**Abie Spangler**

**Question Set # 1**

**IE3 Global Internships**

**What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?**

The first couple weeks here at Tenaganita have proved to be nothing less than amazing. I feel so fortunate to be able to work among a group of people who are so dedicated to work toward improving the lives of immigrants and migrants. Having not been the more informed person about the situation in Burma and the extent of violence these immigrants face in their own country and here I was plunged head first into work as soon as I set foot in Tenaganita.

I have loved being able to not only be in the office of Tenaganita working along the side of people who deal with setting up forums and spreading awareness of the horrid situation that these people have gone through, but that I have been given the opportunity to actually go to the Burmese refugee communities and work helping them set up a coop. These communities have decided to pull resources together and create a coop based on fair trade. They are organizing to be able to sell their artisans at events that take place in Kuala Lumpur, and they also are hoping that with the continued spread of awareness that they will be able to start selling in other countries.

I have been truly amazed by how strong these women have been. They continue to amaze me with their intelligent ideas that they so easily share with me. When I first set out for this internship I came with the idea that eventually I would go to law school and develop the skills to be able to work in Human Rights law. Being here as not only created more motivation for me to keep the dream, but also to encourage more people to perhaps think about careers in the same field. Not only the Burmese, but people all over the world are experiencing the same kind of injustice, and this needs to stop.

I really value the work that I have already begun. I am excited to see what these next 6 months offer me. I know that the time here will fly by and before I know it I will have to say goodbye to everyone. But the good news is that now I have the knowledge of the situation here and I am can’t wait to share it with my community back home.

**What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?**

When I first arrived here in KL what stood out for me the most was the segregation there seems to be among the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. There seems to be very little integration within these groups. Although America is very predominately white, I have never felt that people are so segregated. Being East Indian I don’t just hang out with other East Indians, but my circle of friends is from a very diverse background. It is a little sad to me that there is such little integration.

When I brought this matter up to some fellow co- workers, they explained that a lot of it had to do with religion. Different religions have a hard time agreeing with each other or Seeing Eye to eye. After being here for 2 weeks I have still a hard time coming to terms with the idea of such a segregated country and I don’t think that even in six months I will be able to get used to it.

**What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?**

My greatest anxiety before I arrived was feeling as if I would be in complete isolation. Moving to a developing foreign country where they don’t speak the same language as I do, where I feel that I have very little knowledge of the culture, and where I don’t know a single person was a little scary.

In general when you travel I have found that the feeling of isolation is unavoidable. But my roommate has taken me under her arm and has not only guided me when I have felt unsure about something, but has invited me, and accompanied me on so much. I feel as if we have been great friends for years with the bond that we have created in these last two weeks. This is not something that everyone gets so lucky with, and I truly do feel blessed to have her in life as a friend and a coworker. The language barrier is difficult at times. Especially when working with the refugees in their communities. But being in KL I have had no problem being able to order food or get directions. It seems that everyone in the city knows a little English.

Although there is a very prominent Malay culture here, there are so many other cultures (including American due to all the expats) that I feel very comfortable here in the city. I believe that with my outgoing behavior and the ability to easily try new things and experience new things that I will be able to fully emerge myself into the Malay culture here and enjoy it too!

**Second set**

**1. How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?**

Tenaganita is currently going through a transition. Due to the organization moving offices, things have not been as organized as I believe everyone here in the office would like them to be. I came at a rather interesting time for them, to say the least. But I have found my daily routine to be a nice comfort to all the new and exciting things I do. The tasks that I have been asked to do have not really had anything to do with my profession career goals. So to evaluate my time here and compare it to where I see myself in the future is a tough. So far I have re written notes for other staff members, helped pack up an office and move the office. I would like to have a more focused agenda for the next half of my internship. That way I can feel that I have actually accomplished something. But I have been told that in the next month I will be conducting interviews with women who have been working at the women’s shelter and help document their stories that will be used in Tenaganita’s next publishing. I am looking forward to that.

