

April Nichols
University of Washington – Summer 2015
Center for Social Medicine, India
<https://aprilmilesandsmiles.wordpress.com/>

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?

The organization itself is very impressive. All together the Pravara institute as well as the Center of Social medicine is doing extraordinary work in its community and practically a textbook example of what a health organization ought to be doing in a resource poor community. From my studies at the university I feel as though I have learned many ways in which an organization can help improve public health in rural and impoverished areas and from my first impressions, it seems as though Pravara is doing it all. The program exceeds my expectation thus far but I must keep in mind that I have only been told about these great programs and have yet to see the execution of them. The reality of these programs might be less then textbook perfect, but I am excited to see the dynamic of public health initiatives both in theory and in practice as they may differ greatly. This experience aligns almost perfectly with my previous studies of medical anthropology and global health and aligns with my goal rather well.

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

One of the things that stood out to me the most was honestly how many people I couldn't understand. For some reason I went into this experience thinking that everyone would speak English here and I would not have much problems with language barriers. While there are a lot of people that do speak English (particularly CSM staff), it is with heavy accents and sometimes I still do not understand what they are saying. Luckily there is another American student here who speaks Marathi, and can translate for us. But I still feel like a lot gets lost in translation. There have been no major misunderstandings but sometimes the smaller details get lost between an English that I can kind of understand or an abbreviated translation from Marathi. This language barrier has stood out to me the most I think simply because I wasn't particularly expecting it.

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

My biggest fear was leaving my friends and family behind for three months to go to a foreign country by myself not knowing what to really expect upon my arrival. Never having traveled before I was worried about being so far away from my friends and family for so long. The worst anxiety occurred as my father was dropping me off at the airport. I almost thought to myself that I am crazy for doing this and who in their right mind would choose to do something like this. But there was no turning back, and I knew that it would get better once I arrived in India and settled in. Now as I have been here for almost two weeks I am settled in and have made friends with the other American students as well as the Indian students. It

initially took a while to get connected with my father by phone but I did eventually and all the initial anxiety is gone. I imagine that soon I will feel more comfortable here and by the time the summer is over I will likely be reluctant to leave.

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 am a little more used to the way things work here things are going well. We have seen a lot in the first few weeks as they have tried to give us a good representation of the work being done in this area. Every once in a while we will have a posting in a department that is very slow that day and there is not much for us to do. We sometimes bring books to read or other work to finish with us just in case. Although I have learned that CSM may put us in these post knowing that we may be bored, they also guide us to know what we may look for or what to ask to get learn about the things we are interested in. Aside from the slow days there have also been opportunities to see a lot of really cool things such as visit tribal areas, meet community members and traditional healers, tour an ayurvedic college, learn about and visit an Aids/HIV organization that works with MSM, FSW and migrant populations. So while every few days we might have a post where we don't do very much it is an ok tradeoff for those days that we learn things we never could have anticipated. I personally would like to spend more time in the physiotherapy department in the duration of my time because that is my future field it wasn't until week 7 that I finally received a posting there. I hope I can continue spending more time there because that would help me the most in my professional goals.

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?

I think that my personal goals are in line with what I am accomplishing. I have noticed that this experience is just what you make it. Since there are other Americans here I found myself spending most of my time with them. At one point I realized that with only hanging out with the other Americans, watching American movies and doing everything else I would normally be doing in America I may not have been getting fully exposed to Indian culture as much as I should be. It is true that I was in my comfort zone for quite some time and I had the choice to stay in my comfort zone or to leave it. I have been making efforts to spend less time doing my typical American things and really try to embrace the surrounding culture. For example try and spend more time chatting with the Indian students and watch more Bollywood movies as well as learn more of the language.

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?

I feel like I am learning a lot cross-culturally. A few things that have stood out to me include the way

someone my age lives here. Most of the girls I have spoken to will have an arranged marriage as soon as they complete college. Guys here finish college and move in with their parents until they are married and then they live with their wives. Girls here talk about their future arranged marriages with excitement and it is simply very different concept than I am accustomed to. Dating is much different in this culture than American and it is interesting to talk to the students about it because our way of doing things is just as foreign to them as their way is to us. One thing I would like to explore here is to learn more about religion. This is also a very different aspect that is incorporated into everyone's lives here.

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?

