

Final Internship Report

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SE Vietnam – Spring Term 2017

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?

When I came to VPHA for my orientation, my first impressions were that everyone was very friendly and welcoming. The office space was a little smaller than I was used to, but it meant that everyone was very close with one another. I have started working on assisting the program coordinator for the 9th annual Asia Pacific conference on sexual and reproductive health and rights. I will be working on this program for the majority of my internship I believe and will get to travel to Ha Long Bay for an international steering committee meeting for three days. I will have the opportunity to network with all the international members of the committee. The internship is helping me reach my goals by showing me how NGO's work to fundraise and network with the government and international affairs to put on this large conference.

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

My SE Vietnam advisor Ha was there to greet me as soon as I left the baggage claim and was immediately welcomed with a hug. It was nice to finally see her in person as we had been exchanging messages for months prior to my arrival. It was almost midnight by the time I arrived in Ha Noi, but Ha pointed in the general direction of major landmarks such as the Red River. I also saw my first few motorbikes on the way to my host family's home, one included a vendor who had boxes so big on either side of the bike it look impossible to balance. The number of motorbikes even at midnight shocked me, the city was very much alive even late at night. the humidity was another thing that stood out to me, as soon as I got to the Visa payment counter I could feel the humidity that was wafting up from 3 sets of closed doors. It was very hard for me to fall asleep feeling so sticky and hot even though I was completely exhausted.

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

I honestly did not have any anxieties prior to departing for Ha Noi and my internship. I was so bus worrying about packing and finishing my final projects and exams for class that I did not have time to get anxious about leaving my home for three months. I had little bit of a technological struggle when my flight was delayed arrived to Seoul causing me to miss my connecting flight and I could not get on the wi-fi to notify Ha that I would be arriving late. Now that I am here, my anxieties has picked up a little, but mostly about things at home. The language barrier is a little tricky to navigate sometimes, but I have started trying to learn some Vietnamese so that I can communicate with my co-workers and my host mom as she is the only one in the host family that cannot speak English.

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 remainder of your internship?

My first week flew by fairly quickly at VPHA, but they second week we traveled to Ha Long city for the ISC meeting for the 9th annual conference I am currently working on, so I have not really settled in yet as I have been bouncing from Hanoi to spending the better part of the second

week in Ha Long city. This is the start of my third week and things seem to be settling a bit better now. I am used to the Monday schedule of the office meeting with Professor Le Vu, and waiting for the updates until they conclude their meeting because it is conducted in Vietnamese. I feel like I have not really started working toward most of my professional goals I originally set, I have started to learn what it is like working for a international NGO in Vietnam. The experience is showing me how vastly different public health work is in the United States versus the sector in Vietnam. I am learning the difficulties the NGO's face here and how fortunate we are in the US to have more support from the government. I would like to be able to use more of my knowledge and education from my degree in my internship; currently I have not been working towards my goal of utilizing my knowledge to help with program planning here.

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 are to live the way a local would and to see what the country of Vietnam has to offer. So far I have traveled to Ha Long Bay and explored some of the main attractions of Hanoi including the temple of literature, the Sword Lake, and the Ho Loa prison. I have been to the local markets with my host family and will continue to go to the market with them to learn how to bargain with the vendors after I move into my own apartment this week. I also plan to travel to Ho Chi Minh City at the end of the month for the long holiday, and to travel to the Sapa Mountains some time in May as my final excursion outside of Hanoi. I hope to explore more of Hanoi and experience the local lifestyle once I live on my own, living with my host family has been great but I have not felt like I can run off and explore the city for fear of being rude and not spending time with them. I would like to bargain in the local market and order myself a kg of beef or a bag of coffee, just one experience where I can successfully purchase my own food without assistance by the end of my internship has become a new goal of mine.

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?

