Project Summary

Through participation in the spring 2014 Semester at Sea program, my project will fulfill the Study Abroad option among the six STEP Experience options. The semester-long program takes me to 12 different nations of varying cultural and development profiles while taking a full course load aboard a ship university.

Description of Project

My STEP project aims on a large scale to enlarge and enhance my worldview. I aspire to become a better global citizen, representing The Ohio State University well internationally. Becoming a global citizen entails a commitment to understanding the complexities of international differences while simultaneously finding points of universal human resonance. Striking this balance affords me the opportunity as an individual to be a positive part of the larger global framework in our ever-more globalized earth. It allows me to work collaboratively in the international community to find universally beneficial solutions to pervasive and pressing issues without degrading the uniqueness of the cultures which enrich and defines regional identities.

The increasing of the scope of my worldview in conjunction with the developing of my appreciation of the diversity of cultures cannot be meaningfully achieved by remaining in this single country, the United States. Indeed, it can neither be achieved by visiting any other singular nation. For transcendent growth, I must transcend borders. The nature of the typical study abroad program does not enable this sort of experience, limiting the trip to one main location and inhibiting the capability to compare many varied societies.

However, the Semester at Sea study abroad program, run by the University of Virginia and offered in collaboration with The Ohio State University, distinguishes itself from the usual in this regard. It presents the rare opportunity to incorporate a number of nations into a singular study abroad. On Semester at Sea, an entire university—including 550 students, 35 professors, and a campus (classrooms, cafeteria, student union, clubs)—is enfolded into a ship. This ship university spends each semester sailing a course which spans a portion of the globe. It docks in different destination ports, frequently for approximately a week’s time. At this point, the students disembark the ship in order to utilize the spell of time to experience the country in a directed manner that furthers their cultural understanding and that matches their individual academic pursuits. In transit between ports, the students will take a full course load which aligns
with their particular interests while extending a global perspective. The classes, as well as the daily evening lectures by authorities and intellectuals, are designed to dynamically link their subjects to the itinerary’s stops in order to prepare the students to make in-country connections.

With my application, acceptance, and initiation into the spring 2014 Semester at Sea program, I propose to fulfill the study abroad option of the STEP program. My voyage spans twelve countries: the United States (Hawaii), Japan, China, Vietnam, Singapore, Myanmar (formerly Burma), India, Mauritius, South Africa, Ghana, Morocco, and England. Aboard the ship’s university, my classes include Geologic Hazards/Natural Disasters, Development Communications, Global Environmental Politics, and Development Economics, all of which transfer directly back to OSU credits for my major in International Studies: Development. Each shipboard course has a designated in-country field lab relating that country’s reality to the corresponding concrete in-class material. Additionally, I have signed up for a number of field programs in each country, selecting homestays and service visits in preference to pure sightseeing and recreational activities.

In my unscheduled time, I plan to focus my time less on tourist hubs and more on local cultural hubs. This means making my way to markets, neighborhoods, cafes, villages, farms, and other places that allow me authentic engagement with the community. In interacting with members of the general populace, I will watch and converse in a culturally-sensitive manner in an attempt to ascertain the complicated facets of human wellbeing. Through notes and photographs, I will document my observations, paying particular attention to hunger/nutrition, waste awareness/disposal, wealth displays/distributions, social relations/hierarchies/harmonies, desire for change/tradition, and perceived level of happiness. After my return from the study abroad, I will compile my records for a cross-country comparison in search of potential underlying patterns. The over-arching and quite lofty aim will be to form my own personal rough illumination of the human condition. I hope to begin to decide how to define and strive for its betterment. In presenting outlines of my observations and perceptions for each country to The Ohio State community, I mean to encourage my peers to assess (or reassess) the same profound question. In doing so, we create a more globally-conscious and indiscriminately-empathetic campus.

My project is highly feasible, and I have already gotten underway. After months of preparations in the form of filling out applications, obtaining visas, fulfilling medical precautions, and researching countries to be visited, my voyage officially began on the 10th of January, 2014. The entirety of the Semester at Sea study abroad journey unfolds as follows: Hawaii on January 17th, Japan from January 29th to February 3rd, China form February 6th to February 11th, Vietnam from February 14th to February 19th, Singapore from February 22nd to February 23rd, Myanmar(Burma) from February 27th to March 4th, India from March 9th to March 14th, Mauritius on March 21st, South Africa from March 28th to April 2nd, Ghana from April 10th to April 14th, Morocco from April 23rd to April 27th, and England from May 2nd until I fly back to the United States. I have already acquired the main necessary resources for my project. My only limiting resource will be funds, the allocation of which will in part determine what I am able to do with my time in-country. I must budget, because the fees associated with the Semester
at Sea program have induced me to personally cover the costs not covered by the patchwork of scholarships I earned to be covered with loans and personal savings.

In order to obtain the aforementioned scholarships as well as to discover the Semester at Sea study abroad option, I utilized the Office of International Affairs, both its website and faculty/staff. I searched the website’s listed study abroad offerings and applied online. I also used its links for potential scholarship opportunities. I went into the OIA offices to understand all the logistics of enrolling in a semester-long study abroad, to pick up credit transfer forms, and to have my pre-study abroad orientation. At the OIA-coordinated Study Abroad Fair, I talked directly with Semester at Sea program representatives. Beyond the OIA, I also met with Student Financial Services to figure out how my financial assistance would transfer and to discuss further funding options. Throughout my Ohio State career overall, I have regularly attended lectures at the Multicultural Center in order to increase my cultural and diversity competence, as well as events offered on campus that afforded me the chance to learn more about world events, histories, and identities.