The day begins when I wake up around 7:30, sometimes a little earlier if I have a few things I want to get done. Our postings typically start at 9am so we leave for breakfast at 8:30. The Mess is just a short 2 minute walk from our hostel and me and another student walk over together. From breakfast we will usually go to the Center for Social Medicine department where we check in with the staff in their office. They tell us what our posting is for that day and where we should go from there. Postings vary from on campus in the hospital to off campus in other rural health centers, mobile clinics or school visits. Sometimes they tell us in advance where we are posted and so from breakfast we just go straight there. We have our posting from 9am to sometime around 1pm when everybody goes to lunch. We eat our lunch in the mess and return to our posting around 2 or 2:30. From then we continue our postings until 5 but timings vary depending on what department we are posted in, how busy they are, and what the doctors' schedule is. After five we have free time which I spend doing homework, writing our weekly reports for CSM or various assignments. This is also when I walk to the shops if I need anything or do my laundry (hand washing and drying your clothes take a lot of time). I typically go for a walk around campus or to a nearby temple (on top of a hill so it has a nice view) around 6pm. At 8pm we go to dinner at the mess and since there is a 9pm curfew we are back in the hostel by then. I have found that I have less free time than I thought I would have. My main free time is right after I get done with posting at 5 but I am usually pretty tired to get a lot of work done. I anticipated I would have a ton of time to spend studying for other things (such as the GRE and grad school apps) but that is typically not the case.

2. 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.

At Pravara Institute, all of the students live in hostels, there are separate boy's hostels, girl's hostels and graduate student's hostels. We are located in the international hostel which from what I have heard is the nicest one on campus. Although we are the only international students here the rest of the hostel is filled with graduate students (which here means they are already doctors). The room is sufficient and has lots of room. I have two closets, a small kitchen counter with a sink and kitchen cabinets, a mini fridge, a TV and air conditioning. These rooms have western style bathrooms (which are sometimes hard to find around here). I have been given two twin beds pushed together. There is a pantry located in the

building with a hot plate, but it is the kind that hooks up to a propane tank and I have not been adventurous enough to try and figure it out. Cooking here isn't impossible but very difficult to find what you need as far as cooking supplies. There is a man who does laundry here, you give him your clothes and he takes them to the washers. You pay per piece of clothing and it is pretty affordable. It may take a few days to get your clothes back however and they don't always smell and feel like they just came fresh from the wash. I always wash my own socks and underwear if I send my clothes out. But sometimes you cannot find him to give him your clothes so it is good to know how to hand wash things on your own.

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

Coming into this experience I didn't have a strict budget to begin with. I think I have somewhat stayed within a reasonable amount of spending money but probably could be doing better. When you stay in Loni it is very affordable. Things are generally a lot cheaper here. All of our meals are provided to us by the mess except for Sunday dinner. We go out to eat at a restaurant recommended to us by CSM called Hotel Swagget and most the time a meal for four people will cost us 500-600 Rupees which converts to about 8 dollars (two dollars for each person!). Traveling expenses are what start to add up. When you leave Loni to go into the city or a tourist area prices are much higher. Whenever we travel we eat at nicer places to ensure we won't get sick. These meals cost around 500 Rupees per person. If I were to do something different I would plan ahead more. The more you can plan ahead the more likely you are to be able to save money. Although there are certain things that I feel are worth spending more money on to ensure our safety and our health, because you get what you pay for here.

4. 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?

Day to day we mostly walk everywhere we need to go. Just like many other campuses everything is within walking distance. Outside of campus there is pretty much one main road that all the shops are on it is about a 10-15 minute walk to the edge of town in both directions. If we are outside of campus and don't feel like walking we will take a rickshaw that will usually cost under 60 rupees (\$1USD) there are always rickshaws parked outside the campus gate so there is never a problem getting one. Every weekend we visit a new place (probably why I don't have enough time to study!) and there are lots of places a few hours from Loni to see. For traveling on the weekend we have hired a driver (which CSM arranges for us with drivers they personally know), or taken a bus. If you are going to big cities like Mumbai or Pune then a bus can take you. For closer trips it is more convenient to hire a driver who can take you from place to place when you are sightseeing.

In just about every town there are palaces and forts and temples that are all cool to visit. Below is just some of the places we have visited ourselves but there is much more that you can find.

Places to visit:

Loni-

- movie theater
- market every Wednesday

Shirdi-

- SAI BABA(a very holy temple that you will hear a lot about)
- Closest Dominos! (Although it is strictly vegetarian in this highly religious area)

Nashik

- Sulla Wineries

Aurangabad

- Ellora Caves
- Agenta Caves
- Mini Taj Mahal

Ahmednagar

- Ahmednagar fort

Pune

-This is one of the biggest cities next to Mumbai so there is a ton to do here although it is about a five hour bus ride. But good for a weekend trip!

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?

I believe that my coursework prior to this internship had prepared me extremely well. As a medical anthropology and global health major I found most of my classes pertaining to what we were learning about in the field. Knowledge about global health was important contextual information that helped me imagine the relations between our health system and that of India's rural healthcare. I have spent a lot of time learning about public health in developing countries and this internship put many of the lessons learned into real world practice.

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

I personally already have my mind set on my career path as a physical therapist. I did however learn more dynamic roles of physical therapists in various settings so that was informative and helpful. I have not done any interviews yet.

3. Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

One thing that took a little longer to learn in context was dating versus friendships between guys and girls on the college campus. Dating is much different than in the US for students at our age and friendship between guys and girls was something I had to learn with context as opposed to just reading about it from a book. As we settled into the campus we began to become more comfortable with the students and made more efforts to make more friends. As a female however I was unaware the implications about asking a guy to hang out alone. This while might have had casual intentions it is perceived much differently in India than it would be in the US. I had made friends with a male student (mostly because most of the students we met were male), and had invited him to my room to watch a movie. This I found out later was a much bigger deal than I thought. Guys and girls don't often hang out alone together unless they are dating, furthermore they are not even allowed in each other rooms and can actually get in tremendous trouble if a boy is found in a girls room. Another student told me the implications of my invitation to the friend I was trying to make and I learned that the fact that if we ever hung out alone people would think we are dating and begin to talk. I addressed this issue with the male student and became clear with what was normal for these kinds of situations. We are still friends but made it a point to hang out in group settings instead.

4. What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?

For the most part it seems like India doesn't really have any rules and more often than not people seem to make their own rules. This is both the best and worst part of my experience with the host culture. In one hand it can be freeing to go and be able to do whatever you want with nobody to stop you, but on the other hand this can be a very risky approach systematically. While on an individual basis this is liberating, on a societal basis, this can be dangerous. Many policies, rules and regulations are put there for our own safety so there is a big risk by not having these rules in place. For example there are small things that staff at the hospital does in India that you would be in a lot of trouble for in the US. Lab technicians who take blood samples to be tested do not wear gloves, or masks, or any sort of protective equipment as they are handling bloody needles. This is obviously hazardous and not something that would happen in a hospital in the US. But at the same time outside of a work space not having policies as strict as the US gives people a sense of self responsibility and an attitude that they can do anything they want including accomplishing whatever they want as well. This mentality was very refreshing.

5. What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?

One of the most important things I have learned is that I am able to manage even the toughest situations. While traveling through India in the middle of our internship the interns and I were put into very difficult situations, and while nothing truly bad happened it was a huge learning experience. I learned that I have the ability to navigate through situations like these and knowing this gives me a lot of confidence to handle other challenging situations whatever they may be.

I have also learned how privileged I am as an American. Although I have always been well aware of this, knowing the specific extend to just how good Americans have it in the US has really been very eye opening. This is most likely one of the most life changing aspects of my experience.

Question Set #5

1. Now is the time to begin thinking about how to articulate all your experiences you have been gaining for your next endeavors (job search, graduate school applications, etc). 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.

Accomplishments:

Learning a holistic approach to healthcare

Village health survey

Health promotion school workshop

2. 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

The Learning about a holistic approach to medicine is one of the components of this internship that I am proud of. In the beginning of the internship we learned about the multiple determinants that effecting public health in a rural setting. Along with this we learned the multiple approaches to address all of these determinants. Learning about improving public health through education and improving social well-being was important in shaping my future professional goals. Not only did we learn about a multi-sectoral approach to health care but we also learned about medicine outside of the western bio-medical model. This was very valuable to learn about.

One project we did during our internship was a health survey in several smaller villages. We, along with medical interns and staff members went door to door in several smaller rural villages to perform some basic health screenings. This benefited not only the household members by educating them about their own health status but it also gave the college useful knowledge about health concerns of the community as well as promote the hospital and ensure a good reputation within the community. A challenge that we faced was poor planning with the program. We were often under prepared for the day and had to stop early several times due to this fact. Seeing as though we (the American interns) were just along for the ride we felt it inappropriate to question the staff members when we thought they were not planning well enough. Simple things like packing spare batteries for our blood pressure cuff was overlooked daily and gave us many problems. We decided that aside from a mere suggestion to remember these things in the morning we had to acknowledge that it was not our place to try and plan the program ourselves even if we thought we would do it more efficiently. I instead took the opportunity to see the differences in our cultures when I would get frustrated at our lack of efficiency, even though overall we were making a difference.

At the end of our time in the internship we conducted a workshop at a local primary school to promote

health. We spent a lot of time working on this workshop to ensure that we addressed health issues that were relatable to the students we were working with. In the end we conducted a 4 hour workshop with students that not only educated the students about health but also gathered data that will be useful for future public health initiatives in the area. One of the challenges that we faced was that when we showed up at the school the children were much younger than we were told. Our material was geared towards 17 year olds and was meant to challenge them. Instead we were given 45 students at the age of 12 and 13. This was very difficult to navigate through but we did our best trying to simplify the material we prepared on the spot.