My cross-cultural goal is to learn Vietnamese and have a conversation with my co-workers. I have been working towards basic Vietnamese including the pronunciations of words. So far I have memorized the numbers up to ten, basic phrases like hello, goodbye, and the different types of meat. The experiences that have stood out to me the most have been when I could not communicate with the locals at all. I went to a place for lunch and there were no menus, so I literally had to point to someone else's dish and smile hoping they would understand I wanted to order the food. The woman working did not speak English and I could not speak Vietnamese, so we both had to rely on non-verbal communication skills and a bit of humility to understand each other. In the end it worked out and I was able to order food and pay, but it made me realize how difficult it is when you cannot communicate. Another instance that stood out was when I was ordering an Uber motortaxi home from work one day. I had practiced saying the address of my office in Vietnamese to try and communicate better with the drivers, but when the driver called me and asked he told me to speak English, was a little disheartening to be told to speak English instead of trying to speak Vietnamese. My co-workers have been great in helping me learn Vietnamese, a co-worker named Quy has given me an paragraph each week to try and translate into English so that I can practice the different words in exchange for me practicing English with her. I would really like to have a simple conversation with my co-workers by the end of my internship and hopefully the little language lessons each week I will be able to, but the language when spoke by others is extremely difficult to understand. I find myself sitting at the conference table at lunch listening to everyone speak, hoping to hear a word or two that I can understand, but each person's dialect is slightly different, so the same word said by three people will sound completely different.

Question Set #3

1. Describe a day in your life:

I usually start my day around 6:45 am and make sure I am leaving my apartment and ordering an Uber by 8:15. I usually arrive at work between 8:30-8:40 depending on how heavy the traffic in the morning is. I found that if I am on my Uber by 8:15-18 I can get to the office by 8:35 without any problems, but if I leave just a few minutes later the roads are filled with traffic. My typical workday starts with a fresh cup of coffee made by someone in the office and then I start checking the abstract and scholarship submission emails for the conference, one of my projects. Next I usually work on those emails and help with English translations until lunch which runs 12-1:30pm usually, sometimes we start lunch at 12:30 and go until 2:15. I usually make my own lunch from dinner leftovers at home, but occasionally I will go out for lunch, there is a fairly inexpensive pho place 2 minutes from my office, or there is a old lady that runs a small banh mi stand that doesn't look very sanitary but actually is. I always get a double egg banh mi if I get lunch from her – it only costs 15,000 dong and she understands my broke Vietnamese when I order. After lunch I split the remainder of the day between internship requirement paperwork for my university and helping with the brainstorming for the tobacco free week which is happening at the end of May. I usually make myself another cup of coffee or tea after lunch, I have gotten used to the strength of the Vietnamese coffee.

My work day ends at 5:30pm and I take an Uber home, for the month of April all Uber motortaxi rides after 4pm and before 8pm have a automatic 15,000 dong discount, so my ride home is usually free or only a few thousand dong. After work I sometimes will run to the Lotte supermarket if I needed some groceries that I cannot get from the local market down the street from my apartment, or I will head home and go to the local market and get groceries. I just started going to the local market instead of Lotte for all my groceries - it was expensive and Lotte didn't always have what I needed. I like to walk around my neighborhood since I sit for most of my day, twice a week I go for a run to West Lake from my apartment – it is around 2.5 miles for the route that I run. I make dinner around 8:45 after I rest in my room for a little while, my landlord makes their dinner around 7pm and it is a shared kitchen, so I find it is easier to make my dinner when everyone is out of the kitchen.

It is tricky to balance work with exploring outside since by the time I leave work many places are shutting down except for the local market. Where I live on Ngoc Ha Street there is not much other than little shops, so I have to go some place else like the Old Quarter to explore. I reserve the weekends for exploration and sight seeing, as I have more time than during the week.

2. Housing:

I moved into my apartment building two weeks ago and I have gotten used to living alone, I miss my host family some but am enjoying my own space. My apartment building has four floors, 3 floors with tenants and a shared living space/kitchen area. The landlord and her husband live on the roof where the washing machine is, their son is a professor at the university and lives in one of the apartments on the fourth floor. I have yet to see any of the other tenants except for their shoes outside their doors in the stairwell. The apartments are a studio style; I have a large bedroom with a desk, mini fridge, tv (that I don't actually use, a private bathroom, and a small balcony outside.

I am very happy with my accommodation choices; I loved getting to live with a local family for the first couple of weeks to get my bearings and an understanding of how and where to buy groceries, and my host family became a second family because they constantly check in with me and make sure I am doing okay. Then moving into my own apartment has been a nice and challenging experience. Sometimes I spend too much on groceries because I don't have the language skill to bargain with the street vendors as well as say my host mom. I think it is important for people to learn how to live on their own, I have had to sharpen my skills in setting a weekly budget, grocery shopping, actually cooking all of my own food or I won't eat, and being more independent. I would recommend all interns live with a host family for at least a week or two and then move into their own apartment. It teaches you a lot of important life skills and makes the internship experience that much more than working in another country.

