**Shawna Widmer**

**Question Set 1**

1. **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?**

My initial impressions of the organization were clouded by my excitement to be part of such an incredible journey. I had arrived sleep deprived, anxious and ready to start my work. I came to the office and was immediately greeted with smiles and warm welcomes. The organization exceeded my expectations. I had researched about Elephant Nature Foundation before I came, became familiar with their website and read some reviews but being apart of it was something that I could not have read about. Lek is one of the most passionate, caring and warm people I have ever encountered. Her smile alone puts you at ease and you know that if you had any questions she would be more than willing to listen to you and help you. Her heart is so deeply invested in her animals, all animals, that it is truly a part of who she is as a person. The organization is completely inline with all that it stands for and wants to spread the message of better treatment of animals everywhere. They do not limit themselves with talking only about how elephants should be loved and cared for, but to take what you learn from their organization and also apply that to other animals that you see in zoos or in horrible situations. I started out by staying at the park for one week, learning about the different elephants, going through the volunteer program, meeting new people every day, talking to staff, eating good food, and getting a feel for the aesthetics of Elephant Nature Park. After one week I moved into the city and began my work in the office. I have answered emails, helped with the flow of volunteers that come through, answered any questions that individuals had when they stopped by the office, conducted research on captive versus wild elephants in Asia, made a banner, and designed a flier to be handed out to volunteers when they sign up for the volunteer program, to name a few. I was happy to have work to do and to feel needed as a part of the organization, as I was afraid that there might not be much work in which I could actively participate in right off the bat. My goals were met within my first 2 weeks and I already felt comfortable and confident with my work situation.

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

What stood out to me the most regarding my arrival was the number of foreigners that I saw everywhere I looked. I thought that Thailand was going to be a lot like my experience working in Africa, where it was very rare to see other people than locals. Instead, Chiang Mai was flooded with white people wherever I looked. I felt like it was equal, if not more foreigners to Thai locals. That really shocked me and threw me off.

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

My greatest anxiety prior to departing was that I wouldn’t have any work to do. I’m a very busy person, I like to keep busy and have things to do or else I don’t know what to do with myself. I always have to have something going on. I was afraid that I would just be sitting in the office awkwardly, not knowing who to talk to or be able to communicate that I really wanted work to do and that I felt strongly about helping out. Now that I arrived, I laugh at myself a little. I tend to over think things and I really had nothing to worry about. One thing I would always advise to others is to not stress and to go with the flow. Things will work out and it’s really all right if there isn’t always something to do. Have side projects to work on and keep yourself busy and ask around if someone needs help because there is always something to do.

**Question Set 2**

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?**

Now that I have settled in for a bit at work, things are running really smoothly. When I first arrived, I didn’t know what to expect, as you never know what it will be like when you are in a new environment. I now know whom to go to for certain things, I understand more about the organization and what it stands for, and I feel even more confident that I am working for an exceptional organization that I should be very proud of. I knew that I wanted to get some good work to show for my time working for ENF and I feel that I am on my way to doing that. My already creating a flier for volunteers and working on making banners for an educational center to present to tourists, I feel as though what I am working on is being produced and I can see the results of my work. I already feel comfortable with my coworkers and I like helping out with whatever tasks they need me to do. In the next half of my internship I want to keep making and seeing work that I am spending time on come to good use. I want to do as much as I can for the organization and feel as though I’ve made an impact.

1. **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 have been relatively vague in the sense that I want to see as much as I can, learn as much as I can and make as much of a difference as I can. I like feeling and knowing that what I am doing is acknowledged and that somehow I contributed. So far things are going according to plan. I have been able to travel, produce good work and I have been able to defend and talk about the organization that I am working for and spreading their cause. I’m excited to produce more work, to travel more and also to spend more time at the park. Working the office there is some interaction with animals since the office has about eight dogs, four birds, a squirrel, a rat and two cats that I’ve seen so far, but I’d really love to be able to go up to the park some more to spend time with the elephants and the guests and to be able to talk about what an amazing organization ENF really is to inspire people to spread the word. I want to make sure that after I talk to a tourist or a volunteer that I inspire them and make them want to tell their friends and family about their experience. I want them to know how important the work is and the cause at ENF and how each person impacts the future. In the next 50 years elephants could be extinct if people don’t start acting and I think that that’s extremely important to talk about.

