally intended to be a series of training rides turned into an informal tour of the city that I've come to call home. From my saddle I could venture to corners of the Cape Town inaccessible from the railway lines or mini bus taxis. I befriended other people I'd come across in bike shops, or cyclists I'd meet on the road as they also prepared for the Argus. Mostly though, the folks my bike introduced me to had nothing to do with the race at all. They'd be the local Cape Town residents who were intrigued to see a Black American riding a deceptively flashy-looking road bike around, or the students who'd strike up conversation with me after seeing me bike up the notorious hill to campus every morning.

ELLIS SIMANI

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CLASS OF
2017

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ECONOMICS
&
GOVERNMENT

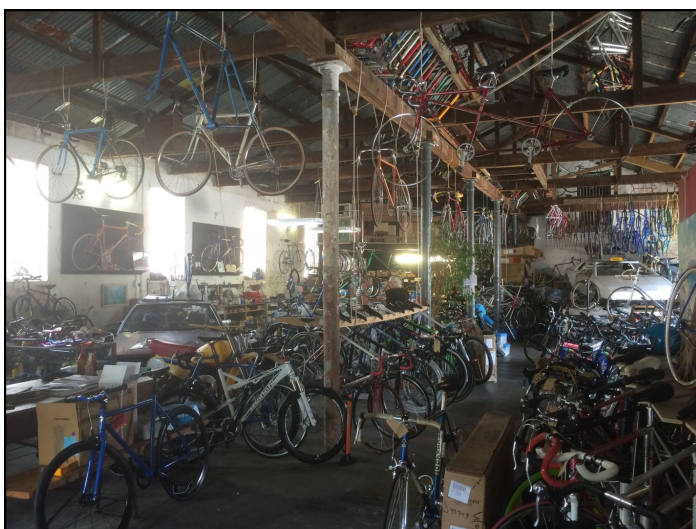
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CIEE
ARTS &
SCIENCES

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CAPE TOWN,
SOUTH AFRICA

In the end, all of the training certainly paid off, and the ride was absolutely incredible. Ironically though, when I reflect on the experience of participating in the tour years from now I don't actually believe I'll focus much on the ride itself. Don't get me wrong, the Argus was one of the most amazing rides I've ever done, but aside from the spectacular views of the Cape and the faces of children running along alongside us as we rode, the experience of riding in the race itself wasn't much different than those back home. Instead, I imagine that I'll think most about the people that came in to my life when preparing for the ride, the places



around Cape Town my bike took me when training, the confidence I developed in navigating a new urban environment and the appreciation I came to have for those who occupy it. I'll also be reminded of less positive feelings as well, such as the privilege I felt in having the funds to purchase a relatively nice used bike at a price that would still be unheard of to the average South African (as is the price of an Argus entry ticket), or the fear that by engaging in my favorite hobby I'd be ushering myself into cycling communities similar to those I encountered back home: predominately composed of affluent white males and without much other social or economic diversity.

I still believe that there are even more memories to be made in this city though, both on the saddle and off of it. The Argus gave me one perspective on cycling's influence on a minority of individuals who ride in Cape Town, but I'm hoping to take my interest and share it with others who might not engage with the bicycle in that same way. In the coming weeks I'll have the opportunity to leave the comfortable Southern Suburbs that house the University of Cape Town, and travel with a local organization to schools in neighboring townships to provide donated bicycles, as well as lessons in bicycle safety, maintenance, and repair to South African students. Perhaps one day I'll find myself back in Cape Town and riding the Argus with them, or maybe we'll just explore new streets and meet the different people in the city who use them- I'd like that too. •

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Mi Querido Ecuador



After I landed in Quito in the first week of January, this overwhelming excitement took over my body as I took an hour long bus ride from the airport into the city. Little did I know that this was only one of the many bus rides that would define my study abroad experience.