3. Finances:

I didn't set a real budget for the first few weeks I was here and I know I spent a few hundred dollars within the first 3-4 weeks I was here on miscellaneous items including gifts for my family, toiletries at the store, food, lots of bubble tea, etc. Once I moved into my own apartment I actually set a weekly budget and created a spending log. I was a little surprised with how much I was spending, but when I converted the amounts into U.S dollars it was not as much as it felt like I was spending. I still didn't feel comfortable with spending money every day, but it's different than in the U.S where you can go grocery shopping once a week and be fine, here you go every few days to get the fresh items and if you buy herbs on Sunday night for instance by Thursday they are going bad already. I may have done that and wasted some beef too. I am having to learn how to budget and plan when I buy certain food products. As far as food I am spending about what I thought I would and a little bit more than I want to spend on random items and gifts. I also booked everything for my trip to Ho Chi Minh City early and calculated that into my weekly budget and was not happy with how much I spent at the end of the week, but then remembered I also booked a trip for May hat week and felt a little bit better.

I spend roughly \$15-20 U.S dollars a week on groceries and around \$8 dollars eating out a week. Recreation I spend roughly anywhere from \$2 on the Uber ride to the area I am walking around to \$50 for my weekend exploring Ha Long Bay with a cruise including food and housing. I spend roughly \$8-9 dollars a week on Uber for transportation to and from work, and another \$4 dollars if I make random trips to the Old Quarter or the Vincom Centre.

I wish I had set up a better budget from the first week I was here, but I feel like I am doing a pretty good job about not spending too much excess money. I would recommend that future interns use something like a "bullet journal" to track their spending from the beginning. I started using it the first week in my own apartment and it has done wonders to help me track and budget my money better during the week.

4. Travel and Transportation:

I take an Uber to and from work nearly everyday, once in a while my host family will pick me up from work if they are on their way home the same time and wanted to say hi to me – which I deeply appreciate. I pay a minimal amount of money for a "taxi" in a large city compared to what I would be spending back in the states, so I am very happy with my decision. Someone recommended I rent a motorbike while I am here, but I am not comfortable enough to drive here and I don't know that the rental fees and gas expense would balance out with how little I spend on an Uber. I know that Grab is cheaper sometimes, but Grab could not get my Vietnamese

phone number to work with their system to create me an account. My host sister and Ms. Ha both called the company to try and get it fixed. Thankfully Uber worked and I am happy with it. I have barely had time to explore Hanoi as I get chances to go to nearby places outside of Hanoi with people, a good problem to have, but I am just now getting the chances to explore Hanoi. The Old Quarter is a lot of fun and there is always something going on down there – I would recommend going multiple times, I have gone back 3 times and still find something new each time. There are lots of museums like the women’s museum, the national Vietnamese museum, and the museum of ethnology that I plan to go explore in the next few weeks. For coffee lovers like me there are literally hundreds of coffee shops to explore, and I keep trying new cafes and bubble teahouses. I love walking around random streets because there is always something new that I find and get to see. I recommend taking a map, a portable phone charger (your phone will drain so fast here), and spending the afternoon walking a new section of the city you have not seen – there is so much to see that is not on Google maps.

Question Set #4

1. Professional Learning:

My workplace culture is very social. Whether we are working on a project, have a meeting, or are simply sitting at our desks working alone there is always food involved. Then, the conference secretary, will always cut up green mangos for everyone to eat during the day. Occasionally near the end of the workday, maybe once a week, everyone will convene in the boardroom and there will be a spread of banh (bread), fruits, and some kind of dried meat. My coworkers love an excuse to have a mini party and celebrate with food. We also all interact around the kitchen at the start of the day – everyone drinks coffee. You can smell the coffee brewing at least three times a workday, sometimes more. If there is one word to describe the office I would have to say coffee. I am a very social person and I enjoy that the culture is very inviting. I seem to fit in very well in that regard because I am more than happy to stop and grab coffee or milk tea with a coworker, but I can also stay focused on my tasks as well. I enjoy that my coworkers work hard, but stop to enjoy the coffee too.

