

From: [WPM Forms](#)
To: [Cheryl Gunther](#)
Subject: New Submission: Cultural Immersion Product
Date: Monday, October 15, 2018 1:36:35 PM

Question

Answer

IP

64.57.190.10

Date Time

2018-10-15 13:36:21

Last Name

First Name

Major

Environmental Studies

Graduation Year

2019

IC email address

Student ID

Advisor

The semester before I left for Iceland, I typed out the first research paper I was passionate about and proud of. It was called Traditional Agriculture: The Modern Food Production Solution. The paper was 32 pages long, and dissected the problems with the current Iceland agriculture system and incorporated solutions derived from traditional agriculture practices from other volcanic-soil islands like Java. When embarking on this paper, I had never visited Iceland, and knew very little about it, but knew that in five short months, I would be taking a plane there to understand it for myself. When I wrote the paper, I did heavy research. I studied deep and hard. I thought I had come to solid, sophisticated solutions to many of the erosion, temperature, low productivity and low diversity that Iceland faced in their agriculture system. But when the plane landed in February, I found myself in an ice-cold van, shooting down the only main road on the west shore, towards nuances and discoveries I never imagined would overturn the paper I spent months on.

I took part in the Center for Ecological Living and Learning (CELL) Iceland Spring 2018 abroad program. This meant that I shared a house with my other eight classmates and my one primary professor, Hank. We lived in a tiny ecovillage in South Iceland, called Solheimar, which means 'land of sun'. Ironic, since my first few weeks there were spent in nearly total darkness. We fell into a strict routine. Morning meeting,

with the villagers. Morning workshops in either the greenhouse (Sunna), the weavery, or the ceramics studio. Then, afternoon lunch with the villagers and workers. Classes. Done by 4pm. Every night, two of us would prepare a communal home dinner where we took turns making a sustainable, vegetarian (and often vegan) meal for the house, to be served by 6pm. Homework, games, or a movie, and then to bed. One day a week we often got a trip to Reykjavík, and on the weekends we got longer trips or hikes. We became a family, and sustainability was always on our minds. Every meal, every hike, every trip, every class lesson was framed in the lens of sustainability. Carbon footprint, food miles, the costs of renewable energy. We were open, communicative, and always challenging each other. We arrived, thrilled to be in one of the 'most sustainable countries in the world'. Soon, we began to understand the complexities and paradoxes of that label.

Iceland is the land of renewable energy. Before my trip, I would have said that we should follow in Iceland's footsteps, and become 'just as sustainable'. But my definition and understanding of sustainability has shifted since my abroad experience and I'm far more skeptical of 'sustainability fixes'. For example, Iceland may be full of renewable energy, but all that energy still has a footprint. Their geothermal wells eventually dry up, the hydroelectric dams affect the ecosystems of streams, and the wind turbines need land, resources, and money to build and repair. It's the same with solar panels. Iceland keeps investing in the infrastructure, but the meager 330,000 residents of the country hardly tap into the supply. Most of the energy is produced for industry; the natural landscapes of Iceland are exploited to build 'renewable' energy so large corporations like aluminum and bitcoin can come in, use the energy at incredibly low costs, and pollute the land. The debate against fossil fuels argues that industry cannot grow exponentially because we do not have the resources to allow it. It seems that switching to hydropower or geothermal is the solution, but all this would do is extend the deadline of inevitable pollution and CO₂e release. In the end, companies using renewable resources will pollute and destroy the ecosystem of a place just as an industry using fossil fuels would, just at a slower (and cheaper) rate. As a scientist and an environmental activist, this understanding has made me rethink what we're advocating for in the quest for sustainability; is it really a transition to renewable energy and sustainable business, or a shift in consumer living, personal ethics and materialism?

This is where the culture of Iceland shocked me again. I laugh when people say "you're so lucky you got to live in such a

Essay of 1000-2000
words

sustainable place!” because the way Icelandic people regulate the temperature in their homes would appall even the least environmentally conscious American. Thermostat cranked to the max, and all the windows open. In the middle of an ice-cold winter- talk about wasting energy. But Icelanders use carelessly what is in abundance (hot water, energy) and are conservative with what is expensive or material. Not many folks have cars (because gas prices are so high), and hitchhiking is incredibly safe and common. I’ve learned that a culture and their sustainability habits are dictated largely by cost, availability, and very seldom by actual concern for the environment. Icelanders love their nature, very passionately, but the disconnect between their lamb and horse consumption and the greenhouse gasses affecting their seasons is very clear. Iceland is also in extreme isolation from the rest of the world, despite their heavily European lifestyle. A man at Þingvellir told me, “if all shipments coming into the country stopped, even just for 3 days, people would start dying. There’s no way the country could exist outside of the global economy.” This struck me as important, because in my studies I always considered a decoupling of the global economy and global dependencies to be a good thing, but people in Iceland do not think so. They say they would hate to go back to their ‘old ways’. “I wouldn’t want to live underground again” one Icelandic said, referring to the turf houses that were only recently abandoned, despite their incredibly weatherproof and sustainable function. To many Icelanders, a higher standard of living is preferred over the old ways of living, which I had romanticized as a sustainable ‘simple living’. Without interacting with a culture, my understanding of what appropriate sustainability is for any group of people will be inherently wrong.

