

Monica Anderson  
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Oregon State University – Student Exchange Vietnam  
<https://vietnammoon.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?**

Student Exchange Vietnam is a really great organization. They have been very accommodating to my needs in small things like diet and rest, but also in big things like helping me coordinate and communicate with my host families and my work situation. I have not started teaching yet, but I have been in the preparation stage, and again, SE Vietnam has facilitated some meetings and opportunities that have allowed me to both observe part of an informal English class, and to take a stab at teaching that same class myself a few mornings this week. At the school where I will be teaching, Bac Lung Secondary School, I will have the support of two English teachers, Ms. Chung and Ms. Bich, who have both so far been very supportive in meetings and on “Welcome Day,” when a lot of the students I will be teaching came to the school to welcome me. I think that the work I will start next week will be more challenging than I expected, especially since I will need to coordinate lesson plans for three different classes, but I am confident that the support I have from Ms. Chung, Ms. Bich, and the principal, Mr. Ngoc, will allow me to be the best teacher I can be. I did not have many expectations before arrival beyond making a positive impact on the school, but based on the excitement of the students and the teachers, I think I will succeed in that. At this point, my goals are mostly for cross-cultural immersion, and those will certainly be met, especially living in Bac Giang, which is very different from Hanoi.

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

SE Vietnam was immediately welcoming and provided lots of activities the first week, while I was still in Hanoi, which made the arrival process really smooth. I didn't really experience culture shock in Hanoi (that came later in Bac Giang), so I mostly just enjoyed all my first experiences in and around Hanoi, especially the excursion to Ninh Binh that SE Vietnam arranged for the first weekend. I've often heard that people in this part of the world are nicer in general, and I agree with that completely. Their way of life seems slower, but more intentional and less stressful. It's refreshing to be surrounded by such happy, hard-working people all the time. Everyone seems genuinely interested in me and they welcome me graciously everywhere.

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

My greatest anxiety has always been the language barrier. In Hanoi, it wasn't really an issue since I was always with people who spoke English, but in Bac Giang, very few people speak English. Currently, my program coordinator is here to be my translator, but she will return to Hanoi tomorrow and no one in my host family speaks English. I do have a Vietnamese phrasebook and I have learned a few basic words and sentences, but I don't know nearly enough to actually communicate and Vietnamese is a difficult language. Still, my host family is wonderful and I will have support from my two local buddies and two English teachers, so I don't think it will be a huge problem at all.

## **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?**

Things are going really well. After two full weeks, I feel much more confident in my lesson planning and teaching, and I can see that my students are making progress both in their speaking and in their understanding of what I say. I was informed beforehand that their English classes have always been heavily grammar-based, so I am focusing much more on speaking and listening to enhance their communication skills. This definitely challenges them, but I want to leave here knowing that I helped them with tangible skills. I spend a lot of time interacting with Vietnamese English teachers, and I have noticed that those who learned English from native English speakers speak more fluidly than those who learned from native Vietnamese speakers. This gives me hope that while the students might struggle to understand me, even listening to my pronunciation can help them. In the next half of my internship, I would like to connect more with the students on an individual level. Since the language barrier exists so heavily, it feels more difficult to get to know them well, but I still have a month and a half left with them, so I hope I can find ways to make that connection. I would also like to become better not just as a teacher, but specifically as an EFL teacher, since I want to do this again in the future. This will require research into the best methods to teach English, and implementation of these methods into my classes. I think that if I can continue to gain and maintain momentum in the students' progress, then we will all have a meaningful experience.

### **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?**

Personally, I have met a lot of incredible people and crafted meaningful relationships. Sometimes I think those relationships are the most important part of this internship because they give me insight into these people as individuals, Vietnam as a culture, and humanity in its universality. I have been invited to a lot of homes, and I really enjoy these visits, but I could do better in terms of my attempts to communicate while I am there. At meals, when people speak only in Vietnamese, I often forget that I could contribute to the conversation if I just used someone who speaks English as a translator. I have made progress in ensuring my own comfort, be it with food, sleep, or exercise, amid these visits; earlier in my internship, I often sacrificed this comfort for the sake of appeasement. Before I leave, I want to spend more time simply discussing cultural differences between Vietnam and the United States. I have had a few of these conversations, and I find them fascinating. Even when the desires of the people are different, the intent is always similar; for example, Vietnamese women want whiter skin and try to get it by avoiding the sun and using skin whitening products, while American women want darker skin and spend too much time in the sun with tanning products. The important thing in that distinction is that everyone seeks an unattainable beauty that looks different everywhere. I think that these insights come most naturally from basic conversation, so I hope to learn as much about Vietnamese people as I can on a personal level.