1. **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?**

I have been getting a lot of cross-cultural experience as I had hoped to do before I landed. I have been able to make weekend trips and some afternoon visits after work. The experiences that have stood out to me so far are all situations that I have never seen before. I went to go see a movie and during the commercials before the movie started, images of the King started to show and a song started to play in Thai and everyone in the movie theater stood in order to honor the King for the duration of the song. It would be similar to if the national anthem played before a movie in the United States. It was definitely different than anything I had experienced. Also, the Sunday market extends for miles and miles and I have never seen a market that went on for so long. I spent hours looking at all the goods that were being sold and I still didn’t see all of the market. Before I leave I want to make sure that I see more of Thailand that is outside of Chiang Mai. I want to make sure that I can make weekend trips to as many places as I can go, or that my budget will allow me!

**Question Set 3**

1. **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?**

Every day I try to wake up around 7:10AM and if I can convince myself to brave a cold shower, I take a shower and start to get ready for the day. I try to leave for work around 7:45AM to get there by 8:00AM. When I get to the office I head upstairs and get to work. Usually Lek gives me multiple assignments at a time so I always have something to work on. Currently I have about eight banners to make, a couple fliers, plus my own individual work like blogging (which I’ve only done one blog post so far even though I’ve already been here for over a month). I take my lunch break around noon, where I eat and talk to my coworkers and relax a little for about 30 minutes-45 minutes depending on the day. Then I get back to work. I try to get as much done by 5pm, and then I pack up and head home. I’ve been sick so I’ve been really tired all the time, so usually I go home, hope that the hostel that I’m using the Internet from is working and then watch some TV shows, try to blog a little, Skype my family and relax. Sometimes I’ll get up and walk around town, get something to eat and sight see. Other days I’ll try to just relax because I know that I have to wake up early and I have a lot to do. The weekends are the best time for exploring life outside of work. I have Saturday and Sunday off so those are the days where I can plan trips and have all day to venture around. Then I start all up again on Monday! Monday is the busiest day when all the volunteers come through the office. Usually I help organize the volunteers, help them answer any questions, help to organize apparel and help anyone who needs it.

1. **Housing:  What is your living situation like?**

At first I was told that I would be living in an apartment but I am living in a house. There are 2 bedrooms, one for me and one for another woman. The Internet is borrowed from the hostel across the street, no hot water in the shower and they just installed air conditioning last week. I’m glad to have my own room, at first I was staying in a loft that was really, really hot and humid and I had no privacy. But, I’ve finally moved into the other bedroom and I am very happy to have some privacy and a nice bed to sleep in. The house has a kitchen area, a toilet and a shower.

1. **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?**

My budget fluctuates depending on what I am doing. I spend most of my money if not all of it during the weekends when I go on trips. Transportation is probably my biggest cost, that and the main tourist attractions that I’ve gone to. I try not to spend much during the week, just on food and beverages. A meal usually costs me around 50-150 baht depending on what I get. Taking a red car any relatively far distance usually costs around 500 baht, plus entry fees, food and water. Getting around town cost anywhere from 20-70 baht if you’re not up for walking. I don’t know if I would do anything differently, as it is all a learning experience. I would definitely suggest that people should not buy everything at the Sunday market the first time that they go. So far the only thing that I have bought as a souvenir is a painting and I got a really good deal on it. That’s it! I want to buy some clothes and maybe my last week I’ll spend some money on other small things but it’s good to wait and see how much things cost over time so you feel like you aren’t getting cheated.

1. **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 try to walk as much as possible. I am a big walker. I walk to work every day and if I can I walk around town. I walk to the mall in about 45 minutes, sometimes less. I really like walking I feel like you see so much more; you feel more accomplished because you found your own way around and it saves you a lot of money. Red cars are fine to take but they add up and can get costly, especially when you can just walk. On my time off, which is usually after work or on the weekends, there is time to explore the surrounding area. You don’t necessarily need a destination you just have to feel up for walking around. If I walk around I usually go out on a hunt for something to eat, a new place to try. It’s great to explore around because you never know what you’ll see. There are so many beautiful temples around town that it doesn’t really matter where you walk because you are destined to walk right into one whether you plan on it or not. I would recommend walking around town and trying a bunch of different restaurants. The river is really beautiful, there is good food everywhere and all places are easily accessible. Doi Suthep is a stunningly beautiful temple that also has a view of the entire city. I think everyone should go there.