While I was in Iceland, I was not an environmental refugee, nor was I in a place where I could experience true solastalgia, but I gained empathy for people who are in both of those situations. I had never left the country, and had never spent more than a week in an environment that wasn’t northeastern United States forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife. I know so many New York trees and plants by name, but I did not understand the intimate connection I had with my hometown landscapes until I arrived in Iceland. Icelandic landscapes are beautiful and deep and grand, but they are not what I am familiar with, and my heart ached for three months to see trees pass the window when we drove down the road. There were open fields, empty for miles until the fog blurred the horizon, and the mountains gave breathtaking views, but I knew none of the mosses and the only wildlife I saw were a mink and a few seals. Stone, water, unfamiliar. I understood what it was like to be in some of the most beautiful landscapes in the

world and still feel displaced. I began to understand just the smallest hint of the environmental traumas of Native Americans, climate change refugees, people who lost their land to industry, to hydropower dams. I cannot say I fully understand, but my empathy runs much deeper after that experience.

While the Icelandic landscape did not feel like home to me, I did learn an immense amount from it. It gave me gratitude for the incredibly resilient landscape I come from, which can withstand trampling, digging, fires, and pollution, and regrow in a season with incredible diversity. Iceland was different. So far north, its species' diversity is low, which made it far more susceptible to disease, invasives, and increased extinctions. Walking on the moss too many times will totally kill it, and it may take decades to regrow to its full vigor, allowing soil erosion to take over. It was important for me to see that firsthand, and to understand that not all land is as forgiving as the land I come from. Some places need gentle care, gentle attention. It fostered compassion in me for that landscape. It taught me to be more cautious and grateful.

With the new understandings of Iceland's environmental and economic instability and fragility, I felt incredibly guilty for coming to the country at all- as not much more than a tourist. We were there as scholars, but I could hardly say takk fyrir without getting eye rolls from locals- despite being blue eyed and blonde, just like them. But the 'tourist guilt' ran deeper than a butchering of their language. Iceland derives most of its economic stability from the blooming tourist industry- an industry that takes almost immediate advantage of the beautiful landscapes- which have total instability. Simply walking through a landscape higher than 63°N is an uneasy ecological decision. But when you send hundreds of people a day on a trail, with little funding to create proper infrastructure, that environment is going to be drastically altered. The dilemma rolls in; what is the role of a proper environmental steward? Conservation, land reclamation, politics, and economics were completely woven into this issue, and I learned that there is not one environmental solution to any problem. The answer also needs to be culturally appropriate and sensitive to a wide range of perspectives.

That research paper I wrote back in the fall of 2017 seems totally invalid after deeply experiencing the place where I had prior only done online research. When it comes to environmental solutions, I've learned what works and is an appropriate solution for the United States is not the same across different cultures, landscapes, and governments.

Environmental understanding cannot come from PDFs downloaded from ScienceDirect, but from a direct conversation with a greenhouse farmer. The textbook is easy to read, but the farmer is more rewarding; after gaining your trust, he will tell you that he had to negotiate with the electric company to run his indoor lights in winter during daytime hours, to please the elves. The role of an environmental scholar and practitioner takes many forms: pretending to be a park ranger and asking people to stay on the trails when you're out on a hike; asking a pointed question you already know the answer to during a tour of a geothermal power plant to raise the attention of the other people in the tour group; baking sourdough from scratch every week; learning to use hand-tools to build; eating crowberries on the mountainside as an ode to thrivability and resilience. Iceland showed a great lesson on simplicity and complexity in their people, their history, and their ecosystem.

