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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 our organization have been positive. Dr. Joel has been lovely and has assigned us a fourth year medical student, Paul, to be our local coordinator. Paul has been passionate and informative when giving us our orientation to Filipino culture, Manila sights, problems that the doctors face due to ties between the church, state, and people. One thing I would say, though, is things haven't quite been as organized as I may have hoped. We just got our schedules yesterday and there have been a few lapses in communication. But it isn't a huge issue. We also haven't really done work yet, it's been entirely learning and being shuttled around as tourists, which I find a bit frustrating.

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

I was surprised at how not overwhelmed I was by Manila. I was prepared for unbelievable traffic, constant loud noise, and just general overwhelming of my every sense. So far, though, it has been nothing compared to the places in India my family is from and what I'm used to, so I have actually been quite comfortable.

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

My biggest anxiety was food. It is still food. There's not a lot to eat as a vegetarian here - one time the only thing on the menu that was vegetarian was ice cream (no problem there though). I'm worried about the islands and doing everything I can to not be rude and eat the food anyways. It'll be fine though, I will take it as it comes.

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?

Things are fine. They've been a little disjointed since we've been in 3 locations. I believe my professional goal was to figure out what I want to do with my life, what my days would look like as a doctor in a disadvantaged area, and whether I'm even suited for it. I address this a little more in depth further along in the question set, but I don't think I've met this goal yet, nor do I think I will during the remainder of my time here. I don't know if that's good or bad or it just is, but I do think that it is indicative of the fact that I'm thinking critically about what I'm seeing and my future role in all of it.

2) How are things going relative to your personal goals?

My goal on this front was to develop a stronger sense of independence while traveling without family for the first time. I don't know how much I have found a "stronger sense" as much as I have learned that I enjoy my autonomy more than I expected and I have loved being alone in this country without family. Even though there were other

students here, I have appreciated being alone. As weeks go by and our internship is gradually reduced to just Lexi and myself (other students were on a shorter program) I have been appreciating it more and more.

3) How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals?

I think I did really well in this new culture. I have done everything I could to become immersed in it while I'm here. We have made friends with people in the community, gone to mass with our friends, tried as many foods as possible, and been down for whatever comes our way. I'm glad I still have two more weeks here (then two more once the program ends) to continue doing the same until I leave the country.

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?

Depending on the day, we usually start sometime between 7:30 and 8:30 am (before that we have breakfast at 6:30 am with our host mom, the vice mayor's mother at the guesthouse we are staying in). On Mondays we have the flag raising ceremony, which the municipal staff attend (rural health unit staff, government officials, the mayor, etc) before we start the day. The daily schedule can vary drastically though. Sometimes in the morning we travel with the midwives to the barangays and help the staff that are deworming at the elementary schools. Sometimes there are vaccination clinics at the barangay health stations, sometimes we stay at the rural health unit and shadow the doctor in his consultations. The afternoons vary about as much as well. Tomorrow afternoon we are assisting in a family planning workshop and prenatal checkups. We also just got to a new municipality on Thursday. We were in Alcantara on Tablas Island for a bit over two weeks before we moved to Calatrava (same island) so our schedule might change a bit in the next few days. After we leave the clinic, I usually either play with the local elementary school kids, go for a swim in the ocean, work out (sometimes also with the local kids, I may have inadvertently become their workout instructor), write or draw for a while, or talk with our hosts. Around 6 pm we eat dinner, then after that is general housework/showering and then going to sleep. I haven't found it difficult to balance work and exploring, I often feel underworked and underutilized. I am an adventurous spirit at heart so whenever I have a free moment I try to figure out the space around me. Every weekend we've been traveling, too. The first weekend we were here we went to Tagatay, home of the Taal Volcano. The second weekend (our first weekend in Alcantara) we went to the Looc Fish Sanctuary and Aglicay Beach. Last weekend we spent an hour north in Odiogan, and this weekend we went to Romblon Island. I'm currently on the boat back to Tablas. Next weekend we are meeting up with the Municipal Health Officer of Alcantara (who quickly became our friend) and are headed to Boracay.

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'll describe the Alcantara living situation first. We were staying in a beautiful guesthouse right on the beach that belongs to the MHO's late aunt. There was a main house with one bedroom and a separate house with three bedrooms. It couldn't have been more ideal, in my opinion. The caretaker, Eding, was amazing and so welcoming. Plus we got to swim whenever we wanted. Our MHO did mention that he didn't think he'd put future interns up there, although I'm not sure why and I don't know if he truly intends to stick with that. In any case, I would suggest to future interns that they bring mosquito netting (my room didn't have screens) and water shoes are a must (lots of sea urchins waiting to stab you in the foot). Also, don't bring chocolate as a gift unless you are 100% certain it won't get wet or won't be eaten by mischievous children if you store it in the fridge.

In Calatrava, we are staying at a guesthouse owned by the vice mayor. His house is about 20 feet away from ours, and his mom lives about 10 feet away. She's our main host and has been cooking us delicious meals so far. Since we've only been there a few days I can't provide much more than that, but it's been great so far.

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?