### **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 definitely feel immersed in the Vietnamese lifestyle. Certain habits, like napping after lunch and eating fruit after meals, have become so ingrained in me that skipping them takes a serious toll on my equilibrium. Everything feels balanced here—work, rest, meals, lifestyle—and I hope I can bring that balance back with me when I return home. A simple experience that stands out to me is something I experience every morning when I run. Even though I run at 5 a.m., without fail, people will say “Hello!” when I pass them, or say something in Vietnamese. Since I live in a small village, everyone knows me as the foreigner and as the runner, and these titles follow me everywhere. I attended a wedding last weekend and several people I met told me they had seen me run by in the mornings. This open-minded and open-hearted recognition of each other feels more genuine than most interactions I have in America. An English teacher at my school, Chung, once said, “The people in my country are poor, but they are

friendly.” I think this sums up the Vietnamese spirit well; everyone I have met immediately treats me like a friend. Before I leave, I have a lot of exploration to do around Vietnam. I have trips lined up to go to Halong Bay and to climb Fansipan, and I hope to adventure to other natural places as well. I hope that these trips will allow me to appreciate Vietnam and all its beautiful places and people even more than I already do.

### **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 get up at 5 a.m. to run and eat breakfast before work. I teach at Bac Lung Secondary School from either 7 a.m. or 8 a.m. until 10 a.m. or 10:15 a.m. After work, I return to my homestay, where I eat lunch with my host family and take a rest for a few hours. In the afternoons, I take some time to lesson plan for the week and generally have free time to read or update my friends and family back home. In the evenings, I run or exercise again and have dinner with my host family around 7 p.m., then go to bed by 8:30 p.m. There’s not much to explore near where I live, but if I want to go swimming or to the market, I can always ask someone to come get me. Also, I sometimes get invited to people’s houses for dinner, so my evenings are then spent interacting with that family.

#### **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.**

I live with a host family, more specifically an older couple—both farmers—who do not speak English. Their son and his family live close by, and I often spend time at their home to use the internet or teach the children there, so I consider them part of my host family also. I cook my own breakfast, but my host mother always cooks lunch and dinner for me. Since I live in a more rural area where not many people speak English and life is generally slow-paced, I’m grateful to live with people who care about me and near other people who can help me. I sometimes feel frustrated with my decreased independence when it comes to meals or daily life, so if I lived in a big city like Hanoi I might prefer to live on my own, but here it feels right to live with a family. Plus, I feel much more immersed in the culture than I would have on my own. After this experience, I probably wouldn’t choose a homestay for extended travel, but for relatively short experiences, it seems like a solid option.

#### **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?**

When I’m in Luc Nam, I spend basically no money since I have all my meals at home and there are not many places here to spend money. My biggest expense is traveling, which includes the tour or package itself, but also transportation to Hanoi, meals and transportation in Hanoi, and meals and transportation at the place to which I travel. Taxis are often necessary in Hanoi and that definitely adds up, as does the food in more touristy areas. Overall, things are cheap in Vietnam and my budget seems reasonable; I’m spending about what I expected, if not less. One weekend traveling might cost me around \$200, all expenses included. There are frustrating expenses that I wish were not necessary, like when taxi drivers take advantage of my foreign status to triple my fare, but for the most part I’m satisfied with how I spend my money.