**2. How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?**

My personal goals were to live outside my boundaries to do something new every week and to truly emerge myself in a culture that I was unfamiliar with. I can say without doubt that I am living outside my boundaries. Little things such as showering without hot water were difficult to get use to the first week, but now that I have been here a month I can’t really imagine showering with hot water! I am trying to do something new and exciting every weekend. I know that if I don’t make it a priority that soon I will be leaving without having experienced everything that Malaysia has to offer. For one I signed up to take an all- day cooking class. I believe that this will not only be an exciting adventure, but also teach me a lot about Malay culture and traditions. Malaysian culture is based around food, and you don’t have to be here a month to figure that out! So I think that this cooking class will teach me about their food but and ultimately help me become more familiar with this culture.

Although I am trying to blend in as much as possible I have still have been having a hard time completely becoming “Malaysian”. Small things such as eating the dry salted fish, I find so hard to even smell let alone eat! Since I am living with a roommate instead of a host family I have turned to the comfort of cooking and cooking meals that remind me of home and that I am familiar with. I hope that with my Malaysian cooking class I can be more open to the foods here, and start to branch out and eat things that I never thought I would. Being open about all the religions (especially Muslim) I thought would be hard at first because I have never been a “religious” person. But the longer I have been here the more interested I have become in understanding the different and diverse religions that Malaysia is home to. Going to Thaipusam was such an incredible experience for me to truly see a Hindu festival at its finest. The passion people have for their Gods here is incredible and helps me to understand the power religion can have on people.

**3. How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?**

There have been many cross cultures experiences that have stood out for me. Almost every day is an experience in itself. It’s an interesting feeling being am American East Indian here. Nobody recognizes me as an American, which is natural. But yet from the clothes I wear to my American mannerism they know that I am not from Malaysia as well. So it ends up people starting at me wherever I go. The first weeks I was really upset by the constant stares. It made me feel uncomfortable when I was already uncomfortable. But as time has gone by I have learned that it’s part of the experience, and a part that I will never forget. So to embrace it and stop letting it ruin the perish time I have here.

Before I leave I want to visit the national Mosque. Currently I feel very intimidated by the thought of the visit. But I know that if I do not go that I will only regret it in the end. Muslim culture fascinates me but also scares me as well. I think I feel nervous around it because it is so foreign to me but I know that religion is nothing to be scared about and that I will only conquer the unknown if I experience. And for that I will be visiting it before my time is up here.

**Question Set 3**

**Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?**

A typical day usually starts around 8am here. I wake up take my usual cold shower get dressed have my coffee and eat my breakfast. At nine I head out to the LRT station where I normally don’t have to wait longer than 10 minutes to get on. I go to the downtown station, where I then switch LRT lines and take it out to PJ (Petaling Jaya). Once I get there is about a fifteen to twenty minute walk to the office. At the office I do different tasks depending on what work is available for me to do. I spend most of my day at a desk on my computer. At around 1pm everyone here takes their lunch. I love that the staff is so close because most of the time we all go to lunch together. After lunch I do more work around the office and head home at about 530 pm. I have become a member at a fitness gym so most days after work I go to the gym and work out. I find it necessary because the food is so delicious that you can’t stop eating it! I get home around 9 or 930pm and make myself dinner read a little bit and then go to bed.

I find time to get away from the office and explore Malaysian culture on the weekends. Although I haven’t travel very much I plan on going to Penang March 18th. I have always enjoyed big city life but I am excited to get away and be by the beach. I also spent the Chinese New Year weekend in Singapore. It was nice to experience another country. Singapore is so close to Malaysia but they are so different in culture. It was very amazing to see. I have some other trips planned out. Since my visa will expire in May I am going to a small southern Thai island for 4 to 5 days. I am really excited to travel around the smaller island!

**Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.**

I live in Cheras which is a large suburb right outside the city. I like that it is so close to everything. I can easily get to downtown or to bus terminals that can take me to places outside the city. I live with another employee here who is from France. We get along so well it’s amazing. I enjoy living with another foreigner because we can experience a new culture together which is nice. Even with everything I know now, I would not change my living situation at all. I really enjoy where, and who I live with and feel very fortunate that it has turned out so well.