Cultural Immersion
Spring 2017

Cultural Immersion: Chesapeake Bay Oystermen

For my cultural immersion, I joined a fishing community-based in the Chesapeake Bay helping with the collecting, cleaning, and packing pieces of the job. My first day was December 22nd and I continued intermittently until mid-January. By the end of the first day alone, I had already gained a new sense of understanding for those who rely on the Bay, or any piece of the ecosystem, for a living and how it dictates their life. I have grown up in Maryland and hold the Chesapeake Bay close to my heart taking action through restoration and volunteer groups in the past. The fishing industry is a critical part of the Bay's culture and history with 1524 being the earliest recorded contact. I had never spent significant time around a fishermen/baymen before my immersion project. A career goal of mine is to see the Bay at a healthier state than when I first saw it twenty years ago. At the time I did not realize it, but the Chesapeake Bay was changing, in 2000 the lowest blue crab harvest of 20 million lbs. was recorded which inspired environmental efforts across the board. To heal the Bay I first have to understand everything that influences the Bay, environmentally and anthropologically. I decided to take this on as my cultural immersion knowing it would be 6am-3pm work days, where the top of the water is covered in ice, and I would end the day covered in the not so fine things the ocean has to offer because I want to restore and protect the Bay for generations to come.

One of the biggest components of belonging to a culture is looking the part. The same equipment you would see on Deadliest Catch was not far away from the same equipment as those in the Bay. Oilskins, thick rubber gloves, rubber boot, and plenty of waterproof layers prepared for the open water. Just like agricultural and hunting, there are specific seasons reserved or best for certain wildlife. In the winter the only thing there is to harvest from the Bay are the mollusks that lay at the bottom of the Bay. Further out red snapper and more commercial fish were being caught. During my immersion, I worked solely with oysters, which are available to collect year round unlike crabs and most fishes. Due to the demand of oysters in recent years farms have begun raising oysters to relieve strain on wild oysters. Both private and public organizations have contributed to the replenishing of the mollusks and bivalves.

The oystermen used two different kinds of techniques to bring the oysters from the bottom of the Bay to the table on the boat. The main technique used was small scale dredging that used what looked like the scoop part of an excavator to drag along the bottom of the Bay. This method caught more rocks than oysters. It was not a reliable method for collecting oysters but is the only option available if they want to harvest these shelled boogers. This method reminded me of a combination of mining and an arcade claw machine. There was no guarantee what was going to be pulled up by the claw, and no matter what came aboard we would have to separate the oysters over four inches long from rocks and mussels before adding it to the bushel stack. I would go into a mindless

Cultural Immersion
Spring 2017

Cultural Immersion: Chesapeake Bay Oystermen

state scanning for potential oysters while clearing the table for the next load. The other method used long tongs that were able to shift mud and smaller oysters out before pulling up to organize into one of the eighteen bushels allotted per day. This method dates back to the 1680's as one of the first regulations to minimize wasteful practices. Through either technique it was apparent that the bottom of the Bay was being rearranged on a daily basis between the tides, scraping the floor, and dumping anything that is not an oyster overboard.

Fishing, especially oystering, is a job that you get whatever you put into it. It is also one that constantly changes. There are many variables that have to be accounted for before setting out. First, access to an industrial boat that seems to stay just above the water level, makeshift plywood tables to sort on, and plenty of storage space for the eighteen bushels that will be filled up over the day. Other factors that were out of our control were the tides, weather from the previous day and for the upcoming day, and a vague idea where beds prime for picking are in the at in the open Bay.

On my first week, a new bed was opened in the Potomac River by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for the first time in four years after planting 10,000 oysters. The bed was opened for three weeks and the oystermen stayed for two weeks until all the marketable oysters had been collected from the bed. Fishermen lead an interesting occupation as they are only able to work when the Bay is healthy enough and have excess pieces. Their job is to exploit the very source they depend on with no way of knowing if they are stripping the Bay or how the Bay will be in a year's time. Unlike farming where the farmer has a general idea of what to expect, to prepare the field, and a way to protect their crops the fishermen are at the mercy of nature. Disease, poor reproduction, competition from the other organisms in the bay or even a heavy storm could decimate stock. There is little consistency in the fishing industry I found. I would have to call my fisherman contact, Lance, every two or three days to find out when or where we would be going out again or if the conditions for going out was favorable. A lot of the time, judging from the other fishing boats, the decision to go out on the water was made within the last twenty-four hours. I would overhear talk about the lack of sleep or when they had to be back on shore to make it to another job.