#### **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?**

My co-worker takes me to work on her motorbike every day, and any time I need to get somewhere in Luc Nam, either she or someone else will take me on their motorbike. In Luc Nam, I don’t really have other options for

transportation, but I'm definitely satisfied with my transportation here. I trust the people who drive me and always feel safe, plus it's highly convenient. When I'm in Hanoi, I either take a taxi, a bus, or have someone transport me on their motorbike. Taxis are convenient but expensive and unreliable, buses are cheap but complicated and take forever, and motorbikes are the easiest but not always immediately available. I use my weekends to explore the surrounding area, and my supervisors are always happy to adjust my schedule to allow this. I have been to Ninh Binh Province, Halong Bay, and Sapa, and I would recommend all three for unique and unforgettable experiences, especially Fansipan in Sapa.

#### **Question Set #4**

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

On a direct level, my coursework did not prepare me much for my internship. While a few of my education classes emphasized cultural awareness in the classroom, they did not focus on the specific challenges that come with teaching English as a foreign language. Still, as a whole, my coursework prepared me on an indirect level to deal with these and other challenges from a place of critical thinking and problem solving. All of my English classes require astute awareness about not just a product or piece, but also about the implications, assumptions, and intentions that surround it. I know that no situation or person is an isolated subject, so I feel well-suited to understand and approach things with an open mind. This becomes relevant in the classroom when methods or content differ from what I know; I've come to expect the differences since the students live in a country drastically different from my own. I credit the tangible and intellectual skills that come with a college education for my willingness and ability to assimilate into this culture rather than run from it.

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

For the first several weeks, I was invited to have meals at a lot of different people's houses, and at these meals two things would often happen: one, they would encourage me to keep eating far past my point of fullness, and two, someone would tell me that being vegetarian is bad for my health. In response to the first situation, at first I just kept eating until the food was all gone because I was told that not eating something made for me would be an insult to the host. I was so worried about offending someone that I forced myself far beyond a place of discomfort; however, as I kept dining at homes, I kept hearing the phrase "eat freely and make yourself at home." Eventually, I learned that this phrase really means to eat whatever I want and as much of it as I want, just like if I was in my own home. If I politely refused more food once I was full, the host would take this as a sign that I felt comfortable enough to be honest and "make myself at home" and would not be offended that I did not eat more; this situation evolved over the course of my internship and my response changed over time, and now I feel comfortable eating as much or as little food as I want. Responding to the second situation, regarding my dietary and lifestyle choice, I found it a little harder to remain neutral. In my mind, if I am willing to respect everyone else's choice to eat meat even though I don't, then they should respect my choice to not eat meat, but people continue to push meat on me or tell me it's bad for my health. In my culture, this is disrespectful and impolite, so I struggled to not defend myself or tell them that, but I am still trying to accept the fact that vegetarianism is such an unusual thing in their culture so I can't expect them to understand my decision. Further, given the language barrier, when things are translated into English, there is often a gap in the level of subtlety and the result is a blunt statement like "not eating meat is unhealthy," so I remind myself that the statement in Vietnamese was probably not quite so forward. In the future, I would keep my immediate response the same, which is to smile and politely say I disagree, but I would alter my internal response so I would not take offense to the statement and instead just consider it a cultural difference.

##### **3. Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience? What has been the greatest personal challenge? What has been the greatest reward?**

I have learned that with any discomfort, I can be resilient and adaptable, and I have learned that everything that initially appears negative will somehow breed something positive. I learned this acutely in the last two weeks when, one day, I was told to pack up everything and move to Hanoi without saying goodbye to anyone. I had just reached the point of total assimilation into my Bac Giang lifestyle and still had plans for the next month, but since the police were involved and my program coordinator did not feel comfortable with me there, I had no choice but to leave. I did not see how anything positive could possibly come from living in a giant city where I felt I could not make such a tangible difference or feel comfortable with the lifestyle, but I was wrong. It took me about five days to adjust, and those five days were my greatest personal challenge of this internship. It was an intense period of questioning, doubt, and disappointment, but I emerged on the other side surprisingly at peace with my current situation, and my ability to build a life here in Hanoi for my last month is probably my greatest reward (besides climbing Fansipan in one day, of course). Now that I'm here, I see so many unbelievable opportunities to strengthen my independence, explore the surrounding area, and interact with remarkable people. And I feel immensely grateful for this opportunity. In short, I have learned that the only guarantee in an international internship (and life) is the unexpected.