Personal Statement

Over 1,700 acres span The Ohio State University campus. Its sprawling acreage, which currently cradles the potential of my education, provides more space than allotted to many and most American college students. Yet, I am restless within this limited space. I desire an education that imparts an authentic worldview. My thirst for diverse academic pursuits would not realize satisfaction even in the nearly 2.3 billion acres of United States territory. My passions transcend any national borders, erase any imaginary separating lines painted on maps. When reaching for my diploma, I want to have earned it not only within the square of the classroom, but around the circle of the globe.

To gain global enlightenment, free of ignorance or presumptions, is my goal. Truth swims along foreign shorelines. It is no stationary target. After thoroughly investigating the options, I stand convinced that a Semester at Sea Spring 2014 voyage is the best mode of transport for the chase. How does it feel to clasp hands with the “untouchable” Indian child? How heavily does the congested, polluted air weigh in the Chinese lungs? How many steps from the African doorway does drinkable water dwell? Only experience can answer.

This experience will not be without concerted personal effort, without stretching of comfort zones. I cannot passively stumble into another society and expect enlightenment. Rather, I must adjust myself to the local norms, paying close attention to subtle differences and collapsing my automatic judgments and presumptions. Without forfeiting integrity, I must make myself a vessel open to cultural knowledge. Further, to unearth this knowledge, I will require the correct approach to my trip. This means utilizing the professors teaching on Semester at Sea. As world travelers, environment scientists, authors, former World Bank and U.S. Department of State employees, they offer a wealth of valuable expertise. Within countries, I will make
connections with international charities, NGOs, and academics. However, the most significant relations I form will be with individual locals who offer authentic perspective.

Having an academic major of International Studies: Development, I need to view the beauty and the devastation of the high-tech, fast-paced lifestyle of Japan as well as the down-to-earth, simpler lifestyle of Ghana. I need to live amidst Mauritius’s stability and harmony as well as Myanmar’s friction and repression. I need to encounter alternate economies, governments, environments, cultures, and mindsets face-to-face, no middle-man involved. Only then can I distinguish the roots of suffering and injustice issues which unsettle me and decide to which ones to lend my career, my life. Only then will I possess a deeper understanding of these issues, gaining the potential for my shovel to actually pierce the ground at the base of the problem.

Semester at Sea will change me. It will throw my worldviews through a wind tunnel and stir compassion where before apathy nestled. After four years of university, the person I am should not be the person I once was, but rather sharper, fuller, and more useful, equipped to take on the world. I enrolled at Ohio State University as a citizen of the United States, but, through the invaluable experience of Semester at Sea, I aspire to graduate a servant of the world.

Budget

Office of International Affairs (OIA) Program Fee: $31,868

This program fee includes:

Estimated OSU tuition--$4,770
HTH insurance--$148
Host institution program fee--$26,950 estimated (varies by cabin)

Note: Host institution fee includes tuition, shipboard housing, all meals on the ship, and academically required field labs.

Estimate of Costs Not Included in the Program Fee: $7,100 total

Airfare, Visas, and Immunizations: $3,000
Personal and Field Programs: $3,000
Books: $500
Pre- and post-trip hotel accommodations in San Diego and London (one night each): $600

Total Approximate Budget: $38,968
The justification for these fees is fairly straightforward. In order to partake in the Semester at Sea study abroad program, I must pay the accompanying program fees. These are necessary not only in my international travel, but also in the maintenance of my academics as I do so. In order for my courses to transfer back as direct credits at Ohio State, I must pay both the Semester at Sea tuition fee as well as The Ohio State University tuition fee. The direct transfer of credits is pivotal in keeping me on track in fulfilling the requirements of my major without falling behind due to my semester off-campus. In order to continue high outcomes from my academic pursuits, I will need to purchase the books required for my classes. Of course, the aim of this study abroad venture is to take my learning beyond the classroom. Thus, I will incur additional costs for my international experiences. Logistical expenses form one aspect of these costs—transportation within countries, destination and return flights, temporary lodging, visas, etc. Safety expenses, such as required immunizations and prescribed medications, form another. Experiential expenses, which includes fees from field programs and homestay visits, historical and heritage sites admissions, traditional rituals and dining costs, and other culturally-specific activities, form the last dimension. Beyond meeting basic necessities, my funds will be carefully allocated toward meaningful, directed academic and cultural enrichment, not toward extraneous or superficial spending. The assistance provided by a $2000 STEP grant—which I would channel toward paying off a portion of the SAS program fee—would not go to waste and would be highly appreciated.

Reporting Back

In serving the global community, it is often well-advised to start with one’s local community. Thus, I would be remiss to reap such a growth of cultural experience and understanding without sharing it with The Ohio State Community, which indeed played a large part in making such personal enrichment possible. Further, by relaying my own involvement in Semester at Sea, in study abroad in general, and in universal cross-cultural dialogue, I may encourage fellow students to embark on a similar venture. I plan to pointedly document my interactions and observations from each country—as well as my personal pitfalls and moments of insight—during my journey, to be later organized and streamlined into a comprehensive cross-nation survey. I will publish this diary-of sorts in an online forum available to the campus. Additionally, I will be open to speaking directly with students about my experience, on an individual or group basis, in order to help them find direction in their own endeavors.