To my surprise, the fishing community did not seem all too concerned with the environmental health of the Bay. At the same time, I can say I am not too surprised, though. Not many people dream of being fishermen for their life profession. It is a labor driven, irregular paying, and unreliable job that is difficult to make a living off of alone. From my observations, the fishermen who would go collect harvest the oysters were all white and the ones back at the packing dock were of Hispanic origin. Back on shore, I was asked if I

Cultural Immersion
Spring 2017

Cultural Immersion: Chesapeake Bay Oystermen

ever had oysters before and many other questions, I asked them how often they have an oyster for themselves. They laughed saying they cannot afford to eat their own product going on about how it would cut into their profit. If it were for purely subsistence I would expect a greater conservation effort and concern for the Bay from those utilizing its resources. The fishermen are in a difficult position to be in since they make a living off exploiting the very thing they depend on. Referring back to the 10,000 oyster bed, after being closed for four years, in less than three weeks the bed was considered not worth the time to go anymore. The most amount of boats I saw in a single day was eighteen, ironically at the Potomac riverbed with boats drifting a couple meters apart. When I would lend a hand in the packing process, I learned it was similar to industrial agriculture in the sense that only oysters that looked like oysters (long and skinny) were to be shipped off to restaurants, while larger not as easily workable oysters were taken in the back freezer.

This experience has changed the way I look at any grocery store or over a large body of water even thinking that out there on the Bay there are dozens of boats dragging their claws and cages through the water to provide us food. I was never able to find out how the price changed as the oysters were passed from boat, to packing, and to a restaurant but I do know from going to oyster houses and now seeing how it gets to your plate there is a drastic markup on the restaurant's behalf. If eating a crab or any shellfish seemed like an event by itself, the labor that went into getting in on your plate is a much longer story than you would expect. From classes, we have discussed the pressures the seafood industry deals with, but if people were forced to work for their seafood like Bay oystermen do I am positive the ocean's systems would be able to recover to stable amounts from a halt in extraction.

Now that I have this small bit of exposure to oystermen I will hopefully be able to build off this knowledge and apply it in some way to the Bay. Ideally, it would be for the collective benefit of the fishermen and the Bay whether it is trading regulations, changes in policy towards more farming or a rotation of location rather than open season year round, or some compromise that favors both sides. I will most likely need more immersion to get a true understanding of what action could be done that has not already been enacted if I want to make a long lasting positive impact on the region.

From: [WPM Forms](#)
To: [Cheryl Gunther](#)
Subject: New Submission: Cultural Immersion Product
Date: Tuesday, October 16, 2018 9:56:19 PM

<u>Question</u>	<u>Answer</u>
IP	76.78.76.223
Date Time	2018-10-16 21:56:05
Last Name	
First Name	
Major	Environmental Studies
Graduation Year	2018 (December)
IC email address	
Student ID	
Advisor	J

Wonewoc Cultural Immersion Reflection
Oscar Mayer
October 16th, 2018

My Cultural Immersion took place in Wonewoc, Wisconsin at the Wonewoc Spiritualist Camp. I stayed at the camp overnight for a week in a small cabin on site. During my stay, I volunteered to paint cabins in need of repair in exchange for free meals with the mediums and groundskeepers. In addition, I received a 50% reduction to the price of my readings and sleeping quarters. Every day I had at least one spiritual reading with a different medium. Many days also had additional opportunities including a day-long Reiki Healing certification class and a group "Spirit Circle" (loosely based on a séance). As an intuitively skeptical person and a firm believer in scientific thinking, these classes and readings challenged me to think beyond my personal worldview. Each psychic reading session operated in a somewhat similar way to a therapy session. Each medium would usually ask about personal issues in my life and family. Through tarot cards, psychic charcoal artwork, and everything in between, the mediums would provide spiritual advice and warnings about my future. It was an honestly relaxing experience and each medium welcomed skepticism and open discussion. I was surprised to find that some readings were fairly accurate while

Essay of 1000-2000
words

others remained somewhat vague. Regardless, each session allowed me to connect with a new individual and learn new perspectives on understanding life.

While I learned a lot from these sessions, I learned most from interacting with everyone during lunches and dinners. While these meals were only given to employed mediums and groundskeepers, my volunteer work had awarded me the status of an 'honorary employee'! The first dinner I attended completely broke the ice between me and the group. Seeing each of the mediums engage with each other and me gave me a new context for each person there. I talked to them about why each of them became mediums and what drew them to the Wonewoc Spiritualist Camp. Many of the mediums became involved in spiritualism following their retirement. Another common theme among each medium was a connection to themselves and an understanding of who they are. This translated to a desire to assist other people to open up and discover more about themselves too, the same way the mediums had. I came to understand that what motivated each medium was the concept of connecting other people to their inner self and help them become happy and successful in individual ways. Within a day of being at the camp, I was able to shed my strictly evidence-based thought process and become entirely willing to listen and learn from the mediums and the camp itself

Something equally telling about all those who worked at the Wonewoc Spiritualist Camp was their reason for joining this specific community at this specific location. So much of what makes the Wonewoc Spiritualist Camp so inviting and spectacular is its natural setting. The camp itself is set in a somewhat circular way with all the cabins facing inward into the forested area in the center. This camp was initially built in the late 1800s by a large group of spiritualists. Each spiritualist built their own cabin with whatever economic means they had. Due to this, each cabin has distinct and unique characteristics. Despite this, the entire camp remains unified by the way in which it interacts with its natural surroundings. These cabins were built in a way that respected the surrounding environment. Each cabin was very small, minimal, and allotted as much physical space for the forest as possible. Despite over 30 cabins existing in a relatively small area of land, the forest remained the most prominent feature. As someone interested in pursuing a career in Sustainable Architecture, this respectful approach to natural development really excited me.