### **Question Set #5**

#### **1. Future Paths: Have you learned about any new possibilities for career paths? Have you done any informational interviews (formal or informal) while abroad to learn about the field?**

I had the opportunity to talk with a lot of EFL teachers from around the world and gained valuable insight into the world of international English teaching. Before this internship, teaching English abroad always seemed exciting and exotic, but now that I've been immersed in that world for a few months, I see that it's also feasible and, depending on the parent organization, can have a hugely positive impact on the students themselves. Now, I feel even more excited about future possibilities to teach English around the world. I also observed a lot of different teachers and while most were excellent and seemed to genuinely care about the students, there was one teacher who seemed discontent with just about everything, which reminded me that individual attitude and intent is also a big determinant in success as an EFL teacher. For the most part, it seemed like the teachers I talked to shared my interest in making a positive difference in the world and did so with open minds and hearts.

#### **2. 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.**

I planned and implemented two to three-hour lesson plans for three different levels of secondary students with minimal resources and little guidance.

Halfway through my internship, I unexpectedly moved from the rural countryside to Hanoi, where I adapted every detail of my life and work to create a newly meaningful experience.

I cultivated professional and personal relationships with local people that I know will continue to positively impact all of our lives in the future.

#### **3. 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**

I planned and implemented two to three-hour lesson plans for three different levels of secondary students with minimal resources and little guidance.

I entered this internship with virtually no experience in lesson planning and teaching English, and I was terrified before my first week of teaching. I spent hours perusing the internet for information to help me, and when I walked into the classroom for the first time, I channeled all my confidence and enthusiasm to teach my lesson, prepared for it to either go really well or really poorly. I left, three hours later, with pumping adrenaline and inspiration to keep improving. As I continued to plan lessons and teach, I took careful note of what worked and what formed a positive response in the students, and within a few weeks, I felt confident that while my plans would always have room for improvement, I could gauge student experience and improvise as necessary. While it was difficult to teach English in a rural setting because I did not have access to materials like flashcards, books, or audio that would enhance learning, I found this challenge motivating and got creative with my own singing and online books. It was also valuable for me to plan all my lessons by myself because I could learn through experience what worked well in both the planning and teaching process. This experience leaves me excited for future possibilities teaching English and confident in my abilities to learn new skills.

Halfway through my internship, I unexpectedly moved from the rural countryside to Hanoi, where I adapted every detail of my life and work to create a newly meaningful experience.

When I prepared for my summer internship, I prepared to live and teach in rural Vietnam, and for the first half of it, I did; however, due to complications with the local police that my host organization could not resolve, I left everything and moved to Hanoi with one day's notice. I had never lived in a big city before, much less one with seven million people in a foreign country, and I questioned my ability to navigate and enjoy it. I began working at an English language center, where I could no longer be the main teacher in a classroom, and for the first week I faced challenges that ranged from getting lost for hours to questioning the value of teaching supplemental English to urban students. After a week of uncertainty and fading motivation, I realized that if I chose to embrace this new life, then it would become a valuable experience no matter what happened. Once I shifted my attitude and began to view this new life as an adventure rather than an inconvenience, I ended up having three of the most memorable weeks of my internship.

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

In Hanoi, the workplace culture is similar to my own since British people run Apollo. Still, about half the staff are Vietnamese so there is certainly a heavy Vietnamese influence in the culture, which shows in classroom management and overall communication throughout the organization. More specifically, things like classroom assignments and schedules seem well-known by the Vietnamese staff, but remain a bit of a mystery to the Western staff. Everything runs smoothly, but I couldn't explain exactly how. The culture between everyone features a laid-back and fully present attitude partnered with set expectations and wide-reaching enthusiasm. There is a certain uniformity to classroom and workplace methods, and I think this is influenced by the widespread conformity in Vietnamese culture. For myself, if I was in charge of actually teaching my own classes at Apollo, the somewhat rigid teaching methods would challenge me since I prefer to use my own creativity and experiment a bit with classroom lessons. I appreciate that almost everyone seems genuinely happy to work at Apollo, and the friendliness from both the Vietnamese and Western employees creates an enjoyable atmosphere. Overall, it certainly feels different than American workplaces I have experienced, and I think it exists as a happy medium between Western and Vietnamese culture.