**Question Set 4**

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

My coursework has prepared me for some of the work that I’ve completed so far for my internship. I have been making banners, fliers and posters to be hung around the office and the park, mainly on Word because I don’t have Adobe Suite on my laptop, and I learned on Adobe in my classes so that’s been difficult. However, I am using the skills I have learned about design, typography and my love of photography in order to make them. I also completed a fact sheet to be shown to volunteers/park visitors to tell them basics about the park and what is included in each visiting package. I used my background in advertising for the layout of the flier, but used what I had learned from my coursework in public relations in order to write a successful fact sheet. So far the most important piece of knowledge of my field that has proved most useful is my ability to see design and layout and to be creative in executions. I feel as though this has been the most important because I’m not just throwing together a quick blank piece of paper with a message on it, I’m taking my time and making sure that what I’m producing not only has a strong message, but is visually stimulating and reflects well on the park.

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

The biggest cultural difference that I have faced is a language barrier. Flying into Thailand, I didn’t know any Thai. I tend to pick up languages really quickly and I knew that I could get basic greetings down within a few weeks. Most places around the world speak English, and I’ve never had a huge issue with communicating what it is I’m trying to say. In Thailand, I found that it was a lot more difficult to communicate and to get across what it was we both were trying to say. I was trying to take a red car to see a couple touristy sights and we negotiated a price and were off. On the way a friend and I also decided that we wanted to go see a waterfall and asked what that would cost, since it was on the way and shouldn’t cost anything at all. As the man kept repeating 200 baht I was repeating back that was way too much and we weren’t going to pay that and we would just go find another driver. Later, we found out, he was trying to say the waterfall costs 200 baht to enter. Because neither my friend or I spoke Thai, we had no idea that this is what he was trying to tell us and we thought that he was saying something completely different. I don’t know if next time or looking back if we would have done anything differently. I feel as though cultural differences are all part of the experience. It’s the times where you experience cultural differences that you learn a lot about others and also about yourself. It is all part of the learning process and until you can speak the language you just have to be able to laugh, remain calm and to know that no matter what it will be fine and you should always have a plan B.

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

I have learned many important things about myself thus far through this experience. I feel as though regardless of the situation, it is important to keep in mind that everything will be ok. There is never a need to get too overwhelmed or to panic or to beat yourself up. There is always a plan B and there are always people who want to help and support you through the challenges. If you were to ask me two years ago, I would have never thought that I would be able to go by myself to Asia and have an internship where I did not know one person for an entire summer. I have found that if I put my mind to it and work really hard, anything is possible. Going through this internship has strengthened my love for international advertising and public relations. I have found that I can feel comfortable and become a part of a team regardless of surroundings or background. I think that I have learned to have an open heart and by accepting that anything can happen I have been able to surprise myself by trying new things and push myself out of my comfort zone. One of my biggest beliefs is that if you do not push yourself and go out of your comfort zone, you do not become the best version of yourself. I believe that you grow mentally from experiencing other cultures and I know that every time that I travel and put myself in a new and challenging situation, I take something valuable away with me that I did not have before.

**Question Set 5**

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

With my experience so far, it has really strengthened my commitment to an international career. I have found that regardless of the situation I put myself in, whether it be working in Ghana, Africa last summer or Chiang Mai, Thailand this summer, that I am able to continue growing as an individual and that the learning never stops. Working in Thailand has shown me that as long as I apply myself and do good work, the location is irrelevant. Being in Thailand has really shown me that even with my inability to speak anything other than basic Thai greetings, I can still produce valuable work that will benefit the company. As long as I make things that I think would be helpful to the park and to the organization, I know that I am a contributing and valuable asset. When Lek asked me to have a banner made by the end of the month (giving me a full month), I had my fun with it and was able to finish it within 24 hours. I think that if you really enjoy the work that you are doing, it doesn’t feel like work. Being able to make banners/fliers/advertisements and help the company with various aspects of PR and knowing that everything I am making is contributing to the company makes me proud and reaffirms my love of advertising and PR.