A driving influence in this respectful approach originated from the ideologies of spiritualism. From what I came to understand from my experience, spiritualists deeply value and appreciate the life energy that exists in all living organisms. Because of this, trees, brush, and wild animals all deserve as

much respect as human beings. I have always held a deep respect for the natural world and it was incredible to meet people who also shared this belief despite practicing a different spiritual ideology. Rebecca, the first medium I met at the camp, and I had a wonderful conversation about the trees and plants on the camp. While I told her about the names of each tree and some scientific facts about them, she told me about how she communicated with the trees. Each tree told her different stories about the people and animals they had seen throughout their long lives and she even said some trees communicated directly with those who had passed. She even attempted to help me establish a psychic connection to a tree. While I couldn't hear the voice of the tree, I do believe I felt some sort of connection to the tree. It was an eastern white pine, which had already been one of my favorite trees, and by attempting to communicate with it, my appreciation for the many aspects of the deepened greatly. Through this, I felt something. It was a magical experience and one that I cannot fully explain.

Through my entire experience, I learned how valuable it is to learn and understand the viewpoints of other people. I'll admit that I initially believed mediums and psychics to be, at best, misguided, and, at worst, con-artists and scammers. However, everyone I met was hardworking, kindhearted, and very respectable. Mediums like Rebecca were upholding a spiritual tradition and maintaining a historical sight. Spiritualism has a great respect and appreciation for the natural environment and I consider myself lucky to have witnessed that connection. I understand now that spiritualism and science can cohabitate the same setting and that dialogue between the two can lead to personal growth. I truly grew from this experience and I plan to return to Wonewoc next summer. I plan to keep in contact with the mediums I shared spiritual sessions with and I look forward to continuing conversations with them. I am incredibly grateful for this experience as I do believe I have become a more well-rounded person after visiting the Wonewoc Spiritualist Camp.

From: [WPM Forms](#)
To: [Cheryl Gunther](#)
Subject: New Submission: Cultural Immersion Product
Date: Thursday, September 06, 2018 8:58:24 PM

Question

Answer

IP

69.80.162.249

Date Time

2018-09-06 20:58:19

Last Name

First Name

Major

Environmental Studies

Graduation Year

2019

IC email address

Student ID

Advisor

J

This past summer, I had the opportunity to live and work in Dublin, Ireland for two months as part of an internship with Sustainable Nation Ireland. At first, I was a little wary—not because of the place or living abroad or being away from my family and friends, but because of the focus of the company. When I first heard about Sustainable Nation, it was pitched as a non-profit that promoted Ireland as a hub for sustainable finance and business within Europe. Their website looked boring, the news stories full of jargon that I didn't understand and didn't really care to understand, but they were eager to have me and I decided to give it a shot and hope I would see their work in a better light by the end, and it was probably the most rewarding learning curve I've ever embarked on. I learned, first and foremost, that stakeholders in the big business and finance sector could not be ignored, as much as I loved to pretend they could. That even through their "perceived evil" there are corporates who want to see a different world, but not because of the reason I'd always thought. I also had the opportunity to engage with the average workforce in Ireland and hear how different cultures demand environmental solutions from their government. One of the first things my coworker Laura told me was that "nothing will change in this world unless someone is incentivized to do so—and we need all the corporates involved who are incentivized by profits." And it took me a while to figure out exactly what she meant. Through

conferences, factsheet creation, and blogpost writeups, I started to learn about Environmental, Social, and Governance factors (ESG), and the role they play in responsible investment. I had never heard the term responsible investment before, and at first thought it was financial investment because of a moral or ethical consideration, much like how B-corps function in the United States, but that isn't the whole picture. Irish corporates that I studied, like Kingspan and Smurfit-Kappa, choose to incorporate ESG factors into their company and investment decisions because it's beneficial to them in the long term.