For future interns I would definitely recommend to live somewhere central. It makes it very easy to travel around not only the city but also when trying to leave the City. I don’t live close to Tenaganita but I don’t mind the commute (and well in any big city you have to expect to commute) it is nice to live so close to so many big attractions. Also I think that if you lived to far away from downtown you would feel a little bit more isolated and maybe a bit lonely. When I am feeling lonely I just hop on the LRT head downtown and do some people watching. It is a nice way to spend a Saturday afternoon.

**Finances: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less that what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc.? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?**

The first month I spent more money than I thought I would. But this was due to the fact that I had to buy things for my bedroom and bathroom. Buy some dishes and staple kitchen things (cooking oil, salt and pepper, etc.) But now that I am not in the moving mode I spend around what I thought I would be spending. I give myself $500 USD a month and it has worked out well.

I have been cooking a lot more now that I have settled in. It is interesting that here it is cheaper to eat out then buy groceries and eat in. But due to health reasons I am trying to refrain myself from eating so much food out and trying to make my own food the majority of the time. Sense a lot of my recreational stuff has been to go to different places and travel it can be kind of expensive. Taking the bus to Singapore and back was around $60 UDS and then not to mention the hotel being around $18 USD a night. That doesn’t sound like a lot but when you are on a $500 a month budget it adds up pretty fast! But at the same time it is worth it to me to spend the money to have the experience of traveling around and seeing as much of this part of the world as I can.

I am not sure if I would do much differently even now after being here. I think that I have done a good job at budgeting and then things that I splurge on are things that I feel are necessary. I would say though that you should pick and choose where you want to travel because to spend $ 80 to $100 on a weekend of traveling and ending up not liking the place is a waste of time and money. So ask locals for recommendations of where to go and things to do. My first week here I told a co-worker that I was going to take the tour of the Petronas towers. She informed me that it was not worth my time because on average you wait in line for 1 to 2 hours, only go up to the 35th floor and are given 15 minutes on the bridge, definitely not worth my time.

**Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage that? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?**

I only use public transport. I take the LRT and monorail everywhere. I avoid the KTM as much as possible because there is no train schedule and once I waited 1 and ½ hour for it to show up! But the LRT and the monorail are so nice and convenient to use. If I was a local here I would much rather use public transport then drive! The traffic jams are a nightmare. On the weekends I make it a priority to go travel around. Last weekend I spent the entire weekend out in Subang at a friend’s house. It was so nice to get out of KL and to be somewhere else and see new things. I have decided that every month I will plan a weekend trip away from the city to a different part of the country or to a different country. March it is Penang April I am hoping to go to Cameron Highlands, May I am going to Thailand, and June when my mom comes out to meet me before I head back we are going to Bali!

I would definitely recommend going to Singapore. You will never see a cleaner country in your life. It is unreal. I also would recommend going to Langkawi it a larger island off of Malaysia. I haven’t gone yet, but on my way to Thailand in May I am taking a ferry from Langkawi to Koh Lipe. So I am excited to spend some time there.

Getting around Malaysia is so easy there are buses that go everywhere for a VERY reasonable price. And if you are more adventurous and want go to outside of Malaysia Air Asia is the best airline. You can find flights from KL to Bangkok for $70 USD. It’s very affordable, and if you are here you might as well go and see other parts of SE Asia as well! Take the opportunity to do as much traveling as possible because you don’t know when you will be back.

**Fourth Set**

**Professional: How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?**

The coursework that has been the most beneficial for this internship has been having previous knowledge on migrant and refugee struggles, being able to write at college level, and learning how to be extremely open minded. Although, being open minded has been the best thing for me while being here. One of the great things about having an internship outside the US, is not so much using the knowledge you have gained through your college career, but it’s the ability to see how much you have grown up from high school to your early 20’s. Of course there is no way I would be able to do the work I do without have gone to college. Political matters that are discussed would be hard to follow if I have no previous knowledge of them through a classroom setting. But one of the things that have really made a huge impact on me is the fact that college has allowed me to mature enough to live for six months outside the US in a culture that is so foreign to me and work in a professional environment. That has been the most amazing aspect of being here, is realizing that… I can do this!

