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### **From the Dirt Roads of Honduras to the Red Brick Walks of UD**

UD is truly an amazing place. I feel privileged to be part of this community that is now my home. The student centers have become my dining room, the front lawn my backyard, my classmates my friends, and my host family, my family. Professors became my mentors and my inspiration; they taught me philosophy, history, policy, astronomy, Portuguese, leadership, economics, etc. What can I say about the campus? It is simply beautiful! The red bricks, the mixture of old with new architecture, the amazing trees on the green and the countless colorful spring flowers across campus. UD is a four-season paradise. Whether it is red/orange/yellow in the fall, white in winter, or green with pink and white flowers against blue skies in the spring and summer, UD mesmerizes. But it is the heart of its people that impresses the most.

I am a proud and happy Blue Hen. However, these feelings took a little time to develop in me. UD, and the US overall, are very different from Honduras. Notice that I said different, not better or worse. For you to understand this difference, I need to mention a thing or two about Honduras and the Latino culture. Honduras is a tropical country with summer weather all year round. Life in Honduras is happy and simple. Latinos are very warm people. We love to hug, kiss, and talk. In fact, we love those things a little bit too much sometimes. We are passionate, family oriented, and alive overall—we love being social, dancing, music, and soccer. Oh, we also like tortillas, rice, and beans, a lot!

During my first few days in the US, I am not going to lie, I made a few mistakes. I was introduced to a girl, and I gave her a hug and a kiss on her cheek. I soon realized that this was not okay. She turned red. My American friend, instead of helping her understand, he allowed me to drown in my embarrassment with his comment and laughter: “Ohhh dude, we don’t do that here!” At least, I learned right away that Americans did not like to be kissed or hugged like my buddies in Honduras. Then we went to a restaurant and discovered that they did not have rice, beans, or tortillas. What was I going to eat now! Well, I was in America after all, so I ordered a burger. I failed to say “well done” when I ordered. I didn’t know that that was a thing. In Honduras, when you order food, meat will always be well done. I discovered that Americans liked eating food on the raw end of the scale. With time, I discovered that when you say “well done,” they actually would cook it through.

I soon learned that the way I pronounced, “beach” sounded like a bad word. So, my friends taught me how to say it the correct way. I discovered that when Americans say “how are you?” It means more like “Hello!” One day, someone said “how are you?” to me, and I spent like ten minutes describing my day and my feelings. Soon I realized that he wanted to leave because he kept glancing at his watch. After all this social awkwardness, winter came and yes, I was not well prepared! What do you mean, this would last like four months!? I got used to it with time though, and it was even fun to play in the snow. Dancing at a party was another awkward experience. I was used to my Merengue and Salsa, I was not prepared for the American style. Don’t even get me started on dating and asking girls on a date—a completely different game, but like anything, with practice, one improves. With my host family and friends’ help, I learned to

speaking better English and to be socially acceptable in the American world—that included, not commenting about people’s weight or income, which in Honduras are all fair game.

I realized that I needed to adapt. I had to stop treating the US like Honduras, because it was not Honduras. And I had to better understand the American culture. If I was to become a guest in this country, I wanted to know their rules and norms. But, I loved my culture. I love being Latino and every single thing that that word means. Was I supposed to give up my culture? I learned that I did not have to. America and UD are full of welcoming, loving people. I learned to coexist as a Latino in the American world. In fact, it became fun and educational to share with my American family and friends the differences between Honduras and the US—this was also productive in classes, in which they valued international input in many class conversations. I went from an awkward guy to a fun and cool foreigner.

Today, awkward moments are rare, because I have become an Americanized-Latino—which it is not a bad thing. The way I look at it is that I got the best of both worlds. I teach Americans about my culture, and when I go home, I teach my family about the American world. I love the University of Delaware and its people, because I would not be who I am today without their love and support. To all those new international students who come from all over the world, believe me, I understand how much you have given up in order to be here. Nevertheless, I will also tell you that this is the best decision that you have made, because this place is transformational and inspiring. The lessons learned and friendships made here today will shape the person you are tomorrow. UD has given me so much and that is why I can truthfully say, I am a proud and happy Blue Hen.