Climate change advocates like myself have forced ourselves into that type of long-term thinking, as depressing as it might be, but to see corporates considering what type of impacts climate change might have on their returns was astounding to me. Corporations in Ireland started the transition from short-term, profit driven thinking into longer-term, also profit driven thinking, because they're listening to what experts are saying about how climate change is going to affect their profits. They're trying to find more sustainable methods of manufacturing and operating because their survival in the market may start to depend on it, not just because of climate change, but because of shifting consumer attitudes. The realization that consumers can have such a profound effect on the decisions of corporations is especially useful when considering the United States, because the corporate culture is much different than it is in Ireland. I think they have the ability to see the long-term risks associated with climate change and how that can affect the business they do, but not without pressure from both their stakeholders, who in Ireland are demanding climate mitigation strategies, but from consumers.

In Ireland, they view sustainability differently than in the United States, and part of this stems from the collective vs individualistic culture. The United States has always been individualistic, while in Ireland (it helps to have a smaller population) there is more of a sense of looking out for the common good and making sure that everyone is getting what they need, and this includes sustainability. My bosses were shocked when I expressed how good the public transportation was in Dublin. While I was able to walk to work, I took the commuter train, the Irish Rail, and the LUAS light rail many times throughout my stay, all by using the same card to scan on and off—and the trains were always on time. While Dublin's public transportation is not as fancy or innovative as other cities in Europe, it is economical and leagues above what I have experienced in the United States. Unless you live in New York City, Washington DC, or cities on the west coast, it is almost impossible to get anywhere without a car or without flying, especially in the Midwest. But I realized that it

didn't matter what I thought of their public transportation system, it mattered what they thought, and the kind of pressure people were putting on the city to change things. Just in the past few years, cars have been banned from many parts of the city, the Port Tunnel now has astronomical fees to drive into the city during peak times, and the light rail has been expanded to reach further east and west. Young people in Dublin are starting to be raised to expect sustainability and efficiency in their public transportation options, and that is the big difference between the United States and Ireland.

However, as much as I came to appreciate some of the things corporations are doing to further their sustainability, I was still annoyed with the bureaucratic process. During one of my final weeks, I attended a green finance meeting with top sustainability and green finance leaders in Dublin. The focus of the meeting was what steps Ireland can take to attract more green bonds and investment from across Europe, with their main competition being Luxemburg. I felt like the whole meeting went around in circles with no one saying anything productive and nothing concrete coming out at the end. I realize that it's important to have those conversations, but I got the feeling those conversations had been going on for a long time and still nothing had happened. Afterward, one of my bosses echoed what I had been thinking about nothing productive coming out of the meeting, and I was left wrestling with the question about what worth those types of meetings have for advancing environmental protections and actions, because there will come a time when people can't just keep talking and they need to take action, but for now, I'd rather them have a conversation about it than ignore it, like what is happening in the United States. It was strange to attend conference and meetings in Ireland and have everyone in the room talk about climate change like it was gravity or just something they assumed everyone around them also acknowledged. I've had those bubbles at school, home, and with friends, but never on such a large scale and never with so many influential people together.

Whenever I attended conferences or events, one of the most consistent questions people asked me once they found out I was from the United States was about Trump, and specifically the environment, since that was the main focus of the events. As much as I have clear-cut views on Trump, I found it difficult to articulate an answer that addressed the root of their question, since I obviously disagreed with every point of his environmental policy. I felt there was nothing I could say that would appease their questions, because really, there was nothing I could do about him until the next election and I didn't want to feel their "pity" for having him as a president. I realized how lucky the people I spoke to felt about living in Ireland rather than the US. Since I'd been to Europe twice

before, I was used to that reaction, but that was always as a tourist and now as someone living and working for an extended period of time. I realized that even if I move to Europe someday, people will always ask me questions about the US, especially in the environmental field, and I just have to get used to answering them in a way that makes them feel like they've gotten in answer and in a way that makes sense for me.

Overall, my experience in Ireland changed me more than I would have thought as an environmental scholar. I have a more well-rounded understanding of the roles business and finance place in climate change mitigation and how I can hope to integrate varying viewpoints, even if they all concern the environment. I also have a better understanding of the role the United States places on an international stage, and that in the future, as Europe continues to become more progressive with their environmental stance and the United States pulls back, it will become imperative to find a way to work together, and the only way to do that is by having clear and frequent dialogue.

Cultural Immersion Product

4/2/17

Over the course of the semester I have spent time with the people of Loaves and Fishes, a local organization that offers free meals to those who attend their hours during weekdays. The operation itself is housed inside of a kitchen and dining area in St. John's Episcopal Church. I remember entering the space on one of my first days and feeling overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle, but, at the same time, the organization and flow was apparent. Throughout my time at Loaves and Fishes I was able to sit down with multiple participants to chat during their meals and also talk with the volunteer staff.

