

### Expanding Horizons in Argentina

Having the opportunity to study abroad is a privilege and will most likely be remembered as some of the best experiences in one's lifetime. Living in a place that is completely unique from which students are accustomed to during some of their formative years will give them perspective that they could not have found elsewhere; however, it will also provide multiple challenges. In this day and age, studying abroad is becoming more and more common for short periods of time, which is defined as 8 weeks or less. This provides students with the opportunity to still spend time in a different country in a way that is convenient for their schedule. However, one downside to this length of time is that it is difficult to truly understand and integrate oneself into a different culture over the course of years, let alone weeks. As stated in Brubaker's "Six Weeks in the Eifel," "the long held belief that simply being abroad will automatically spark meaningful cultural learning is increasingly being questioned" (Brubaker 1). In order to not only recognize cultural differences but to understand them is a quality that only comes with effort on the part of the student, and adequate time abroad. Currently, I have lived in Córdoba, Argentina for just over a month, which is still within the range of what Brubaker would define as a "short study abroad." However, I am lucky enough to have until July 1st here, as there is still so much to learn. Although I still have a lifetime of experiences to have in Argentina, I have been able to identify some key differences between the culture here and that of the United States, one of which being how each country views planning and social "rules" surrounding planning.

Planning and rules are two concepts not lost on the United States. We are known for viewing schedules as something that should be adhered to down to the minute. The phrase "to be early is to be on time" echoes in the ears of all Americans, and we can be quick to change our perception of people if they are five minutes late to a meeting at work or to a function of some variety. Secondly, the changing of plans last-minute is often looked down upon as Americans enjoy having a sense of control over their lives. In contrast, Argentinians tend to have an attitude of relaxation around plans, and avoid the stringent planification that people in the United States often adhere to in their day-to-day lives. This attitude has been especially reflected in my personal experience here in the flexibility of class times. For example, the start time of my first class of the day varies within about a 15-minute window, and it is not considered an offense if a student arrives a few minutes after the class has begun. To understand this more relaxed attitude regarding schedules, it is necessary to note not only that it exists but also why it exists. As explained in Osland and Bird's "Beyond Sophisticated Stereotyping," "when outsiders look at a culture, they inevitably interpret its institutions and customs using their own lenses and schemas" (Osland and Bird 2). Imposing the values of the United States onto another culture because it is viewed as lazy to be late in our country does not take into account why these cultural differences exist. One of the reasons for the more relaxed attitude of schedules here is due to the widespread use of public transportation, specifically buses, to travel. Often, due to exterior reasons such as traffic levels, bus schedules are faulty and cannot be relied on down to the minute. This is the main reason that my professor structures his class's start time: to provide a buffer for students who may arrive late from a tardy bus. One of the main ways to begin

understanding a culture is to relinquish the sense of control you may have and accept the differences in lifestyle that are seen. This coincides directly with the Transformative Learning Theory which states that one must be uncomfortable to allow for personal growth (Strange and Gibson 2).

Although in general it is seen that Argentinians may have a more relaxed lifestyle regarding scheduling than those from the United States, it is important to note that this is a stereotype and people tend to view cultural norms in “simpleminded terms, glossing over nuances and ignoring complexities” (Osland and Bird 2). Understanding a culture is never simple, especially when attempting to generalize a diverse group. For example, one of my other professors does not view scheduling in the relaxed manner that is more common in Argentina. He starts his class every day at the same time as he does not agree with the more commonly held norm that scheduling can be a little more fluid. This proves that making generalizations about cultural differences can be harmful and lead us to make false assumptions about a group of people. Thus lies the paradox, that within the same school a class apart, two professors can have very different attitudes, one that coincides with Argentinian norms and one that can be considered an exception.

Studying abroad offers the chance for growth and integration of unique cultural norms; however, it also allows for reflection on differences between cultures and why they exist. In my short time in Argentina, I have been able to note many unique aspects to the typical lifestyle here, including the general flexibility regarding plans and scheduling. In the remainder of my time here, I hope to continue gaining perspective from new environments and experiences that can only be had at this moment, in this beautiful country.

## Works Cited

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