

**Whitney Shervey
Oregon State University
Fall 2015
Vanastree - India**

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 first two weeks living in the Western Ghats has been very rewarding. I feel very welcomed at my home and with all of the different people I have met along the way. The few people I have met who represent the organization have been kind and insightful. The organization does amazing work and their outreach is larger than I had presumed. The work I have started doing certainly matches my expectations and goals. The graciousness with getting acclimated to a new culture and time zone has made adjusting into a routine easy. After my first week, I had a meeting with my site supervisor to discuss my goals and work expectations. My goals have all been addressed and an outline for what is expected of me for the duration of my internship has been composed. The outline adheres to my goals and work expectations.

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

What stood out to me the most when I first arrived in India was how challenging it was going to be to communicate with others. Language differences, tone inflections and body language are key when trying to navigate new terrain and when these are all different at the same time it is important to remain calm and examine the big picture.

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

My greatest anxiety prior to departing was affectively navigating transportation to and from my homestay. This is definitely still my greatest anxiety for fear of catching a bus or train in the wrong direction. I am planning on this anxiety easing as I continue to travel out and about.

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 at work are going quite well. I feel I have a good idea of what is expected of me, and what I should be spending my time doing. Getting into a good flow of things can be a challenge though, especially because I am so used to using the Internet for the majority of my schoolwork. Not having regular Internet has been very challenging so far.

The professional goals I have set for myself have been addressed by my site supervisor but not by my professor back home. I am trusting that the guidance and insight I receive from my site supervisor will lead me to completing my professional goals.

For the next half of my internship, I would like to dive into the specifics of my term paper and have it completed by the deadline. This is not just a goal of mine, but is a requirement for the scholastic portion of this internship.

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 feel I am progressing at a good speed with my personal goals. My goal of mediating my high levels of stress has been intrinsic with my experience in India. I do need to make more of an effort to make this a more tangible practice that will translate well back into my life in the States.

As far as my goal of conquering my social anxiety, I still need to be making a stronger effort of starting conversations with new people.

Before I leave, I want to be sure to finish at least one of the books I have started.

3. How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

My cross-cultural goals are going okay. I have definitely been working on learning the language and feel I will certainly meet my goal of learning at least 10 words in Kannada before I leave.

My other goal of learning 10 new spices name is a bit more challenging. Most of the spices that I have encountered I already know fairly well. I have attempted to help out in the kitchen, but am often not given direction or told that no help is needed. I have expressed that I have a lot of cooking experience and that I want to learn, but I am still getting a lot of resistance in the kitchen. In order to overcome this, I am planning on being more forthright with my eagerness to learn the cuisine.

The experiences that have stood out to me the most, is using what little words in Kannada I know to try and navigate the local bus stand. Sounds like a simple task but each and every time I try and find my bus it is a huge challenge. Another experience that stands out is having an English/Kannada conversation with one of my home stay families during mealtime. They know more English than I do Kannada and it is fun to try and figure out what the other is saying.

Before I leave, I want to ensure that I experience a live classical Carnatic or Hindustani musical concert. My site supervisor has addressed this and I am hopeful it will occur.

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?

Life is finally slowing down with the first half of my internship like a roller coaster of new experiences. Over the last week I have really tried to implement the schedule that I created for myself. Two days a week I ride the bus into town to the office or the Internet cafe where I send emails. While in town I attempt to take care of any errands that may have accrued like going to the market or ATM. The other days of the week, I have been working on my term paper, taking care of the dog Chitty, keeping up with chores and working in the garden. One morning I was able to go on a short hike to a nearby temple and a few weeks ago after a week-long camp I assisted with; I stayed 3 nights at a hotel on the beach. I am trying to schedule more exploring opportunities into my week but as of now the temple hike and the beach vacation have been my only down time.

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.

The living situation is superb. I really don't think there are any other options for living situations in the area, but I haven't really browsed. The 2 home stays that I went on were also quite awesome. I basically live with my boss so work seems to be constant. The best way to mediate living with your boss is to go above and beyond making as detailed of a schedule as possible.

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?

I am on track for how much money I have budgeted for this experience. One thing that is bothersome is the way I am required to pay my rent. I have to withdraw the money in 10,000 INR increments (the maximum allowed in one transaction) until I have reached 90,000 INR. Each time I withdraw money the ATM charges me. I am a member of two excellent credit unions back in the States and have contacted them on the matter. They informed me of their low percentage that they charge per transaction but what is more costly is the irreversible ATM fee that is charged here in India. I would somehow try and avoid these ATM fees if I knew what I know now before I left for India.

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?

For the most part I take the bus to and from the closest town that is 30 minutes away. With walking time included, it is about an hour each way. I am somewhat satisfied with this choice and know if I want to spend more money, I can hire a driver to pick me up and take me to town. The bus ride into town is peaceful and enjoyable. The bus ride home can be quite nerve-racking. All of the buses have their destinations written on them in Kannada and although I have my destination written down it is near impossible to locate my bus. I have to ask several people to figure out which bus to board and almost miss it every time.

I don't really have much time off and have not explored the surrounding area very much. The bus situation can be kind of a gamble so it has discouraged me from venturing out. I would like to go on hikes and explore but am not sure of what is around me. I am planning on a hike to a bird sanctuary that I found online tomorrow.