Many environmental initiatives to reduce consumption of energy or resources face the obstacle of perceived feasibility and convenience. My discussions with participants and volunteer staff revealed that the Loaves and Fishes culture takes environmental responsibility seriously when planning operations. The main method of support for environmental responsibility that I found was the commitment to waste reduction. Participants loved the fact that meals are served on reusable dishware instead of disposable items. Often times, events such as family parties, picnics, and other meals often make use of disposable ware perhaps due to location, but also due to convenience. However, the Loaves and Fishes crew had dedicated volunteers who happily washed the reusable dishware items. In addition, all the food scraps produced during meals are composted. Hank, a known-face by the volunteer staff and a conversation partner, informed me as we walked up to the kitchen window about the process of how he scraps his plate with a spatula into a hole in the stainless steel counter while smiling and thanking the staff. Taking a trip into the kitchen at the end of meals revealed that the compost bins were not only highly appreciated, but highly utilized.

The reusable dishware and composting successes at Loaves and Fishes made me rethink the way I view environmental studies and sciences in terms of sustainable initiatives. Brainstorming solutions to address large-scale environmental problems, climate change for example, seems like a daunting task that requires equally large-scale solutions. What are the answers for changing the everyday habits of millions of people who live unsustainable ways? Widespread policies that require cuts in emissions or increases in equipment efficiency definitely make significant improvements, but perhaps more attention should be placed on the small-scale

initiatives. The participants at Loaves and Fishes love the fact that their meals are also good for their environmentally conscious minds. Going forward I hope to implement that same sense of responsibility in my own meal planning and preparation while also teaching others.

Loaves and Fishes has also made me realize the need to be inclusive in future decisions about sustainable efforts. I think that one of the biggest barriers to achieving a successful sustainability initiative is participation. Constructing programs that may make a difference, but exclude a group of people do not contribute to sustainability progress as a whole. The people I talked to at Loaves and Fishes were grateful not only for the resources provided by the program, but also for the fact that sustainable practices are prioritized by the staff. Since Loaves and Fishes welcomes anyone into their program the participation in sustainable practices is not restricted. People I talked with had faced tough times ranging from stints of unemployment and homelessness to working and still not earning enough to feed their families. Engaging in green practices is often associated with larger upfront costs and may not become priority to people facing tough situations. For example, upgrading to efficient appliances in a home or buying organic produce are larger initial expenses than purchasing their conventional alternatives. However, program creators seeking to accomplish environmental goals must keep the affordability of their initiatives in mind because, despite people's situations, they are still making an environmental impact.

Completing this project feels like coming full circle as I think back to my Food and Water Politics course from my first-year at IC. In Food and Water Politics we focused on the interactions between business, politics, and food systems. The "Big Four" food industries – sugar, corn, wheat, and meat – have risen in power and influence in the U.S. political system, and thrive on providing ingredients for processed food manufacturing. Processed foods are often not as nutritious as fresh produce due to the added sugars and preservatives, but they are often cheap and available food options. I realized after discussing with participants that one of the primary reasons that they enjoy Loaves and Fishes is the opportunity to eat hot meals with fresh ingredients. Some participants expressed their lack of choice in food due to the increased shelf-life and affordability of processed foods. We learned in Food and Water Politics that the world has enough food to support the population, however the current distribution of food causes problems. Constructing strong, local networks of food is a potential solution to food access that

requires investment in local producers. The Loaves and Fishes program receives local donations and makes an effort to purchase their ingredients from retailers that support local producers. One day I was there when the kitchen was serving a homemade chili dish and I watched people bring their empty bowls back up to the kitchen with huge smiles on their faces. The fresh veggies in the chili were produced locally and helped create opportunity for Loaves and Fishes to give participants a fresh and healthy meal. “That was the best meal I’ve had in a while,” exclaimed one man as he returned his bowl. Loaves and Fishes participants are great examples of supporting local food production while also offering healthy choices to those in need.

My conversations at Loaves and Fishes always felt very positive. All of the people there – staff, volunteers, and participants – were always checking in with one another and ensuring that everyone had everything they needed. The problems people were facing seemed to be left at the door and everyone rallied around supporting the Loaves and Fishes cause. Being part of the Loaves and Fishes experience has made me realize that people are willing to help the environment when barriers like financial investment are broken down. My experience will influence me in the future to take a mindset that is thoughtful and inclusive in tackling any environmental problem.

