

Study Abroad program reaching new horizons

"The benefit of it is experiencing a new culture and putting your needs away and see the way other nationalities live. It broadens your horizon," says Dominican senior Andy Acosta, who recently returned from his study abroad semester in Taiwan.

"All Dominican exchange programs foster high-impact experiences that help to create ethical leaders and socially responsible global citizens. No matter what their major, students are able to take classes that count toward their degree completion," said Giulia Welch, Associate Director of [Study Abroad](#) and Director of [Global Ambassadors](#). "Dominican Study Abroad promotes equity of access, allowing students to keep all of their financial awards while abroad."

For the 2013-14 academic year, 15 students participated in a Dominican semester exchange program from the following academic concentrations: [International Business](#), [Marketing](#), [Management](#), [Humanities](#), [History](#), [Psychology](#), [International Relations](#), [Art](#)

[History](#), [Communications](#) and [Gender Studies](#). The students have studied at different partner universities in France, The Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Greece, Japan, Taiwan and Michaela Brooke Griffin became the first Dominican student to study abroad in Morocco.

Griffin attended Al Akhawayn University, an institution similar in size to Dominican, and lived in Ifrane, a mountainous village similar to her hometown of Truckee. Her goal was to learn about and absorb Morocco, which is marked by historical and cultural diversity. The average person there speaks three to four languages.

Her experience in the Dominican Study Abroad exchange program was a true adventure.

"I literally wanted my life to be shaken. I wanted that. I wanted something to change the way I saw things. I wanted to be turned upside down," Griffin said. "I want answers so I thought it would come from something hard and different."

Griffin, a [Gender Studies](#) major who has been actively involved in women's right causes at Dominican and last year helped organized the "One Billion Rising" march on campus, learned first-hand the struggles of the Moroccan women's right movement and how it is being revived after periods of oppression.

"My major has taught me never take anything at face value. There never is just one reason it is happening," Griffin said. "I'm so glad I explored it."

Griffin discussed women's right issues with fellow students, some of them Moroccan, during her Arabic language and culture classes. She had more in-depth conversations about it with study abroad friends when they traveled to the west coast city of Taghzout or east into the Sahara Desert. She looked for answers in the Koran, the religious text of Islam. She concluded that the women's right movement in Morocco was slow developing, hindered by politics and laws.

"I really feel I know why it's happening. What I learned coming out of it now I would never take back," Griffin said. "I found that my peers were not much different than me. In our many conversations about politics or social issues, family life and personal relationships, we valued the same things -- respect, compassion, equality, closeness, honesty, sustainability, grassroots, representation, democracy, growth, progress, freedom to think, act, and choose."

Griffin was touched by her Moroccan friends and how they helped her if she needed directions or how they cared for her if she became ill. They were giving hosts.

"I was one is fortunate enough to become considered part of the community, which often does not happen on a short vacation for tourism," Griffin said. "One finds that in Morocco, taking care of 'your community of family and friends' is so important."

Whereas Griffin's experience in Morocco was a revelation, Acosta's challenge in Taiwan was an exercise in interpretation. He is a vegan, so communicating his requests in local food markets in Chinese was a daunting task at first. But Acosta's persistence and his devotion to his Chinese language classes two hours each day eventually allowed him to get what he wanted to eat and left a smile on his face when he did.

“It was a breakthrough for me being able to communicate,” Acosta said. “I didn’t realize how important it is to communicate or understand someone else.”

Acosta, a native of Nicaragua, had long sought a chance to study abroad. He was home schooled in high school living in San Francisco and was inspired by the Chinese population that surrounded him. He was anxious to learn their language and culture and was intrigued by Buddhism.

Dominican Study Abroad in Taiwan afforded him that opportunity.

“Although I’m a humanities and cultural studies major, being there made me realize there are things in a textbook I wouldn’t really learn,” said Acosta, a [Humanities and Cultural Studies](#) major. “I learned how it’s played out every day in their culture.”

Acosta enjoyed traveling in the region. He flew to Japan and Thailand and bussed all across Taiwan. He was particularly moved by the natural, unspoiled beauty in the mountainous terrain in eastern Taiwan where most of its indigenous people live.

Acosta felt rewarded by his total Taiwan experience. He returned to Dominican prepared to recommend that any student partake in the study abroad program.

“Do it. Definitely do it,” Acosta said. “At first it might seem a little scary but, once you finish, you are going to very happy you did it.”