I think the most valuable knowledge that has been the most important so far with this internship is understanding how governments work together to battle an international and cross cultural problems. I feel that I can really contribute to in depth conversations when issues of politics are brought up. I enjoy being able to partake in these conversations and offer my point of view and understanding of the issue.

**Cross Cultural: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?**

Before I left I knew that food was a big part of Malaysian culture but I truly didn’t know how big a part of its culture it was. During the first week of my time here every lunch hour my co-workers and I would go out to lunch to eat these huge meals. At home lunch time is not a time I usually gorge myself with food, due to the fact that when I eat a lot I get extremely tired and feel useless the rest of the day. So on my second week when I was asked to go to lunch I kindly declined. My roommate later told me that I had really offended my co-worker. I felt awful, so the next day I went up to her and explained the reason why I had declined her offer. What she said was that it wasn’t so much eating food together but spending time outside the office together, which made me feel even worse!

How I have managed to get around that is packing a lunch at home bringing it to the office, but ALWAYS going to eat with my co-workers. Such as lunch time being a great opportunity to get to know the people I work with every day. Get to learn about their family life, personal aspirations, achievements, things they have regretted, etc.

So in short, I will never again decline any sort of invitation. No matter how small it might be, you never know if you are offending someone or not.

**Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?**

The most important thing that I have learned through this experience is that I can do it. Adapting to a culture that you are unfamiliar with can be isolating, scary, and sometimes even awful. When I left for this trip, I was remembering my time spent in Central American where I know the language have studied the culture and generally have an understanding of daily life there. When I arrived here I was completely thrown off by how different it was from anything I have experienced.

The racism and sexism is such a prominent part of the culture here I find it shocking. The lack of friendly smiles you see on the street, and the way that everyone seems so reserved caught me off guard. Pretty much the complete opposite of what I experienced in Guatemala, or Costa Rica. But what I really found was that, yeah it might not be the easiest thing to adapt to but I did it. And now I honestly feel that I have a comfortable living situation. I have a nice routine that I follow, I have made friends which have allowed me to be able to make weekend plans and not just sit around by myself. I have created a lifestyle here. I think it will actually be a little difficult going back home now. That being said, I do have to say that I am so glad that I am staying here for six months and not just three. If I was going home in two weeks I would feel that I was not able to fully emerge myself into the Malaysian culture or lifestyle. Within the last three weeks I have finally felt like I have an actual life here. It took me about 2 months to get to that place. So If I was to leave after being here only three months would feel like such a waste! Spending the first 2 months adapting only to spend the last one really living! I am grateful for the fact that I was not only able to afford it, but that time has allowed me to be here for six months.

**Fifth Set**

**Professional: Have you learned about any new possibilities for career paths? Have you done any informational interviews (formal or informal) to learn about the field?**

Working with this NGO I have learned a lot about social work, and what it actually means to be a social worker. I did a few informal interviews with some of my co-workers and learned so much about what it takes to contribute your time and energy working to better your community.

I really like the idea of working with people and for people. There are so many communities in the US that need the kind of support Tenaganita offers for migrants, refugees, and women here in Malaysia. Although it’s great to be abroad and be exposed to new and exciting things, being here has made me reflect on our communities at home. Especially the Hispanic population that we have in the US, so many of these communities need the kind of legal support and aid that Tenaganita offers to migrants here.

By working in the Burmese communities I have been exposed to ways in which not only I but people at home can help migrants (documented or undocumented) in the states. This is something that I now have an interest in. I think that there is a need for this kind of organization all over the states and it would be pretty rewarding to be a part of that and take the experience of working with migrants and refugees here and use it back home.

