

THE BROAD HORIZON

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“No stray dogs or cows, SWEET!” Having grown up seeing these animals in India more on the streets than any other place, these were my first thoughts when I first landed here and peeked out the window of the cab to get the glimpse of what US had to offer.

I first came to UD in the summers of 2014 as a visiting scholar and that was the first time I was stepping out of my home country, all by myself. I always dreamt of traveling the world, making friends of different nationalities, speaking multiple languages and what not. Getting an invitation letter from UD to spend my summers there was the very first step towards living that dream. The experience I got from those few months and the extent to which I liked this place compelled me to come back here to pursue my graduate studies.

“Yes, I eat beef...” even before I could finish the sentence, she exclaimed, “Hawww, but cow is considered as one of the gods in India and everyone worships it, how can you eat beef dude?” Questions like these kept increasing as I met more and more new people. And I try to give an appropriate answer everytime to people who don’t know much about other countries and who wants to know what my country was like and how were the people, what they do, how they think etc...

Someone asked me once if I ever faced a situation of confusion. Well, if I could tell him one. I will never forget one of the moments when I experienced the so called ‘culture shock’ when I was invited to play football, and being an actual FOOTBALL fan, I agreed. The next day I hit the field and I saw them playing some sort of game which looked similar to rugby and was nowhere

close to football. Later they told me that this was American football and what I was thinking was called soccer. It still makes me smile when I recall that incident.

What I've learnt here is that there are small things that can make a difference. Kind gestures that we might never notice can say hundreds of words. Holding doors for people, vehicle drivers waiting for pedestrians to pass by, greeting some stranger a good day with a picture perfect smile whom you don't even know and many more. Such are the acts I see daily which always put a smile to my face.

It gives me a sense of belonging when I look around in my class and see students just like me and you, from various parts of the globe so diverse, thousands of miles away from their family, overcoming hundreds of difficulties, be it the language or their beliefs or the cultural barriers and still working hard towards achieving the dream for which they were here. I get inspiration not from some Hollywood celebrity, but from people like these.

Back in India, this is the time when we have all the festivals lined up and we get so many vacations to celebrate. Now that I am here, I hear more of Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas and how people start preparing for them well in advance. I am particularly excited about Halloween, but I still need to figure out what I want to be: A knight from Game of Thrones (who would put every other knight to shame because of being too skinny :P) or an Avenger or Goku. Ahhh, this is more stressful than studying for a mid-term.

One of the many things I like the most about UD is OISS coffee hours where we get to meet new people and make friends. I am very lucky to have utilized this opportunity to make so many crazy and weird friends from all round the globe. An American friend who always introduces himself as a person who lives on the street of Six Flags to an Australian brother who never forgets

flashing his national flag wherever he travels. From a Sri Lankan drinking buddy to one of my best friends from Swaziland. Never in my life had I ever imagined that someday I would learn Turkish with the help of some of the most generous and friendly Turks. Just few months and I have had the time of my life here.

I have become a huge fan of Mexican food, Spanish language, American games and Chinese names (and they are still hard to pronounce and remember). My taste buds have developed a liking for burritos and tacos, Bailando is now one of my favorite Spanish songs, even though I don't know the meaning of most of its lyrics. I have started following Football (yes, American football and not soccer) and sometimes I even have difficulty recalling whether this person was Xin or WanXin ☹️ But in spite of this, I am learning to live in a community full of diverse but amazing people.

The overall experience of being in the US has been terrific. I have learned how to overcome different challenges that life would put in our path. The biggest has been to learn how to cook, in which I still struggle. I feel the experience I've had here has transformed me into a person more responsible and who's ready for any kind of situation. One thing I myself have learned is to get out of my comfort zone, 'coz as they say '*life begins at the end of your comfort zone*' 😊