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

The workplace here is a little contradicting in my opinion. There is a dynamic where everyone is late, works at their own pace and doesn't follow the rules while at the same time holds formalities as a priority. In the workplace it is very clear who is superior and how the chain of commands goes. To your superiors you only reply with yes sir or yes madam and in this way it is very professional. At the same time however you mostly follow your own rules. Most people come and go as they please are typically late, take long lunches and work at their own pace. So while relationships between one another is professional the actions may not be. This is however my interpretation using my own cultural expectations. For example doctors and interns sometimes take a two hour lunch break if they feel the need to and are often late when they are expected back at a certain time. If an individual did this on a regular basis in the US they would get in trouble. People here don't get in trouble with their superiors here however because their superiors are doing the same thing.

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

Learn Marathi: this is not necessary but I feel like I would have gained a lot more from the experience if I could understand a little bit more. Marathi, being the local language is what most of the people and patients speak here. You will often be sitting in a room observing a doctor and the whole conversation will be in Marathi, only half the time will the doctor have time to explain what was said. Learning basic conversation will be extremely helpful and people will appreciate your efforts. Also most of the shop keepers in the area don't speak English so knowing some shopping lingo will help a lot too. Learn Hindi if you plan to travel, but you might only learn basic traveling phrases and that will be good enough. Like I said you can get by not knowing the language but I believe that you will have a far richer experience if you can try and learn the language.

Learn how to hand wash your clothes before you leave. This skill is a good one to have.

If traveling to nearby cities it is 100 times better if you have an Indian student with you and even better if they are a local to the area. Traveling in India can be extremely difficult and having a local with you not only is convenient for knowing where to go, but you are also less likely to get ripped off too. Don't be

shy in asking the local students if they want to join you, they understand that it's difficult to travel especially if you don't speak the local language. It will be a lot more enjoyable and you will avoid a lot of the challenges foreigners normally face.

Bring everything you think you will need for the first few weeks. Shopping here is very different and may take a little while to get used to. It took us some time to find the stores with everything we need. There is no big super market or anything like we are used to just small storefronts for the most part. Few of the shop keepers speak English and so it is harder to ask them for something. You can definitely find everything you might need in this town but within the first few weeks it may take some time navigating where and how to shop. Plus you have plenty of space in your room (two closets) so I recommend over packing as opposed to under packing.

Communicate with the staff. They are looking out for your best interests but you have to communicate what those are first. It may be difficult because there are several staff members and they might direct you to someone else who will direct you to another staff member. But in order to get what you want out of this experience it is important to keep trying to communicate and to be patient. There are weekly meetings where you can express your goals, avoid missing these meetings.

Question Set #6

1. Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed?

Many of my thoughts that I had before I left regarding India and my experience there still remain the same now that I have completed my internship. Going into the experience I did a lot of research about India all while keeping an open mind to the fact that everyone's experience is different. I tried to not have many preconceived notions about the country before I got there but many people prepared adequately for my experience overall. One of the things that I have come to learn is just how diverse the country is. North India is starkly different than South India and every state has its own language, culture and traditions. Lumping all Indians together is like lumping all Europeans together as one culture. Everywhere you go in India you will have a different experience and no one's experience will be the same. I have learned an important lesson that through all the research about the country and all the preparations to make a note of the differences between our cultures, there is one thing that took me a lot longer to learn: No matter who you are and where you are from in the world, we all have far more in common with each other than we think. We often focus on the differences between cultures but I have learned that it is much more interesting to look at the things we all have in common.

2. What were your greatest challenges and rewards on this internship in each of your three development areas?

- Personal:

I feel as though I have grown a lot personally. I faced a lot of challenging situations specifically while

traveling out of the village of Loni. I think that I learned many life lessons and although I learned them the hard way it was all a growing experience. One of the greatest rewards I have is getting to have a more worldly view on life. Coming back home, I now see just how privileged we all are as Americans and how many small things we take for granite. I strongly feel as though everyone should have this experience and be able to see how the rest of the world lives because it is very eye-opening.

- Professional:

Professionally, one of my greatest rewards was seeing how versatile physical therapists can be in their field. This leaves me with great optimism going into this field. One of the challenges I faced was getting to spend as much time in this department as I had hoped. I wanted to make closer connections with the professionals I met in this field but I was unable to.

- Cross-Cultural:

My greatest reward was learning in depth about the values and beliefs of Indian culture. I learned about how they value family above all else, how they view marriage and relationships. It is different than what I have experienced before and I truly value getting to know a different perspective on common topics such as these. I feel as though I am able to adjust my own beliefs with the positive sides of both cultures. One of the greatest challenges was learning about certain aspects we would only hear the positive point of view on the matter. It was difficult to find an unbiased opinion sometimes and so often we felt like things may have been sugar coated for us, not just culturally but also in the personal and professional ways as well. As guests many people didn't want to tell us what the flaws in some things were as Indians are very proud people.