**Cross Cultural: What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?**

The most frustrating part of Malaysian culture is the racism and sexism that is so prevalent. Although in our global community men tend to dominate there is a serious lack of respect toward women in Malaysia. There also is a serious issue with race. In Malaysia the “Malays” are given tax breaks, treated with more respect, and in general can live better lives. If you compare the way they live compared to the Indian Malays or the Chinese Malays there is a huge gap of opportunities and respect. I have found that really hard to cope with.

I think that the hardest part for me is that the Indians and Chinese have adapted to their circumstances, which is sad for me because they all should have the same opportunities and chances because they are all Malaysian.

The most rewarding part of Malaysia is being so exposed to so many different kinds of cultures, religions, and traditions. It truly is a diverse place. In one country you can experience China, India, and Malaysia. I don’t think there is any country quite like Malaysia. It’s pretty neat to walk around one neighborhood and feel like you are in a village in China and then 20 minutes later walk into an all Indian area where everyone speaks Tamil and you literally feel like you have stepped into India. I don’t think that there are very many places like that in the world.

The food here is also a plus!

**Personal: The period of cultural adjustment is often represented by a “W” curve with various peaks and valleys: Honeymoon (peak); Initial Culture Shock (valley); Cultural Adjustment (peak); Further Culture Shock (valley); Further Adjustment (peak); Re-entry Shock (valley). Outline your cultural adjustment thus far marking the highs and lows with approximate dates and descriptions of events that represent some of these phases (recognizing of course, that you are still in process).**

When I first stepped off the plane and drove through the city and jungles to the suburb of where I live I was so excited. I couldn’t stop staring at everything and just had this feeling of excitement and nerves but was so happy that I had made it to Malaysia and was truly able to experience being in SE Asia.

I think the first culture shock was using the public toilets. When I lived in Central America there toilet system was still the same as what I was used to at home. But I was not ready to find a toilet that is basically a whole in the ground with a hose next to it. In all honestly I didn’t even know how to really use it the first time I went to a public toilet.

Once I purchased everything for my apartment, bedding, kitchen supplies, etc. I really felt like I had made a home for myself and felt really comfortable in. It helped me also feel that I had created a safe space for myself. Whenever I feel overwhelmed by being in such a new place I know I can go home where I have bought American food from the grocery store and other home comforts.

When I came to terms with the sexism and racism in the country I was completely shocked. I think I felt it even more because for most foreigners or westerns they are treated very differently than locals because people see them as wealthy tourist. Also most white women don’t get condemning looks or jabs when they wear shorts or dresses because people know that they are foreign. But because my ethnicity is Indian I am not given that same freedom. My roommate and I went out one evening and she is white. Because of the heat we both wore dresses, but the negative looks were only toward me. The inequality was really shocking to me.

Once I became familiarized with Tenaganita and all my co-workers I felt that I had fully become comfortable in Malaysia. I had a nice place to live that had comforts from home, I knew how to use the public transportation which made me feel more independent, and I now knew how connected with people I worked with and knew how the organization functioned. I think when all those aspects of my life here were put into place I felt like I had finally fully adapted to my life here.

Living in an apartment complex so close to my neighbors I thought that by now I would have made friends with the families, and people that live in either side of me and across from me. But it is so strange to me how families and people here keep to themselves. Every day, morning and night I will wave to the people who live across from me and they just stare at me. No smile, no wave back, nothing. My roommate Elodie told me that is just how people are here they are not as warm as people in other places. I found that so shocking. We live 6 feet away from each other and see each other every day and yet we can’t create any sort of relationship.

**Sixth Set**

**Professional: With your experience thus far, are your more or less committed to a career in this field? What experiences have contributed to this?**

I still believe that studying laws and being politically informed is something that I really find valuable and necessary for change to happen in our communities. But being here at Tenaganita has taught me that so much change happens on the ground level. The social workers at Tenaganita are the ones who are extremely involved and the ones that work directly with the people and understand the situation from the bottom up. I have learned that having a closer relationship with the people you are working with and working directly with them is more rewarding and even more valuable than learning the laws and going to court.