From the 9th floor of my apartment in La Mariscal, I stare over the city every morning to see how volcano Pichincha is doing (it only took me several weeks to realize that the mountains I had been staring at every morning were actually active volcanoes). Depending on the weather, I either choose to stroll through Parque Carolina on my way to class or hop on the Ecovia. On days when I have to commute to the university, a 45 minute bus ride into the suburbs of Cumbaya, I switch off between two buses.

ALICIA
FRAUSTO

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CLASS OF
2017

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INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS
&
SPANISH

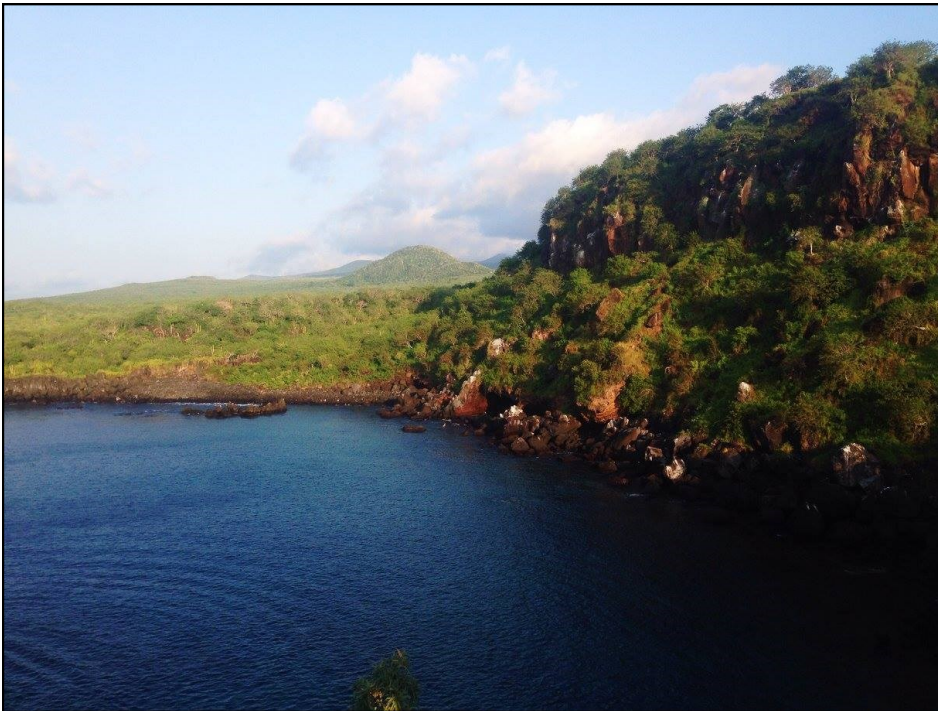
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QUITO,
ECUADOR



These bus rides have been crucial in developing my love for Ecuador. On the buses, I have had some of the most eye-opening experiences: people singing their heart out for some spare change, children selling chicle for a dime or two, mothers with children on their back putting together helados, and blind men dancing through shoulder-to-shoulder crowds. When I am lucky, I get a seat on the bus and take a few moments to reflect on everything happening around me. On the outside, we are driving through cliffs and mountains at a speed much faster than what the speed limits suggest. On the inside, I am sitting next to an indigenous woman, behind an Afro-ecuatoriano, and in front of an extranjero making his way around the city. There is no city tour bus that will give you as much of an authentic cultural experience as just riding the same buses as the locals.

Ecuador is unique in so many ways. This small South American country on the equator, nestled between Colombia and Peru, is one of the most diverse places in the world. A one hour bus ride outside of Quito and I am in the cloudforests of Mindo, two hours and I am in the indigenous community of Salasacas, three hours and I am swinging at the end of the world in Baños, and six hours and I am parasailing in the Pacific Ocean. I came here to learn about Ecuador. I came here to improve my Spanish, but along the way, there have been some twists in the road and I've learned much more than just that. I learned to speak some Quichua; I learned to overcome my fears, and most importantly, I learned to love myself and appreciate the beauty of everyday life.



