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**Student Exchange Vietnam**  
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### **Final Report**

#### **What was your first day at the internship site like?**

On my first day of work, I met with my supervisor, who helped coordinate all of the volunteers at the hospital. The first thing I noticed was how crowded the hospital was, with patients, nurses, and volunteers. I also noticed that the building was older, but that renovations were being completed in the adjacent wing. For the first day, I simply spent time in the physical therapy rooms and was allowed to assist as an orderly for some patients. I was initially happy with my placement, but felt that I could be doing/learning a lot more and was very attentive to opportunities opening up. Opportunity came knocking in the form of a group of foreign doctors working with an organization called ReSurge International. They required all the translators they could get and I found my way into the operating room, where, in my opinion, the most exciting work in the hospital was being done.

#### **How would you assess the initial adequacy of your language ability, and how did it develop?**

I have passed fluency tests in Vietnamese before, and communicate with my family using Vietnamese, so I felt I had a fairly good grasp of the language before I came to Vietnam. However, working in the hospital helped me identify certain flaws in my proficiency. I learned that I mixed two dialects when I spoke, and I learned a host of go-to phrases. I also learned lots and lots of medical term. The process was gradual, but I also strengthened my native pronunciation quite easily. I was led to believe that accents don't go away, but my Americanized accent clearly decreased the longer I stayed in Vietnam. I was able to understand colleagues more clearly as the internship ended as well, but it required truly having to listen closely. I also learned to think in Vietnamese and not always translate from English, as this method takes longer and the grammar and phrases do not generally make sense when translated.

#### **What were the most important benefits of your internship - personally and professionally?**

I was able to make contact with a culture I've had marginal experience with my whole life. It is a great privilege to be a member of any culture, and to lose that connection is a great loss that many do not realize the magnitude of until it is gone. I was able to pick up right where I left off in my ability to integrate into Vietnamese society. In terms of personal goals, I was able to see the culture that my parents are from, and realize how normal my upbringing was and what traits I have that are bestowed from Vietnam's very old culture, traits that are not immediately apparent to an outsider. On the last leg of my travels, my great-uncle took me to see the graves of some of my ancestors out near the coast, going back five generations. We lit incense for them. I feel a greater connection to history, and see my place in a much bigger picture.

#### **What were the biggest challenges during your internship?**

The biggest challenges were being able to balance work and recreation. Towards the end of my internship, there were far too many people phoning me to meet up, and between them, my work

obligations, and working on applications, I didn't have the chance to say goodbye in person to everyone. I also faced the challenge of being more assertive in the Vietnamese language, a skill I was never taught in the household. Practicing how to speak professionally and convey ambition and other traits is difficult when you have only spoken with your parents and relatives your whole life. Enough of my personality came through however to help my friends and colleagues get to know me. I learned a lot from other visiting Vietnamese who had grown up in different countries. I was able to learn some effective Vietnamese communication skills from observing them and talking with them.

**What steps did you take to make sure that you became an asset to the organization?**

It is difficult as a premed student to do anything too valuable. However, I helped where I could, including helping move patients to the PACU, helping set up the operating room, helping to sterilize hospital equipment, and especially as a translator for the travelling physicians. My bilingual status was very well exploited by the organization I would say, and I was very happy to help out in this regard because it allowed me patient interaction and was rewarding work in its own way.

**What guidance and supervision by your mentor on site did you receive? What guidance did you have from your academic faculty at home?**

I had very little guidance and supervision from my supervisors, partially because I did not solicit it. Looking back, it would've been interesting to hear from them more. I was able to find guidance from the doctors of the orthopedic surgery department instead, and they helped me tremendously, loaning me books and highlighting interesting patient cases for me, as well as helping me get access to the operating room.

**How did your impression of the country you were in change during the course of your internship?**

My initial impression was that Vietnam was very similar to other places that I had been, with the exception of a myriad of motorbikes coursing through every road. The more I travelled however, the more I learned about the poverty that people still face, as well as the dangerous vestiges of war that remain (i.e. tons of unexploded ordinance). I also got to see what a developing country looks like from inside and from my own perspective, which almost completely negated the perspectives of others. It is wonderful to have lived in Vietnam and have my own opinions and experience of the country, instead of relying on the oftentimes strange observations of others. Our observations of foreign countries are so personal that they seem very unlikely to other people.

**What do you wish you had known before you arrived?**

My parents and relatives never taught me how to interact with those younger than me, since I am one of the youngest in my family, so I made a few mistakes when first coming to Vietnam. It is these language nuances that were never clearly spelled out for me. It is also important to know the prices for different food items and services, as they tend to be quite consistent but can be raised or lowered depending on your rapport with the seller. I would've liked a list of common prices for food items to decide where to eat.

**Give an overview of your daily routine.**

My daily routine has changed over the weeks, but at the end of the internship, I came to work at exactly 8 am every morning. Sometimes I would go earlier to follow a doctor on his rounds and attend the

doctors' daily meeting in the lecture hall. Afterward, I would see patients with the doctors and they would show me some x-rays of the different surgeries for the day. Then, we would head into the operating room for the rest of the day, ending anytime between 4 pm and 7 pm. I would have a lunch break at an inconsistent time each day. The time in the operating room would be spent scrubbing in on surgeries or just functioning as an orderly for some of the shorter surgeries.

**Please give tips for future interns who will be living in the same city/country (ie. transportation, money, entertainment, culture, housing arrangements).**

I would highly recommend Uber moto for getting around Saigon fast. It is unclear whether they will remain this cheap forever, but currently, it is the cheapest and fastest way to get around the city. In order to use this service however, it is necessary to buy a sim card in Vietnam, in which case, I recommend Viettel, the state-owned telecommunications company. There is a company called Nasco that locals use to send luggage, particularly helpful if you are flying into one city but returning home from another. Plane tickets through Jetstar or others are very cheap, often around 60 USD. If you want to explore nearby countries, just make sure to apply for a multiple-entry visa so that you can return to Vietnam without having to pay the visa stamping fee.