Aside from gather at lunch in the boardroom daily and the heard of coworkers flocking to the coffee pot like it’s a drinking hole; I have loved getting to work on the Tobacco Free Week planning and the editing for the Vietnam Journal of Public Health. The Tobacco Free Week is a bit more challenging since I am not planning the program in its entirety, I like being able to make the program pieces fit like a puzzle and I am only getting to work with the overview of the program. It is nice that I don’t have the stress of putting on the whole event, but I am used to planning for a program entirely and having to make the pieces work together. I am enjoying getting to read through all the submissions for the Journal of Public Health. We are working on the special edition for the conference in November and it has been eye opening to see the types of studies and the results from different provinces of Vietnam. Not everything being submitted to the journal for publication is a project for VPHA, so I have been fortunate to read most of them while I edit.

The backwards plan timeline I had to create for the Tobacco Free Week was an intense and stressful two weeks of planning and creating a deliverable for my preceptor. I was struggling with my ADD, forgetting to put my contacts in most mornings because it was 95% humid at night and my air conditioner broke, so I was unable to sleep. It was a rough several days while trying to work out the details and create this plan that the organization was expecting to use for this important program. The timeline included everything that needed to be done for the VPHA run events, the province fieldtrip visits, the partnered event with the public health club at the

university that I am also tasked with helping develop, and the communications plan for the whole week. I was able to finish it by 4pm on the due date and I was very happy with how it turned out. I was expecting Anh Vu, my preceptor, to tell me the timeline would need some edits or things would need to be different, and he told me that the plan looked perfect and we would go forward with it.

2. Cross Cultural Learning:

I have actually had a pretty bad incident where I misunderstood cultural differences. I am used to hanging out with my male friends alone without it being anything romantic, but here I learned that is not the case. I met a older gentleman named Duc, as the International Steering Committee when I was in Ha Long Bay, he is a very important member of the committee and he started to act like a mentor to me while we were at the committee meeting. He had told me about a café that does monthly classical music concerts and said he would invite me to the next one. When I arrived at the concert he paid for my matcha drink, which was nice, and I did not think anything of the gesture as my male friends back home would do that, but after the concert he invited me to a nice bar that he said he liked to go to afterwards. It was not until we started drinking wine that I noticed this was not just two friends hanging out. He began to try to hold my hand and tell me how beautiful I was. He tried to kiss me at one point. I did not know how to deal with the situation because I knew it was very different than how I would handle the same situation back home. I pretended to be tired and said I was going to take an Uber home because I had to be up early the next day. He tried to have us take the same taxi and that he would drop me off first, but I thankfully had already ordered my Uber motorbike home.

I talked to Ms. Ha from SE Vietnam when we went out that weekend about the situation and how to handle it if he invited me out again. She told me that in Vietnam if a male asks you out and there is no one else coming they view it as a date, and that if he asks me again its okay to be honest and tell him that I was not comfortable seeing him again. She advised me that if a male invites me to another event, that I should ask if there will be any other people present unless I would be okay going on a date with that person.

It was as such a simple event, going to a café with someone, but I didn't realize that cross gender events are much more casual in the U.S, especially in Oregon. The gender roles and norms are very different here, females hang out with females and males hang out with males, there is very little crossing of the genders unless they are dating – something I was not used to and now am aware of this cultural difference.

3. Personal Growth:

I have been writing on my blog more frequently than I thought I would and I actually wrote a post similar to this question last week. The most important thing I have learned about myself is that I am braver than I thought. I am not a shy or fearful person, but I didn't think that moving to Vietnam for three months or going to the local market and bartering for food would be something brave. My landlord's son, Alex, teaches math at the university and has told me I am brave for cooking on my own and going to the local market instead of the supermarket. I didn't see why he thought that, but after I looked at what the tasks like buying groceries at the local market meant and symbolized I began to see that my moving here was a brave thing. I feel more confident in myself and my ability to adapt to my surroundings. It was very difficult the first few times I went to the local market by myself, but I have gotten more and more confident going and bartering for lower prices. I have memorized the numbers and learned that if I have smaller

bills I can show them the exact amount of what I want to pay for the produce and they will usually accept it. Originally one of my goals was to have a conversation with a coworker in Vietnamese – I have since learned that the language is not hard to speak, but the memorization of the words and how to pronounce them is very difficult. My new goal became to successfully barter for my groceries in Vietnamese – which I was able to do the last two weeks and it is a great feeling. There are still a few times I know that I pay more, even with bartering, than I should have, but I am able to buy a majority of my groceries at the local market which I feel good about because it is helping these people directly. For instance there is one woman I buy most of my greens from and she does not over charge me, I like knowing that I am helping her feed her family. I went to the Woman's Museum and one of the exhibits discusses how many of the people selling produce or flowers are from provinces outside of Hanoi and that they leave their families for two weeks at a time because the money is in Hanoi, and that is how they provide for their families. I shop at the Lotte supermarket once a week maybe to get instant noodles and soap or any random item I might need that I could not find at the local market. Most everything that I can buy from a local vendor I try to buy from them.