From: [WPM Forms](#)
To: [Cheryl Gunther](#)
Subject: New Submission: Cultural Immersion Product
Date: Monday, August 20, 2018 1:34:57 PM

<u>Question</u>	<u>Answer</u>
IP	159.247.3.210
Date Time	2018-08-20 13:34:52
Last Name	
First Name	
Major	Environmental Studies
Graduation Year	2019
IC email address	
Student ID	
Advisor	

Due October 17th

For my cultural immersion experience, I studied abroad in Christchurch, New Zealand. This was one of the best decisions of my life, and has influenced me as an environmental scholar and as a young adult.

For the first time in my life, I lived under a new country's government, which was fortunately one that supported curbing climate change and living as environmentally friendly as possible. As a student studying in New Zealand, where more than a quarter of the total land is set aside for national parks and reserves, I was able to see the effect that an environmentally-conscious government can have on a country and its ecosystems. New Zealand is conscious of its waste and resource management, and its protection of the parks throughout the two islands. Their biosecurity is one of the top in the world because of their vulnerable island environment, and also because the government cares about the species which are native or endemic to the country. Coming back to the U.S., I noticed that the US was more concerned of who was coming into their country than what was coming in. This experience of living abroad has opened my eyes; so long have I studied the importance of recycling and creating less waste,

and now I was able to see a country and its citizens take part in these practices. If I didn't have a family that I loved in the US, I would not think twice about moving to New Zealand after college to live there permanently and to work.

My cultural immersion experience has opened my eyes to new areas of study as an environmental scholar. For the first time, I began to appreciate the ocean, thanks to my abroad experience. This new found appreciation for this new ecosystem has changed my understanding of the world. As an environmental studies major, I have only studied land ecosystems in depth. This ranges from studying island environments to forests and lake ecosystems. However, never have I studied ocean environments in depth, much less seen them in person. My time in the Southern Hemisphere changed all of that. I took an upper level geography course which specifically focused on coral reefs and the ecosystems of ocean environments. I was also fortunate enough to see the ocean ecosystem first hand. This was possible when I went snorkeling and scuba diving in the reef ecosystems around the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, as well as the lagoon reefs around the Cook Islands (an island chain in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.)

This experience has facilitated a new understanding of the ocean ecosystem, which is just as valuable as those on land, even though they are much less easily accessed and seen by the public. There are many national parks throughout New Zealand, and some around the US as well, but one area that is lacking in the world as a whole, is protection of coral reefs and marine reserves. Seeing the diverse ecosystems of the reefs at hand took away my breath in more ways than one; I now see the importance of preserving all areas of wildlife, regardless if they are visible on a day-to-day basis. "Out of sight, out of mind" is a common saying that is unfortunately applicable to ocean environments when thinking about conservation. If I could share my experiences with more people, and maybe with those with government power, maybe the world could shift more towards protecting these salt water environments. No more would whaling and overfishing be a part of the world; we would protect more areas of the ocean instead of fighting who owns the waters.

Experiencing ocean environments has changed me as an environmental scholar and as a pre-professional, because now I believe I have a direction in which I want to go. I was unsure of what I wanted to do with this degree, and the exact path I wanted to take, since this is a broad field of study. However, after seeing ocean ecosystems and realizing that there is a lack in support and conservation for them, now I know that I want

Essay of 1000-2000
words

to work with oceans and marine life out of college. This experience has thus reframed my path for the future, as I initially wanted to go into something forestry or private sector related.

My experience in New Zealand has really influenced my approach to environmental decision-making in that I am more aware of what I do. I am constantly aware of the resources I am using, such as energy and gas, and the waste I am producing. This is made in part because of the electric on-off switches that New Zealand has in their apartments, and the five different waste baskets all around their cities and college campuses. Above each outlet in my apartment, there was an on off switch. Therefore, electronics such as TVs and microwaves could still be plugged in (to save the inconvenience of plugging them all in) without using energy by staying plugged in. This was very efficient in preserving energy, and a really good idea. Additionally, there were consistently 5 different garbage and recycling cans all in one cluster. There was a separate can for compost, glass, plastics, paper and cardboard, and one for rubbish. In some instances, there was even a bin for coffee cups and styrofoam. This was huge to me. I had never seen a place like this with so many different ways to get rid of your waste. Even Ithaca, as progressive and environmentally conscious as it is, does not have this many ways of getting rid of trash. Not only were there trash cans like these all around our campus, but all of the students seemed to actually care about taking the time to sort their trash. Many students at Ithaca through everything away in the garbage bin, even if they have plastics and compost they're throwing out. But not in New Zealand!

My experience abroad has taught me so much. I have learned that everything I do has an impact on our earth and I have seen what it is like when a country's government actually cares about their citizens impacts and how to curb climate change. I have changed as an environmental scholar and professional, and I feel like I now have a direction that I want to take as an adult.