Finances are going well. I haven't been spending a lot at all, especially since I don't get any of the meat options at lunch, so it's been fine. It's good because that way I can pour the majority of my money into traveling on the weekends. I've been spending about the amount I expected to. Per day I spend maybe around P100 (about \$2) for food and on the weekends that increases to around P300-500, if we travel and eat at nicer places.

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?

In Alcantara, our guesthouse was about a ten minute drive from the RHU, which meant that we were more or less confined to the house. Every morning a van (driven by Dr. Jobin's father, James) would pick us up and take us wherever it was we were going. Usually in the afternoon James would pick us up and take us home, or we would take trikes home. It would have been better if we hadn't been so dependent on him to get around. I wish we could have had a little more autonomy in getting around and exploring the town, which could have happened if our house was located closer to town. As for where to explore, Dr. Jobin was very helpful in taking us around exploring on the weekends. I think I could provide a more comprehensive list of good places within the next few weeks.

In Calatrava, we are located in the city proper, a five minute walk away from the RHU and from the market and the ocean. This gives us a lot more independence, which has been really nice so far, and we've mainly been walking to get around. We take boats to the remote barangays, and sometimes use the ambulance to get around on the better roads. We've also been using motorbikes every now and then which has worked well. Again, since we just got here I could probably provide a better response later on.

Question set 4:

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

My answer depends on which part of this internship you're concerned with. The wonderful thing (in my eyes, at least) about this program is that it is just as much public health/global health as it is clinical rotations (and small piece of advice when choosing future interns - someone just looking for clinical shadowing and mostly concerned with medicine will NOT get nearly as much out of the experience as someone interested in both), so coursework in both is helpful. The two global health classes I took were great prep for the PH aspect of this. I felt like I was applying that sometimes dull policy that I had learned about it and I have such an appreciation for it now. As for the clinical aspect, I think a few more human physiology courses would have been helpful but not necessary. I haven't felt behind or incompetent at any point, especially because the main purpose here is to learn. It might be helpful to come in with a blank slate here - no preconceived notions or attitudes towards what you're seeing and learning.

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

I don't know if I've learned about new possibilities as much as I've started considering new ones. This internship has confused me in the sense that I no longer know if I should go into medicine and become a doctor because there are so many different fields that I could have a greater impact and better use my strengths. Should I go into public policy or law instead? I don't know and I don't think I'll be coming back to the States with any answers.

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

I can't think of something off the top of my head that directly involved me, but there was an instance in our group where a student was inappropriately speaking about her romantic life in the US with our conservative Catholic friends. I think she completely misunderstood what would be acceptable to share in that context. In the US she is polyamorous (multiple romantic partners who are all aware of one another and have multiple partners themselves) and the openness with which she was speaking and sharing was completely culturally insensitive. To attempt to ease the situation, I talked privately to an individual who was rather perplexed by this to make sure it was known that it wasn't a situation that applied to everyone in the US, or to the rest of the students. I'm not sure what I could have done differently to prevent this situation from happening in the future...

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

One of the most frustrating aspect is the hospitality. Don't get me wrong though, it is so kind, accommodating, and selfless of everyone here to treat us with the warmth that they have. However, it sometimes creates a barrier between us and our hosts in a way that makes it very difficult to get to know them and become friends with them. The most rewarding aspect could also be the same though - it is so wonderful when the people you want to reach out to and get to know finally let you in and allow you to help wash dishes while also talking about their lives.

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

I think I've learned important aspects of my personality that aren't always apparent when I am overwhelmed and stressed out at school or when I'm in my home culture. Living on a tropical island has brought out some parts of myself that I didn't know were there. I've also had a new-ish learning experience being a part of a majority white group of students in an international space. Before all my international travel was with other people of color. I've learned a lot about how to handle (and when to handle) racism on a day to day basis here, which was strange and very difficult for me to handle/process/talk about for a long time.

Question set 5:

1) Identify 3-4 accomplishments in your internship of which you are most proud. Explain them briefly below.

A) Surviving (watching) childbirth: I have never seen a birth before (besides videotapes in middle school health classes) and here we have gotten to see two so far. It's really interesting how the births here are so different from the US (cultural expression of pain is so different). I didn't really do any work here (obviously) but I'm proud of the fact that I was able to watch the birth through a lens that wasn't just preoccupied with the actual baby coming out, but I also had cultural awareness and was observing the practices.

B) Cultural integration: I think I did as good of a job as I possibly could have integrating into our host towns. We made lots of friends (especially in Alcantara), went to mass even though I'm not religious, and coaxed life stories out of individuals that had been initially wary of me and got close with them. As important as the time spent in the clinics was to me, the people I met were just as significant.

C) Introspection: this is less concrete and more personal, but I'm happy with the way I processed and internalized this entire trip. It would have been easy to passively float through this internship without thinking critically about what you were seeing and being told.

2) 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.

