

In February of 2024, I left the United States of America to spend a semester abroad in Córdoba, Argentina. This was during my junior year of college and although I had 3 years of Spanish classes under my belt, I had little to no experience using conversational Spanish. I was extremely nervous about being placed into an environment where everyone around me spoke Spanish. I expected to have a very difficult time, and made a few goals so that I could better enjoy my experience abroad. I pledged to myself that I would spend as much time as I could speaking Spanish. Also, in order to get the most out of this semester, I swore I wouldn't avoid any conversations or events because of my linguistic ability.

When I first arrived in Argentina, the cultural differences were immediately apparent to me. I was a nervous wreck meeting my host mom for the first time, and I could barely communicate what I wanted to say in Spanish, but she gave me a hug and a kiss, and immediately referred to me as her daughter. Later that day, she took my roommate and I to a beautiful national park, and we sat by a river bank and introduced ourselves. I was so grateful that she shared a place that was incredibly important to her with us with zero hesitation, and initiated a gentle conversation that helped me shake off some of my nerves about speaking Spanish. From that moment on, small moments with strangers helped me realize how strong the cultural differences were in Argentina. Like in America, people are passionate about their identities, but, for a variety of reasons, most Americans aren't passionate about being American. Argentinians take so much pride in their country and their image. My uber drivers would ask me if I was enjoying Argentina, and would recommend I go to parks, museums, and go out and dance. I felt like every Argentinian I met wanted to share their love for their country with me, which

really changed my idea of cultural identity and nationalism. I had always heard about the strong sense of family in Latin American countries, but actually experiencing it made me wonder how I could bring that sense of belonging and warmth into my own personal relationships.

My most rewarding academic experience by far were the presentations I completed in my classes. I hate doing presentations in English, so the pressure was about 3 times worse in Spanish, but I can't deny the impact they had on my ability to research and present on academic topics in Spanish. They challenged my linguistic capabilities and personal anxieties, and in turn I gained some confidence that I've kept with me and used in my courses in my final year at Clemson. Now, my goal is to keep developing my public speaking skills, because I know they're a key part of a professional and career development.

Personally, my semester in Argentina improved my self confidence tremendously. I did not think I had the strength to go to a different country for the first time and take my first plane. I was sure I'd go home early or chicken out at the airport. There were so many times I struggled with my Spanish and felt stupid and incapable, but I didn't give up and tried my best to apply myself and learn from my mistakes. Now I know that I have the potential to thrive in unfamiliar environments, and I'm a lot less anxious about trying new things. I've realized lately that there's so much that I can do, but I was just telling myself I couldn't.

My study abroad experience has done wonders for my vision of my future. I've learned so much about my personality and how I want to communicate with others. Argentina reminded me of my want to work with people and care for my community. I've

decided I want to pursue a career in the nonprofit sector, and I'm so excited to use the cultural knowledge and humility that I've gained to improve the lives of others.

In conclusion, Argentina was an incredibly impactful learning experience for me. I gained some personal insight on how I want to treat myself and others, and I became more confident in my abilities and in my choices. I saw an example of a close-knit, caring community that I had been envisioning for years, and it inspired me to create my own version back home. More than anything, I learned that I have a lot to learn. I want to be open minded and considerate of others and their experiences, and continue to work on the personal growth that I started while abroad.