A Conglomeration of Cultures

The third and final competency for the Honors program is the global citizenship competency. The need for this competency has grown as the world has become more interdependent and the need to be able to communicate effectively with people from other cultures has become paramount. Looking ahead, I see a need to prove that I am, at least, half way through the global citizenship competency before I move on to the second portion of the competency, but first global citizenship must be defined.

Before I can begin to work my way through the global citizenship competency, I had to understand what global citizenship means. I learned that being a global citizen means having “the knowledge and skills” to comprehend the world around you and “the skills to integrate across disciplinary domains to comprehend global affairs and events” (Reimers p. 2). Global citizenship can also be seen as “the move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism”, or moving from the belief that one’s culture is the only way or that it is the right way, to seeing that one’s culture is but one option among many and that other cultures might have insights that one’s own might not (Bennett p. 1). Moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism can be spilt up into six unique stages; in order from the most ethnocentric to the most ethnorelative: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaption, and Integration. Each stage’s name aptly defines its characteristics.

However, these definitions did not quite suit me. So, to reword it in a manner that makes more sense to me, being a global citizen means understanding that there are many differing cultures swirling around, intermixing, and having the aptitude to efficiently and successfully emerge oneself in to the mix. It is recognizing that you are in a culture that is not your own, but still being able to engage others and successfully navigate through the intricacies of life, be it a conversation, a meal, or a meeting. Being a global citizen means that you do not really have one culture that you belong to, moreover, your culture is really a conglomerate of many different cultures. Your culture is a global culture. You are not only a citizen of the nation in which you were born, but also of the world.

While its definition might make global citizenship seem daunting, I feel confident that it will not pose a problem for me. Being a half Costa Rican-half American I have spent a third of my life living outside of the United States. I feel that this experience will help me with this aspect of the Honors program. I am not saying that I am currently where I need to be, but that I have a great start. The global citizenship competency is divided up into two parts, language and culture. As far as language goes, a student has to achieve an American Council on The Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) intermediate mid or low competency. I feel that after living in a Spanish speaking country for five years and after semi-frequent visits to Costa Rica I am where I need to be. I can understand Spanish very well, and I can speak and write it well enough to participate in a conversation, or write a paper. I will soon be taking a test to see if these skills match up to where the Honors program wants them to be.

I also plan on taking Elementary and Intermediate Norwegian on the side. Those classes will aid me as I try to complete the other portion of the global citizenship competency, culture. It is necessary for students to “develop deeper learning about peoples and cultures with which they [are] unfamiliar” (Honors Student Handbook p. 26). In an attempt to do so, I will, at some point during my Junior or Senior year, be studying abroad in Norway. This will give me an opportunity to do something I have never done before: live in a culture different than my own, and understand it as such. This will be an entirely different experience from what I encountered living abroad as a kid. When I lived in Mexico, Venezuela, and Kazakhstan, I did not really understand that everyone around me saw life in a different manner, that their culture was different than mine. Due to this childhood innocence and naivety, I learned about these different cultures as if they were mine too. Without realizing it, I absorbed parts of the culture from these countries into my own life. However, now, when I travel into a different culture as an adult, by myself, I will be able to see and understand the differences in the culture. I can make a decided choice whether to incorporate the Norwegian culture into my own, as opposed to simply absorbing small parts of it like I did as a child. I look forward to this experience with the excitement of a child, but also with the shrewd judgment of an adult.

Global citizenship is one of the most important aspects of the Honors program. It teaches the students to be more cognizant and understanding of the cultures around them, and to embrace them. For me, I was already on this path before I came to Minnesota State Mankato. I am half Caucasian and half Hispanic, and have lived abroad for a third of my life. I have a good grasp on Spanish, and hope to prove that to the Honors program soon. Additionally, I plan on living in Norway for some time during my Junior or Senior year to learn more about a culture that is different from anything I have ever known, which will help me take another step closer to becoming a global citizen.

Works Cited

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