Question Set #5

1. Professional:

Working at an NGO for the last eight weeks has shown me that international affairs are of high importance. I enjoyed getting network and work along side several NGOs from around South East Asia and the Pacific. Before coming to Vietnam I was not as interested in working for an NGO or even international affairs. My opinion has shifted a little since working for VPHA; I am interested in working more with international affairs, but still not as interested in NGOs. I think they do fantastic work and are important aspects of public health planning, but for me I believe I am a better fit in a corporate or government setting.

With my networking at the ISC meeting in April I was able to talk with other members of NGOs from various aspects of public health within countries such as Malaysia, Australia, Nepal, and the Philippines. I was fortunate enough to exchange contact information and was welcomed to the various organizations whenever I am in their country.

2. Cross Cultural:

In the beginning I was expecting a massive Asian culture difference, and for the country to be less Westernized. Since I have arrived I realized that I thought of the country as more of a 3rd world country than it really is. Vietnam is a thriving and rapidly advancing country with a large technology burst. I heard that the Vietnamese were very kind people prior to my arrival and that has only been solidified. Most everyone I have met here is extremely kind and willing to help out. When I got lost trying to find my hostel in Ho Chi Minh City a younger man who did not speak English tried to explain where to go and when we didn't understand each other he motioned for me to hop on his bike and he would take me there. When I tried to give him some money for helping he simply smiled and waved goodbye. I wish the Vietnamese were a little more confrontational however, I like being corrected if I am doing something wrong or something could be done differently and here no one wants to address it.

3. Your Culture Curve:

I felt I was in a honeymoon state for the first two weeks, despite the massive jet leg making me exhausted by 8 each night. My initial culture shock was when I was in Ha Long bay for the work meeting and I got a first hand experience with the different levels of respect and how it is

handled. I had to get used to being hushed in discussions and ignored while the elder men were talking. It was a massive adjustment as I am a very outspoken person and feel that women are equal, but here there is an apparent patriarchy. After the meeting in Ha Long Bay I slipped into some normalcy as I moved into my apartment and had to visit the local market almost every day to buy groceries, and this helped me feel more like a local and into cultural adjustment. Some of the vendors and I grew to have an understanding and I would visit them every time and they would take care of me. I was getting more and more comfortable bargaining for cheaper prices if I went to another vendor or market. I enjoyed feeling like I understood the culture and was a version of a local. I don't feel like I have had a significant second cultural shock, I feel like it happened all at once in the beginning and I believe a large part of this is because I moved into my apartment early on and was forced to face a lot of the differences quickly.

4. Articulating your Experience:

In one paragraph I would say that interning in Hanoi was one of the best choices I could have made. The professional experiences were not anything like I imagined. There were times I was not working on anything and still had to come sit in the office for nine hours a day, but then there were days I had 30 minute deadlines and massive trainings to research. I was also exposed to another culture in the hardest way possible with full immersion. I had to learn how to communicate to buy even the simplest of things like my food and toilet paper. This often included playing a game of charades with people, the one time I had to go to the pharmacy to buy anti-itch cream for my mosquito bites, that come in plenty, I was spent 15 minutes trying to explain, Google translate, and mime what I needed. In the end I was given an anti-fungal steroid instead. I also grew as an adult in my short time here; how to balance a budget for the month, paying for all of my own bills, having to cook at late at night when all I wanted to do was fall asleep. Living in Vietnam was certainly a challenge and there were times I wanted to throw the towel in and go home, but this was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. It was not at all what I thought it was going to be, but it was everything what I needed to experience.

Question Set #6

Advice for future interns:

The biggest piece of advice I can give future participants is to really let go of your inhibitions. Don't be afraid to try something like a foreign food, it may taste gross but by eating it you are learning about the culture of the place you are spending the next three or more months. Don't be the American existing in another country, be the American living like the locals. You have a once in a lifetime opportunity to completely immerse yourself in another culture, eating different foods, hearing another language, learning that there is far more to the world than the American lifestyle. Embrace the new culture, it will scare the hell out of you sometimes, and that is completely okay, but don't run from it. Embrace the new person you will find you have become when you come home.