I still think that someday I might want to go to law school, but watching the lawyers that Tenaganita works with, I have come to understand that they very rarely work directly with the person which is something that I find extremely important. Being able to be in the communities I have realized how valuable it is, not only for me but for the women of the communities to have that connection with others. Because of this, I am not so sure being a lawyer is really the profession that I can see myself in now. I never would have said that if it wasn't for this internship.

**Cross Cultural: Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed? What new sources of information have shaped your perspectives?**

I really was not sure what to expect when I arrived in Malaysia. I knew that it was a developing country in SE Asian and that the primary ethnicities were Malay, Indian, and Chinese. Every time I would think of Malaysia my mind would wander to Thailand and I had this perception that they were similar. I could not have been more wrong.

I think Malaysia is a beautiful country. The natural beauty is unreal. The diversity of people is beautiful. Especially coming from Eugene where everyone is white! It is refreshing to see such diverse ethnicities. As everyone mentioned to me, the food is incredible and cheap! Malaysia is an amazing and very unique country.

I still struggle with the racism and sexism that is very prevalent in the country. Malaysia is developing at a rapid pace. When you are in KLCC it's like being in any American big city. NYC, LA, San Francisco you literally feel you have stepped out of Asia and into a western city. But something that I believe is holding the country back from really being progressive is the ideologies everyone holds. Unless the country as a whole can start to respect and offer the same opportunity to all, I don't believe that will ever get to what Americans would call "developed".

**Personal: What has been the greatest challenge personally thus far on this internship? What has been the greatest reward?**

As I have mentioned time and time again the greatest challenge for me has been dealing with the sexism and racism. Especially being from Indian decent I have found it very difficult here. It is no surprise that most locals see me as a local due to the ethnicity. But feeling the uncomfortable stares because I am not wearing traditional Indian clothing, and wearing western clothing was really difficult for me the first month or so. But I have now learned how to brush it aside and not let it affect me. The most rewarding part of this internship has been really to integrate myself into the culture here. In my neighborhood every night my flat mate and I go out to get a juice, tea, etc. The waiters all know us now by name and know our story just like if we were any other locals. It’s really a great feeling to start to feel like not a "foreigner" or a tourist but just like any other local. I really do find that being here for 6 months will really make that possible for me. Being able to really integrate myself in Malay culture has been so challenging and rewarding all at the same time. And even with the negative aspects of it, I don't think I would change any part of my time here thus far.

**Set 7**

**Now is the time to begin thinking about how to articulate all your experiences you are gaining for the job search when you graduate. Identify 3-4 accomplishments or successes in your internship of which you are most proud. These can be professional, personal or cross-cultural. Explain them briefly below.**

There are so many things that I feel that I have accomplished and felt successful in doing. Professionally I believe that the biggest challenge I have overcome and felt successful in doing is being able to relate to other professionals who are from a completely different culture than I am use to. At first I didn’t realize how difficult it would be to be able to understand and communicate due to the fact that we come from different places, but I now feel that I have overcome that Challenge.

When I got asked to conduct the interviews at the Women’s shelter I was very hesitant. I have conducted interviews before. In fact many interviews due to the fact that I was manager and was responsible for hiring employees. But these kinds of interviews were very different. I had to take into consideration that these women had been through some serious traumatic situations which was unlike anything I have ever had to deal with.

On a personal level I feel that I have really been able to live like a local here. I huge part of this is due to the fact that I actually look like a local. In the past when I have traveled no matter how long I stay somewhere, I always am seen or known as the foreigner. So in that aspect it’s a lot more difficult to fully “become” a Malaysian.

**After identifying 3-4, pick two of these and expand on them with the following:**

**• outline the context of the situation**

**• Describe any challenges you faced**

**• Describe the actions you took to overcome the challenges**

**Restate what the final outcome was (your accomplishment you mentioned above).**

Working with people from another country was far more difficult than I imaged. Our traditions, cultures, basic lifestyles are so different and affect the way we work more than I would have thought. There are many things that made it difficult to become adapted and to feel comfortable in my working environment. But by far the biggest difficult was the communication aspect. People in Malaysia are much more reserved than in the US. I found that when something wasn’t getting done or if it wasn’t getting done the right way no one would take the initiative to bring up the issue.