1. **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?**

Looking back at my initial impressions of the host culture when I first arrived, I had heard a few things about Thailand and had a couple preconceived notions. Before I left, many people would ask me how I felt about going to Thailand as a young woman alone. It was as if I was putting myself in danger, as many people associate Thailand with sex trafficking and being a foreign culture with different customs and beliefs. I was never too worried, though more often then not others were worried on my behalf. Being in Thailand now, I often feel safer walking along the streets than I would in the comfort of my own hometown. As a woman, I feel that it’s always good to be on guard if you are alone walking by yourself at night. That remains true for wherever you are across the world. Thailand is no different than being back in Oregon. In fact, you might even get noticed more if something were to happen because you do stand out as a foreigner, rather than blending in and going unnoticed. On that note, before I came to Thailand I expected it to be similar to my experience in Ghana, Africa. I thought that I would stick out like a sore thumb and not see another Caucasian face for miles. It blew my socks off when I drove through Thailand the night I arrived and I saw such a large number of foreigners. I would have never expected that. Chiang Mai is full of tourists from around the world and walking around the city, going to the night bazaar, walking streets, or riding around in tuk tuk’s, it is a very rare moment if at one given time I don’t see another foreigner like myself out and about.

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

The greatest challenge personally thus far on this internship has been battling my hardships on my own. Not having a familiar face or the comfort of my loved ones when I found myself struggling has definitely been difficult, when I am so accustomed to always being able to call or meet up with someone to talk. When the Internet is spotty at best and all I need is to see the faces of those closest to me and it just doesn’t work out, it really takes a toll. Lucky for me, about half way through the internship my parents came to Chiang Mai for a week and the week after my sister came to Chiang Mai. Having my entire family in Thailand, let alone Chiang Mai, really made a difference. They showed me how proud they were of the work that I was doing and the experience that I was having and reinstalled the motivation and excitement for living in Thailand and being so completely out of my comfort zone. Though the greatest challenge has been being away from my family and long term boyfriend, the greatest reward is also knowing that I am able to go out on my own, pursue my own dreams and succeed. Even at my lowest, I still have support from my friends and family and ultimately I know that what I am doing is for an incredible cause and that every memory and moment I am having is opening my eyes and teaching me a valuable lesson.

**Question Set 6**

**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.**

1. Being able to understand and speak some Thai language, such as basic greetings and questions.
2. Being able to give directions somewhere around the city when stopped on the street (preferably with a map).
3. Writing bullet points each day of things I want to remember and being able to blog about it later.
4. Producing work that Lek is using in the office and in the park that I took time on and seeing it put to use.

**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).**
1. Being able to understand and speak some Thai language, such as basic greetings and questions.

One of the many accomplishments during my internship that I felt proud about was the amount of language that I was able to learn and my ability to communicate. I came to Thailand without knowing any Thai. I’m fairly decent with picking up languages and pride myself of being a quick learner, so I was not too concerned about my inability to speak Thai. Not knowing any Thai only proved to be a disadvantage a few times. For example, I wished that I was fluent so that I would be able to better communicate with some of my coworkers and also when bargaining for souvenirs. A couple of my coworkers couldn’t speak English fluently, so there were times where I found myself struggling to understand directions or communicate something that I needed to get printed or delegated. It was never too much of an issue, just a couple times where I knew that if I were able to speak more Thai there wouldn’t have been as many moments where both of us clearly couldn’t understand the other, though we would just awkwardly laugh, and projects could have been taken care of more effectively. Another time where not knowing Thai language proved a disadvantage was during markets/night bizarre escapades when I would be bargaining with Thailand locals. Being a foreigner, I already stood out as someone who didn’t know the local ways. I knew that if I was able to at least count to 10 in Thai, I would have an advantage because I wouldn’t feel so vulnerable and I wouldn’t feel as though I was being taken advantage of. Sometimes that was a challenge because after three months I knew what some things should cost, but I would never be offered the same price twice without some haggling. In order to overcome this, I found that it was really helpful to go back to the same people and always smile. Smiling makes a world of difference. Also, when your face becomes familiar, the people you buy from remember you and won’t give you a hard time. By the end of the internship, I was able to say basic greetings, ask for my food to go, say thank you and some other small phrases I picked up along the way. I feel really happy with the amount that I learned and I knew that if I stayed longer I would be able to start learning sentences that were more complex.