Childbirth: we got to see a birth during the first day of our stay in Quezon (week 7 total). We had been dying to see a birth this entire trip, and when we heard there was a woman giving birth who had consented to us watching, we half ran to the RHU (there was one instance in Calatrava when we were told a woman was delivering at that moment, so we sprinted from the beach to the RHU in the dark but still missed it). The birth itself was equal parts horrifying and amazing - horrifying for obvious reasons and amazing because wow, that woman was so strong. She delivered on no pain meds, in a birthing home upwards of 90 degrees in temperature, and didn't even cry out in pain. The birth here was so peaceful - no hysteria and yelling and screaming like I imagine in the US. The midwives and nurses didn't even tell her when to push, only encouraged her as she naturally knew to push with her contractions. I did nothing but stand in the corner for this, so nothing was obviously challenging about that. What was hard to watch, though, was the pain radiating from the mother and knowing that there was nothing in my power to help her. While most of my peers were occupied with the baby, I felt a massive knot in my stomach from watching the mom. It was also difficult wrestling with the story that was formulating in my mind about her life - this was her third child, adding to a greater strain on her ability to provide for them. I guess I haven't quite overcome that pessimistic mindset quite yet. We will see what happens in the next two weeks.

Cultural integration: I can't give a specific context to this because it has been an ongoing process. In Alcantara and Calatrava this was an easier process because we were the first students the clinics had ever had. It has been more challenging here in Quezon, I think possibly because we are fighting preconceived notions of who we are and how we present ourselves, set by the groups before us. Fighting those stereotypes and expectations has been difficult for properly integrating, and it has been an ongoing battle to become individuals in some eyes. Thankfully we are here for as long as we are, because every day that goes by makes it easier.

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

The clinic staff are like a family, which is fantastic once they let you in but difficult to truly become a part of (of course you won't, you're only there for a few weeks). It is also an interesting juxtaposition between conservative faith and progressive medical interests. For example, the way that family planning is done and people are educated about contraceptives vastly differs from how it is done in my progressive state of Oregon. I think it is sometimes difficult to swallow and accept some of the ways that women are also treated in households and the responses of the clinic staff. The role of a female in society is one that certainly takes getting used to and processing.

4) What words of advice do you have for future interns?

- 1) As unappealing as it might sound, get a pair of Crocs to use as your water shoes and your clinic closed toed shoes. They're very comfortable and don't get ruined when it starts monsooning.
- 2) Don't have any expectations for the islands and what life will be like. It'll shape your outlook and perspective on what you see and how you process it.
- 3) Be helpful in whatever appropriate ways you can be, whether it be doing dishes, organizing medical records, writing up records, or whatever else is needed. At the same time, you are useless, you can make your presence not a waste of space.
- 4) If someone asks if you want to do something, just do it. Don't hesitate.

Question set #6

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

I wasn't really making expectations for Filipino culture when I was getting ready to depart, but I think that served me well because I was able to see the culture through a clearer lens. Filipinos are every bit as hospitable as you hear, they bend over backwards to make sure you feel comfortable and at home. It is easy to make friends here because of how nice everyone is, but it can be difficult to get close to some. Time helps with this, of course. Another thing I have learned is that this culture is full of contradictions between religion and practice. The Church has such a tight grip on many, preaching against abortion and hanging disturbing signs equating abortion with murder outside cathedrals. But 50 feet away there are women selling drugs guaranteed to cause a miscarriage. Things like this underline a lot of the healthcare policy, political elections and power, and people's sense of agency. It is an interesting dichotomy to wrestle with during the first week in Manila, but if you continue to make sense of it and trace back power and influence, a lot will become clear.

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

Personal: my biggest challenge as an introvert was constantly being with people. At clinic, at home with friends, at night with the other interns - I was always with people and it became very draining when combined with the constant waterfall of information, clinic chaos, and cultural adaptation. After my first week in Manila it became easier to manage because I could sneak time away by going swimming in the ocean alone or hanging out by the shore. But it was definitely challenging when it hit me how drained I was but have to continue interacting in the most outgoing manner possible. However, I think the greatest accomplishment was also the friends I made along the way because I channeled that energy into interactions. I was able to become close with the nurses, some of the neighbor kids, and others among the community. It definitely made it difficult to leave.

Professional: I have touched on this before a bit, but I think both the biggest challenge and reward has been that I haven't come out of this internship with any concrete answers about what I should do with myself. I feel like I'm being thrown back into school with no sense of whether I'm on the right track or not. Going back is going to be really difficult for me in that sense. It is good though because it is that many more paths I could take, so many more options for me to explore. That was a nice thing to discover.

Cross-cultural: in my interactions I didn't feel like I had a challenge with anything cross cultural, but I definitely had a bit of a problem with food. Since I am a vegetarian and the Philippines has a very meat heavy spread, it was sometimes difficult to people that I couldn't eat it. It felt really bad whenever we would go to barangays and the health workers there would offer me food, I felt so rude. It came to the point where I would have eaten whatever I

was given, but every time I ate dishes with fish or meat in it I would spend 2 days vomiting since my body isn't used to it at all. Biggest reward, though, was probably the sharing of culture I was able to do with the Filipinos. They were always very curious about my family's origin, so we were able to compare foods, traditions, festivals, etc in a way that made me feel we were mutually learning about each other and it wasn't just one sided.