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Michele Bonnevie
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I will be graduating this May 2007 from Fisher with a B.S. in Biology, a minor in Chemistry, and a minor in Religious Studies. Ever since my sophomore year, which was when my older brother studied abroad in Italy, I have always wanted to be able to study abroad like my brother. I began thinking about where I wanted to go and looking into what colleges Fisher sent students on this abroad experience. After some thinking and trying to choose between Australia and Ireland, I chose Australia for the main purpose of being able to see a kangaroo and a koala bear (the biology in me shining through)."

A Semester Abroad in Australia: My Religious Experience

Michele Bonnevie, Class of 2007

I will be graduating this May 2007 from Fisher with a B.S. in Biology, a minor in Chemistry, and a minor in Religious Studies. Ever since my sophomore year, which was when my older brother studied abroad in Italy, I have always wanted to be able to study abroad like my brother. I began thinking about where I wanted to go and looking into what colleges Fisher sent students on this abroad experience. After some thinking and trying to choose between Australia and Ireland, I chose Australia for the main purpose of being able to see a kangaroo and a koala bear (the biology in me shining through).

My religious experience in Australia started as soon as I left the Los Angeles airport. I started my journey by praying for a safe trip across the ocean. I also asked God to help me to be more outgoing and to make the first move in meeting new people, especially the people I was sitting next to, because they were in my study aboard group. Upon arrival in Australia, after a very long flight, we were placed in our rooms that were smaller than the single rooms here at Fisher and contained walls made all of brick; they reminded me of a prison cell. I was anxious and yet excited to be able to meet new people from different parts of the world. I know I have a tendency to be shy when first meeting people, but luckily God had heard my prayer as I quickly made friends with the people on my floor. This gave me the opportunity to meet persons from Singapore and India, as well as native Australians. Being acquainted with people on my floor led me to be invited to play pickup soccer which facilitated meeting more people with different backgrounds.

The next step was the beginning of classes which are much more difficult than here at Fisher. Once again I found myself asking God for help throughout each class in not only being able to focus and to learn content and Australian vocabulary and pronunciation, but also being able to interact with my other classmates and getting beyond the thought in my head of "what does it matter if you make good friends here? You will only be here for a semester. Your friends that will last a lifetime are back in New York." Once again God showed me that you can indeed make lasting friends even though in just 4 months they will be half way around the world. Three of the closest friends I made were from Wales, South Africa, and New Zealand, and we plan on meeting up again sometime next year for a reunion. I would not have come across these friendships if God had not shown me how to be a bit more outgoing.

After getting all settled into my room and with classes, I found a girl, who just so happened to be the person I sat next to on the plane ride, who was also Catholic and looking for a place to attend Mass on Sundays. After asking around and using the internet, we finally found a Church that was just up the street. So every Sunday we would walk 15 minutes to Church and 15 minutes back. It was a nice small Church with most of the congregation being an older generation with only a few children. We were welcomed into their Church and had conversations with some of the

parishioners and the priest about where we were from and why we chose to study in Australia. It was an exciting experience to be able to find a church and be welcomed by a congregation in a foreign country.

As the semester went on, the hardest part of studying abroad was dealing with loneliness and being homesick for my friends back in New York. I found myself listening to Christian music at night when trying to fall asleep. In order to cope with the loneliness and with situations in Australia which were hard to deal with, such as relationship issues and adopting some of the Australian student culture, I “talked” to friends at home by writing e-mails. I ended and started each day with a prayer asking for the patience to deal with my daily struggles and for strength to overcome these situations. I found myself relying on God’s help more in Australia than I have been doing here at Fisher. Through this experience I have been able to develop a greater relationship with not only God, but also with the friends I have back at home. In being away so long I realized what I have at Fisher and my views on life were refocused. I was able to figure out who I really am and what people I cherish. Overall my experience in Australia was a positive one in allowing me to deepen my relationship with God and learn more about myself as a person. For all those who struggle with these aspects of their life, I recommend studying abroad. You will learn more about yourself than you thought you would. As for after I graduate from Fisher, I plan on attending UB dental school and eventually specializing in either Pediatrics Dentistry or Orthodontics.