So for my first month I had no idea of I was doing what I was supposed to be doing, or if it was being done the way that the organization wanted it to be done. Even when I tried to ask about the project or situation the responses were very indirect or vague. Finally I made a decision to myself that I needed to be more assertive, but assertive in a way that would not offend a culture that does not communicate the way we do in the US. When I was given the project to work on the publication of trafficking I wanted to make sure that I was doing everything right. I started asking for scheduled one on one meetings to discuss all different aspects of the project. I found that by scheduling even a 5 minute meeting I was able to get a much more direct response. This could be due to the fact that they would have time to think about what we’re going to discuss. But it made it much easier on all of us, than when I would just knock on the office door to ask a question. Although in the US it may seem a bit odd to schedule a meeting for 5 minutes I have found that it really works here in Malaysia. I feel very successful in being able to overcome that cultural difference.

On a personal level I really have enjoyed the fact that I have easily been able to really live like a local. I have friends living in Bangkok right now and live in very comfortable western styled apartments. But I find that even things like that keep you from really experiencing a culture. I love living in a Muslim neighborhood where everyone is from the working class. I really see what daily life is like in Malaysia and I am living it right alongside them. Living in my small flat without air conditioning can be excruciating at times, but at the same time I love it. I have no oven, no a/c, no dryer, and no hot water. It’s so simple. And really has given me a perspective of how the locals live here. Not to mention that I am Indian so people mistake me for Malaysian all the time.

There has been a good aspect to that, as well as the bad. The good is that no one treats me like a foreigner. Well until I start talking because my accent is definitely American. But the bad part is that I have truly experienced the racism here that most Indians or darker skinned people feel. When I am at a restaurant waiting for expat friends I have met, the waiters won’t pay any attention to me until my white friends show up. Then we get the best service out of the whole restaurant. Although this was one of the most painful things I have gone through, it has really opened my eyes up to the challenges people around the world suffer through. Even in the states there is racism, but most of the times it’s subtle whereas here it’s right in your face.

But instead of taking it the wrong way and letting it upset me to a level in which disables me from doing something, I have taken it as a huge learning experience and have allowed myself for 6 months take off the shoes of a “foreigner” for once and become a local.

**Set 8**

**Knowing what you know now, what advice do you have for any future interns? Provide some perspective relative to the three aspects of your internship: personal, professional and cross-cultural. Where were the challenges and where were the highlights? What advice can you give to assist future interns in maximizing their efforts to achieve their personal, professional and cross-cultural goals?**

The challenges and highlights apply to my personal, professional, and cross-cultural experiences. Coming from a Western culture we can easily take for granted the freedom that comes along with being an American citizen. At time we can even complain about the situation that we are currently in. Economic, politically, etc. Yes, I was definitely one of them.

But when you come to a place like Malaysia it helps put your life into perspective. We have choices and opportunities. As a woman and a colored woman I never realized what racism and sexism really looked like until I came here. The people I have met the conversations I have had about how to treat wives and what women are worth seriously has made me stop and re-evaluate how fortunate I am to live in a place where I literally feel the world is at my hands.

On a personal level I think that you just have to come to SE Asia with an open mind and not to expect anything. Once you start to expect things (before you even get here) you will not only be greatly disappointed, but might even have a harder time adjusting to the culture. There is so much diversity here and so much to learn about people, cultures, and societies. But you have to be open to it, or the shock of how different it is can be disabling and keep anyone from really experiencing the country.

I think the hardest thing for interns is the professional aspect of the internship. Tenaganita does not work the same way a company or NGO might work in the US. Things take a lot longer to begin and everything has to be Okayed from the Director. So if the director is gone on a work related trip or vacation your proposal or project will be on delay because you need to wait for the director to return or to answer the email giving you the ok. Even though there is a program supervisor (AKA general manager) all the “yes” and “no’s” have to come from the director. Previously being a manager where I had the liberty to make those kinds of calls, I found it very frustrating when I needed an answer and the director took off for two weeks. I felt like I was sitting around the office just waiting…because I was!

