Public Statement:

For three weeks in May, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to step outside of my comfort zone and travel across the globe to China, a country I never thought I would experience. When I registered for the GCC Course Psych 457: Research Methods in Educational Settings, I knew I was getting closer to completing my psychology major, but I didn’t quite realize that I was also getting closer to embarking on the most influential trip of my life. In the course, we conducted cross-cultural educational research and looked at how cultural differences influenced child development. At Beijing Normal University in China, there was a group of students taking a similar course, and the trip in May allowed us to collaborate with them in the analysis of our comparative data. Through this trip, I learned a great deal about research, but I learned even more about myself as a leader.

In a world undergoing rapid globalization, today’s leaders need to be even more adept at understanding multiple perspectives and communicating effectively across cultures. They can’t fear that which is different, they must embrace it and enjoy it. They must face every situation with a positive and open mindset, excited by the idea of diversity and change. They must listen to others to understand and make no judgments. In the end, leaders know that inclusion means everyone has a voice and something important to contribute. During my time in China, I developed such skills to propel my own leadership journey.
I’ll admit that when I first found out I was accepted to the abroad portion of the course, I was a bit nervous. What little I knew about China was that the culture was quite different and that it was often spoken about with negative connotation. I was worried about whether I would be able to adapt and fully immerse myself. What I found was that Chinese culture isn’t all that different, and that those who speak negatively about it probably haven’t had the chance to experience what I did this summer.

For the time I was there, I stayed on the campus of Beijing Normal University, a college much like the University of Michigan, thriving with ambitious students who take many courses, join many clubs, and have a lot of fun. I interacted with the psychology students we were collaborating with and formed unbelievable friendships. We learned so much from each other, and the language barrier was no stopper. We had meaningful conversations about our lives and how they were similar yet also quite different. We traveled to historic cultural sites together and ate lots of good food together. At the end of trip, we presented our research together to an audience made up of Beijing Normal University professors and other students. I even had the chance to visit a family and help cook a traditional Chinese dinner. I was completely immersed and welcomed into the Chinese culture and I appreciated it even more as a result.

I went into my abroad trip with some reluctance and reservation, and came out of it with excitement and inspiration to be a better leader. I want to be the kind of leader who faces new situations with enthusiasm and determination, with open-
mindedness and sensitivity, and my China experience was just the beginning of my journey to becoming that leader.