Public Statement

During the Winter 2015 semester, I had the opportunity to study abroad as an exchange-student at the National University of Singapore with the support of the Barger Leadership Institute. This experience proved to be extremely rewarding and transformative, as I learned more about culture, leadership, and myself than I ever could have had I stayed in Ann Arbor.

Simply being away from my family and friends back home helped me grow more independent and mature. Having lived in Michigan all my life, to have the opportunity to study abroad as an exchange-student where I was completely integrated in the college life challenged me considerably. Prior to studying abroad, I had never had the opportunity to travel outside of the United States except for when I visited Venezuela, where my mom immigrated from, as a child. While studying abroad in Singapore, however, I was finally able to travel to other countries and interact with other cultures directly. As Singapore is optimally located in the center of Southeast Asia, I was able to affordably travel to Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

To the extent that I had not fully realized prior to coming to Singapore, travel can be a deeply educational experience. My understandings of identity, nationality, race, democracy, authoritarianism, colonialism, governance, public policy, development, and life in general were all challenged and furthered. Moreover, through my travels, I was able to develop my cultural competencies and leadership skills. I feel as though I have become more globally aware, interculturally competent, and can look at issues from varying perspectives.

Also worth mentioning is the fact that most of my friend group consisted of non-Americans. My closest friends were Korean, Taiwanese, Singaporean, Norwegian, Dutch, and Canadian. I learned so much from their different backgrounds and we often had discussions
about different cultural values and policy issues. This, I believe, helped me build my listening and communication skills, as well as allowed me to engage in dialogues across cultures.

I learned so much from their different backgrounds and we often had discussions about different cultural values and policy issues. As a public policy major, I am particularly interested in discussions such as these. Through these discussions, I came to realize that public policy is simply but a reflection of cultural values and priorities.

Through my coursework, I had the opportunity to build practical skills and develop myself as a leader. In my class "Managing Nonprofit Organizations", I developed a proposal to start a global nonprofit organization along with a culturally diverse team through a semester-long applied project. Through this course, I was able to develop presentation skills, entrepreneurial skills, and managerial/project-management skills. Moreover, by working with 3 Singaporeans and a German, I learned how to work in a culturally diverse team and leverage each person's different experiences and insights for the benefit of our project. At times, it was very difficult to work together since we all had different interests and wanted to serve different communities, but in the end we incorporated everyone's insights so that we each had a stake in the organization's success. Inclusive leadership, I learned, is incredibly important to effective teamwork and team cohesiveness.

Though smaller in scale, I also had a group project in my “Comparative Study of Development” course. Through this experience, I learned most about how effective leaders are able to delegate work accordingly given the strengths of weaknesses of the team. For example, I leveraged my presentation and communication skills, while my teammates used their statistical and computer modeling skills. More importantly, this group project manifested into strong
friendships with local Singaporeans, where I had the opportunity to learn more about Singaporean life and not just engage with other exchange students.

By the end of the semester, I truly felt like I had become a more effective leader. While I am everyday contemplating whether I would like to work in business, politics, nonprofits, government, or social enterprise, I learned that ultimately what drives me is a desire to lead and to have a positive social impact.

I sincerely appreciate the Barger Leadership Institute’s support in fostering my personal growth and leadership development. If you would like to learn more about my study abroad experience, please feel free to check out the blog I had managed. There are 18 posts in total, from January to May, and the link is markgoestosingapore.blogspot.com.