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

I don't think it's possible to truly prepare for life in Vietnam until actually living here. Everywhere, from Hanoi to Sapa to the countryside, is full of rich and interesting culture unique to the place. The best way to integrate into life here is to jump in without hesitation and receive everything with an open mind, even the ridiculous heat and humidity. It's important to be aware that while the overwhelming majority of people here are genuinely friendly

and always excited to see or meet a foreigner, there are still a lot of people who will try to take advantage of your general naiveté, especially with money, so it's good to remain alert. I would advise anyone living in Vietnam to recognize people's generosity and try to form real relationships with the local people. The conversations I had with my local friends taught me so much about myself, Vietnam, and even the United States on a global level. I will miss them the most. Take advantage of your free time to explore places outside of your base town because Vietnam has unbelievably diverse options for travel both inside and outside of cities. Most importantly, it is essential to value every moment of your experience, both good and bad, and to recognize the incredible gift that is living in this country, even for a short time.

### **Question Set #6**

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

I basically knew nothing about Vietnam before I left, so the first few weeks of my internship were my first impressions of the host culture. Those certainly changed throughout, and I left with a fuller view of the culture, but also one that illuminates both the good and the bad. I think it is especially important for me to understand the bad parts because even though living in another country is exciting and sounds glamorous, the purpose is to broaden perspectives and experience authentic life there, not just to see the highlights. In Vietnam, I learned through experience that certain people and groups cannot be trusted, but I also learned that a smile goes a long way when buying food. In the beginning, I walked around wide-eyed and amazed by everything I saw, but in the end, I watched my steps because I felt integrated enough to know the intricacies of the culture. I left with a greater understanding of Vietnamese culture, my own culture in Oregon, and the concept of international culture in general.

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

- Personal:

My greatest personal challenge was adapting to life in both Bac Giang and Hanoi. In Bac Giang, I had to learn to live without the conveniences—technological, food, and resources—that I have back home. This was a welcome challenge, but still took a few weeks to master. In Hanoi, I had these conveniences and many more aspects of city life thrown back at me, so it was even more challenging to come to terms with that.

My greatest personal reward was probably reaching the summit of Fansipan in one day a little over halfway through my internship. This trek was symbolic for all the challenges I had overcome up to that point, but it also happened less than a week before my greatest challenge, so it equipped me with the personal strength and confidence to conquer anything.

- Professional:

My greatest professional challenge was teaching myself how to be an effective English teacher. Especially in Bac Giang, I had very little guidance and even less feedback as to whether or not my methods worked, so the first few weeks required a lot of time and energy invested into the lesson planning and teaching process.

My greatest professional reward was seeing the progress in my students over the month or so I worked with them. On my last day teaching in Bac Giang, I taught my eighth grade class without any help from Vietnamese translators, and that class was my most successful for learning outcomes and for the connection I felt with the students. It was immensely rewarding to communicate fluidly with students who several weeks prior would only stare back blankly when I asked a question.

- Cross-Cultural:

My greatest cross-cultural challenge was forming relationships with local people knowing that I would be leaving relatively soon, and knowing that while we could all talk about visiting each other again someday, the reality is that I was able to live in Vietnam for the summer based on extraordinary circumstances, and it would be unlikely for our paths to ever cross again. This did not make those connections any less authentic, but it made leaving feel much more permanent than staying ever did.

That being said, those relationships were my greatest cross-cultural reward. I became very close friends with a few people within those two months, and my experience would not have been nearly as profound without them. One friend especially, who was initially assigned as my 'local buddy,' reminded me of my friends back home and I can now count him among my best friends. Those relationships are worth the whole experience.

### **3. What (if anything) do you wish you had done or known before your internship?**

I wish I had researched teaching English before I left, even if it was just a simple Google search to see what resources I had available. Other than that, I think it was valuable to begin my internship with very little expectations about the whole experience because it allowed me to truly integrate into Vietnam and taught me a lot about myself.