In my few months here I have been able to swim with sea turtles in the Galapagos, climb to the top of a volcano, and hike up to breathtaking views. Ecuador is not only for the environmentally-driven, extremely adventurous person, Ecuador is for everyone with an open mind and a desire to experience life in a new way. There have been several times throughout the semester where I have questioned if life and nature could be more beautiful than this. My host mother repeatedly asks if I have fallen in love with an ecuatoriano yet. I have fallen in love (but not with a person). In Ecuador, I fell in love with life. I guess the continuous “Ecuador, Ama la Vida” billboards on the side of the road were right. •

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“I HAVE
FALLEN IN
LOVE (BUT
NOT WITH A
PERSON). IN
ECUADOR, I
FELL IN
LOVE WITH
LIFE.”
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Berlin Doesn't Sparkle, It Shines



The night before I flew to Berlin, I cried. My program began much later than most others, and I had been on campus working for the few months before I left. Whenever I came across someone I knew, they would also look at me with confusion. “Didn’t you go to Germany? Why are you still here?” I would give my automatic response that my program doesn’t start until March, and I was working to make some spending money. “Are you excited to be leaving soon?”

My heart starts beating fast. My eyes widen slightly. My breathing stops for a moment. I emphatically answer “Yes!” with a grin plastered across my face, pinching at the skin of my palm.

I was anything but excited. The Claremont bubble is real, and I was enjoying the safety of it. To suddenly be thrust into a new country with a different language is terrifying. Even more than that, being thousands of miles away from anyone I knew was terrifying. I couldn’t care less about “expanding my horizons.” I liked my horizons where they were.

MARCIA YANG

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CLASS OF
2017

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PHILOSOPHY
&
PUBLIC
AFFAIRS

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BERLIN,
GERMANY

On the eleven hour plane ride, I continuously reviewed what I would say to my host mom. I had barely spoken a word of German in three months, and now I was expected to eat, sleep, and breathe it.

Soon after I arrived, we were placed into a language intensive course which consisted of four hours of German starting at nine in the morning every day for two weeks. After which we had numerous worksheets, vocab and verbs to memorize, and grammar to practice. After my first two weeks in Berlin, the most I’d seen of the city was the five minute walk to and from the subway station.

In the last week of orientation, we finally went out and explored the city. We saw plays, visited museums, saw the remains of the Berlin Wall and Checkpoint Charlie. I made friends and felt a little bit less anxious about living in Berlin for the next few months. I learned a little bit more about the contradictory state of Berlin.

Berlin is still trying to recover from World War II. In the German Parliamentary Building, the Reichstag, there is an art installation of many small metal boxes with the names of all the democratically elected Parliament members from 1919 to 1999—including Adolf Hitler. Many people have come through the installation

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“LEAVING THE WARMTH OF
CLAREMONT WAS DIFFICULT, BUT
THE COLD OF BERLIN SUITS ME
JUST AS WELL.”

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and tried to damage his little metal box. The government at one point considered removing his box because they were getting tired of repairing it, but the artist insisted that history must be left intact. One cannot simply forget one's past in hopes of moving on.

Scattered across Berlin are reminders of its dark past. It does not sparkle like Paris, or New York, or London. It remains haunted by its past. It's desperately trying to redeem itself. But this allows it to shine in a way that is different from those other cities.

I stand above the last part of the Berlin wall that remains as it was during the Cold War. The automatic guns, barbed wires, and watch tower all linger. The death zone stinks of cigarettes instead of blood. A monument to all the people who died trying to cross into West Berlin stands nearby. The cold wind bites at my bare skin and I wonder what it is like to be that desperate.

My fears are not gone, but lessened at least. I've moved from one bubble into another. They're very different, but I'm able to find some comfort still. Although I was fearful when first coming to Berlin, I know that I'll miss it when I leave. Leaving the warmth of Claremont was difficult, but the cold of Berlin suits me just as well. •