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 decided last year that any opportunity I had to tie learning about India into my coursework I would. This gave me a great foundation to begin my internship. The year of plant identification I took really helped me to notice various aspects of plants and how to identify them. All of my science and natural resources classes have helped me have a better understanding of this ecoregion and its natural systems. My past experiences working in numerous kitchens has given me a lot of flexibility when it comes to meeting new people and working in new situations.

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 have recently found out about an undergrad certificate in Food in Culture and Social Justice. I am excited for the new courses that I will be taking winter term and am happy that the certificate fits into my Natural Resources Major. I am hoping that this slight shift in my coursework will lead to more international opportunities.

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

When I arrived at the train station in Mysore it was pretty late so I decided it would be best to get dinner at the station. I found the canteen and proceeded to place my order. I paid for the meal with a larger bill than what was needed because it was all I had and waited for my change. I was told repeatedly to sit down and I began to become confused. I sat down and examined my receipt and noticed that it said I had given the exact amount. I began to wonder if I was getting scammed or something and went back to the cashier and asked for my change again. He demanded I sit down so I did. My food came and I really began to worry. I went up and asked for my change a third time and the same thing happened. I finished my meal and packed up my things and asked the cashier a fourth time as I was exiting and he proceeded to get my change. I have eaten out quite a few times while in India and this was the first experience like this. I am still unsure of what was the reason behind waiting until I was finished with my meal to give me my change but it was surly frustrating and nerve

wracking in the meantime. If this situation occurs again I will probably do the same thing but I probably won't worry as much during the process.

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

The most frustrating aspect of my host culture is not being understood. When the people who I am attempting to converse with don't speak English I assume that there is going to be a lot of miscommunication, but when I speak the same language and am misunderstood it can become really frustrating. Along the same lines, it is frustrating to not have any trust with my skill set. Things that I am proficient in say cooking is not translated here. This experience alone of letting go of what has identified me has been incredibly rewarding.

The most rewarding thing about this culture is the low tempered go with the flow attitude almost all people embody. I am hoping more and more will rub off on me.

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

I have learned that I am more flexible than I ever thought I was. I have learned that if I want to do something, and that if something is important to me that I need to speak up and say something. This being my first time away from Portland for more than a week, I have learned that I am more adaptable than I could have ever imagined. I am excited to have learned this because I am very interested in traveling more and learning about different cultures.

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.

- 1) The completion of my term paper was by far my biggest accomplishment while on this internship.
- 2) Creating various lesson plans that I implemented at the organization's outreach site.
- 3) Navigating public transit.
- 4) Worked through a lot of my social anxiety issues and learned how to relax.

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**

1) This was the first time I have ever written a report of this length and difficulty and was nervous at times that it wouldn't get completed. Before I left for my internship I met with the professor who would be working with me on my term paper and he gave me very little advice and direction on how to begin. This was totally new to me as I am used to working within a structured environment. It was hard to get a good start on my report but after help and guidance from my fellow intern and site supervisor I came up with a first draft. I submitted my first draft to my professor and waited for a reply. I didn't hear anything from him for nearly 4 weeks and was worried what he might say. I continued to work on the second draft and never received feedback on the first. The same happened with the second draft and I was increasingly worried that my draft was not up to par. When I submitted my final draft I had released any anxieties I had and decided whatever happened, happened. My professor finally responded to me well after the term was over informing me that my paper was excellent.

Writing this paper was a challenge especially not knowing how I measured up for the duration of the term. When I decided that I had put in good effort and tried my best my worry subsided. This helped

me realize that placing unnecessary anxiety on situations that are out of my control is detrimental to my overall well-being. I think I will be less worried about the unknown from now on especially when it comes to school.

2) Halfway through my internship I was given the opportunity to create two different lessons for post high school aged students at Vanastree's outreach site called Punarchith. I have done some teaching to younger students about cooking and gardening, but never to students of this age. I was excited and nervous at the same time. The first lesson I was to create was about seeds. I am passionate about seeds and was hoping I could express this passion in a way that the students would understand. My fellow intern and I created an interactive lesson that was enjoyed not only by the students but by Vanastree members as well. The second lesson that we created was on food justice. This subject is one I am even more passionate about. This was a bigger challenge for me. Food justice is a tough enough topic to teach in English so I was worried how I would get the points across to students who spoke another language. We created a lesson that was visual and hands on and to my surprise when the students gave their own definitions of what food justice meant to them, they certainly understood the topic.

I was very nervous about teaching to older students and found that teaching a subject that I am very passionate about is enjoyable. I spent a lot of time into the preparation and planning of the lesson that a lot of my worry was eased. The first lesson went so well that I looked forward to going back and teaching the second one.

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 culture here is much more relaxed and unstructured than I have ever been exposed to. My personal cultural lens has struggled with this. I am very used to be given specific tasks at work and that is what I do. Having a lot of freedom with when and where I complete my work has

been a challenge and I have learned a lot during the process. It has given me better organizational skills and allow me to approach new tasks through a different eye.

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

- Be as flexible as you can be. Everything can change at the last minute and it is not a big deal. This is something that took me a while to get used to and at first bothered me. I learned that if I was to make a big deal of it I was creating a problem that was unnecessary.
- Make a good schedule for yourself and follow it. Time flies and it is good to accomplish the things that you need and want to do. This is especially true for day trips and long weekends. Make sure you plan a few outings in advance, it is well worth it.
- Try as much food as possible.
- Celebrate a festival with a local family.
- Learn a little of the language, Kannada, before you arrive.