But it was a great lesson to learn, and to understand how different organizations in different parts of the world work. I feel like I have learned a great deal of patience’s, which many Americans do not have. It was frustrating at the beginning of the internship, but since I adapted to that sort of protocol I am use to it.

Cross-culturally don’t hold back! If you want to try something or go somewhere just do it! You can easily reach your cross-cultural goals. Something I really wanted to do was learn how to cook a traditional Malay dinner. I am so glad that I didn’t just say “oh next week I will do it” because I know that it would never have happened. One thing I wish I could have done a bit more or was learn Malay better. It can be difficult to practice Malay in KL because most people speak English and even when you try in Malay they find it easier just to converse in English. If I could do it over again, I would definitely try harder to learn and speak Malay. I feel that if I would have really pushed myself within six months I could easily be having small conversations with the locals. But because I didn’t try hard enough I know barely any Malay. So all in all, whatever your cross-cultural goals are, you just need to do it without hesitation.

**Final reporting questions**

**Professional: Upon reflecting on your internship experience, are you more or less committed to a career in this field? What experiences have contributed to this?**

I feel that through this internship I have really gained an appreciation and understanding of how important it is to work with people. I have never consider social work as a career that I would enjoy, but after working at Tenaganita I found that my favorite part of the week was when I was able to go to the Women’s shelter or the Burmese communities and work hand in hand with the people.

Although I enjoyed working in the office and with my fellow co-workers, I felt more connected to the work when I was able to work in the field. I am now not so sure where my future where lead in career wise. Law school has always been something I have wanted to pursue but seeing how the lawyers worked and how the social workers worked, it was clear to me that the social workers were far more in touch with the people than the lawyers. So if I can find a law career where I am able to work less in an office and more with the people…that would be ideal! I am not so sure such a career exists but I definitely know now that I love working with people.

**Cross Cultural: Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how did your impressions of the host culture change? What new sources of information shaped your perspectives?**

I had an understanding that there was going to be a percentage of Indians in Malaysia. I was shocked to find out how big the population was. I have never lived in a place where I was a majority. Especially in the neighborhood I lived in there was a very large Indian community.

It was interesting to me to be able to experience racism and sexism first hand. One of the things that I found challenging but extremely important for me to experience was feeling so discriminated against. The US has such vast diversity, and although there still is racism and sexism that exists everywhere, even in the US I have never seen or experienced it the way I did in Malaysia. Being an Indian woman there was very difficult for me. Having men feel they have the right to stare at me, or say an inappropriate thing to me was really difficult for me to handle. I felt that even if I said something back it wouldn’t do anything to fix the situation that all the Indian women in Malaysia (and women in general) deal with on a daily basis.

Talking to other employees and women friends in Malaysia I found out that I was not the only women who felt this way. Sexism and Racism is a huge part of Malaysian culture, which is why I was so eager to work along Dr. Irene because what she stands for and what Tenaganita stands for (equal and fair rights) is what Malaysia desperately needs.

**Personal: What has been the greatest challenge personally on this internship (reflect upon pre-departure all the way through your re-entry back home)? What has been the greatest reward?**

I think the greatest challenge pre-departure all the way through re-entry was adapting. Adapting to SE Asian culture was challenging in that it was a culture and country that was unfamiliar to me. From the weather, traditions, and food I felt that I was in a completely new world (and I was). I felt that although I had read about the country I was not prepared at all for what I was about to experience. The work also was such a challenge to learn about the realities of sex trafficking in SE Asian and the world to learning the tragic situation of Burmese refugees was hard and depressing to engage in.

But at the same time I am so happy to have had the opportunity to work with the refugees and victims and hear their stories and be another person that can support them. I think the greatest reward is that I now have a new perspective on the realities of a large population in SE Asia and have a new perspective and appreciation of the life I was given. It also feels good to talk about what I have learned with people who don’t know what is going on. I have really enjoyed explaining the work I have done with friends and family. It feels good to educate people on such a serious situation so that there is more awareness!