1. Producing work that Lek is using in the office and in the park that I took time on and seeing it put to use.

Another accomplishment that I am most proud of in my internship is the work that I produced. I love the feeling that what I am doing is going to a good cause. Not only that it goes to a good cause, but that the time I took to make posters and banners and fliers has been worth it because I see them being hung up in the office and at the park and it feels good to know that I contributed. I don’t have a graphic design background and I found that a lot of the assignments that Lek would give me required design elements. That was a challenge for me. Especially since I have a new computer, I don’t have any programs such as Adobe Suite or Indesign or Photoshop on here. I just worked from Word to do all of the projects that incorporated design and they actually turned out very nicely. If I ever had any trouble or questions, I would always just ask my coworkers. If I didn’t like the way something looked, or I couldn’t decide on a color scheme, I would ask around to see what the main consensus was and go from there. Overall, I knew that each assignment Lek would give me was meaningful and important and so I wanted to make sure that the work I produced reflected that. I made sure to put heart into every assignment and make sure that I was proud of the outcome, which I was. I was really happy with the work that I was able to do and hope that what I made will help further the park’s efforts into a successful future. I felt as though I’ve planted a seed with the company and that I’m excited to see where the relationships I’ve made go and to watch my connection to the company grow and maintain over the years to come.

**Final Question Set**

1. **Describe the workplace culture at your host organization.  How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization?**

The workplace culture at ENP was extremely warm and welcoming. I only had a negative experience with one woman who was no longer affiliated with the organization and once I chose to not engage in any conversation with her everything was fine. When I was put in a negative situation, I made sure to take a step back and evaluate the situation and see if it was a cultural difference that was the cause or if it was something else. I also tried to take it as a learning experience of what to avoid in the future and to make sure it wouldn’t happen again later on. Everyone else in the office and at the park blew me away with their big hearts, humor and overall good nature. Every day I would walk into the office and everyone would greet me with a smile and say good morning. It was so easy to start up a conversation with staff members, ask if anyone needed help, or for them to come to me and ask me to help them with grammar or other tasks. I found that things move a little more slowly in Thailand than they do in the US. Lek, my boss, would ask me to make a banner for her and she would tell me to have it done in a month and I would sit down and work on it and finish it in 2 days. She would be completely surprised when I would finish my assignments so quickly. To me, I was shocked that she was giving me so much time to work on it and finish it and to her she couldn’t believe I got it done so quickly. In Thailand most work takes time to get done, whereas in the US work at a faster more stressful pace. It was very easy to adjust to the culture at ENP because all the staff members were so personable and friendly. I never felt out of place or like I was unable to ask questions or throw ideas out. The staff was all very supportive of anything I needed and made me feel like I was a part of the team.

1. **What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?**

I would definitely tell them to plan to have their planschange, expect the unexpected, and to just be friendly. I would also suggest to bring more money than you plan on spending because you never know what fun things you might miss out on by not having enough. Don’t be afraid to go out and explore on your own. Thailand has amazing food so try everything and never stick to the familiar. Eat as much Khao Soi as possible. Get Thai iced tea with no milk. Visit as many temples as possible and don’t be afraid to walk around and get lost for a little while. See as much as you can and make friends along the way. Write down everything that you want to remember because so much happens on a daily basis it’s hard to remember everything even if you think you have the best memory in the world. Take pictures. Make a list of things you want to accomplish and make sure they happen. Drink beer. Play darts. Play Connect Four at Half Moon. Don’t bring any clothes you care about and donate them at the end of your trip. Bring small gifts for children you meet along the way. Be a tourist and book a touristy trip. Ask coworkers of places to go see and things to do. Chiang Mai is a beautiful city that never gets too hot. It’s usually a little overcast and you can walk almost everywhere, even across town (it took me 45 minutes to walk to Airport Plaza Mall). See a movie and be prepared to stand for the song of the King. Talk to the ENP staff and tell them Shawna said she misses you. If you find yourself in a difficult situation, remember to breathe and remember that everything is ok. Let your parents know how you’re doing. A smile can make a huge difference so always smile. Don’t just give up if things get hard, learn from it and become a better person. Try to learn the language and practice it. Laugh at yourself if you mess up. Make the best out of any situation. Most importantly, never forget that you are having the experience of a lifetime and only you can make the most out of it.