

*“We shall not cease from exploration/
And the end of all our
exploring/
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”*

--T.S. Eliot



Bangalore, India

2011 Study Abroad Program

Final Part II

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Question 1

Seattle was our time to give some deep kneading to topics we would be confronted with during our 4. We talked about them on a much larger global aspect. Our texts were from different walks of life, but we were able to generalize the feelings in Seattle. India was only somewhat the same. We dealt with the “same” issues but within an Indian context. Occasionally, we were reminded of Seattle via others questions. Though our bodies were located in India, questions from the Dalit Federation and Sangama about any similar issues or support groups brought our attentions back to the fact that things we were experiencing in India aren’t wholly exclusive to the country.

Another idea (thought) that stuck to me in India (probably due to the layer of sweat I wore like a second skin) is how to convey my ideas. How do I blog? Do I blog? Are my smoke signals destined for the states or are they getting lost in the Indian smog? How/what different audiences does blogging reach? For example the publicly anonymous TUI has a blog and the Better India is entirely web-based. Both have similar interests in India and it makes sense that they are targeting an audience of the upper class or international status when internet can be hard to come by for many locals. So how do I convey my travels? I wanted to and needed to share my travels with others. It was my obligation to my sponsors to show that I was doing more than just precariously prancing around the streets of Bangalore; it was my obligation to let my loved ones know I was doing okay. Those reasons, combined with my need for Seattle support to mitigate homesickness, nagged me with the task of blogging prolifically. My goal was to neither solely uplift nor trash India. It was to tell the truth! But how to do that when during the 10 I researched so many travel blogs that failed to meet my standards? How to do that when my work during the 10 made me question the validity of blogs written immediately and ones written days later? I struggled with finding the perfect model of blogging, until I decided to do away with the worrying and the stalling of my blog’s birth. I satisfied all my journaling needs by privately writing all my thoughts and interactions of the day in a journal, while sharing the “exciting” and expanding on ideas I felt relevant at the time. So, my answer to the recurring question of the 10, “would you be proud of this work? Does it exemplify your travels?” Yes. In retro-reading, my blog reflects my main thoughts and my own experiences with a realistic ratio of not-so-great to helmet-to-cheek moments.

Also, context! That word isn’t specific at all—under its umbrella are topics from considering peoples’ backgrounds, along with their point of views to not taking information given as the only “truth.” The texts and even the first assignment on researching several articles on current events helped me to keep biases on my mind. In India this skill was used in a range of ways: on a small scale I was reminded that although ESG is an always reliable source, sometimes their comments are heavily coated with all the politics they deal with. An example

that comes to mind is Indira Gandhi. During an ESG lecture it was presented that although some of her development projects, as well intentioned as they were, were to blame (right along with electronic city) as causes of environmental stress. Yet with the Dalit Women's Federation, I felt a very different, albeit an initially confusing, sentiment for Indira Gandhi. Listening to the achievements and inspirations of the Women's Federation, they shared an air of veneration for Indira Gandhi I hadn't breathed until then.

On a larger scale, I was constantly reminded of the idea of space. Space, I learned, is subjective. In the context of the states, space is privatized: your family business stays in the home; your work stays with your 9 to 5 hours. I couldn't escape, and sometimes battled, with the concept of space in the Indian context. My experience slowly built up from getting elbowed aside in the City Market to getting shamelessly cut by strangers in line at Thom's Bakery. Space even found its way into my shopping experience. My clothing size was no long confined to the changing stalls, but put out there for the world to see (and hear) by via the salesman at bazaar.com. The most defining moment of my 10 education being put to the test was when my concept of space finally started to shift and align with my context. After witnessing a family sickness while in their household during "family time" and for business that, in the states, would have to wait for tomorrow I reached my breaking point. In retrospect, I felt that it was appropriate. After my breaking point subsided I was asked to look at some things in this world on my head. My breaking point was my turning point; I had to look at the world upside down or I would miss all the helmet-to-cheek opportunities. I did away with feeling that I was unwillingly in the wrong place at the wrong time and replaced it with being fortunate to have been invited into a household and welcomed as warmly as could be.

Question 2

Seattle is a city known for its ubiquitous green landscape and residents. Its diverse neighborhoods boast a range of features from quirky coffee shops to gated communities--- from crime ridden alleys to waterfront views. The population thrives with a diverse demographic and a comparatively left political scene. But in the midst of the clean air and separated recyclables there are problems hidden (or disregarded) by much of the more privileged population. This program seeks out issues such as homelessness, education, socio-economic imbalance and injustices encountered by minorities. Different lenses of activism will be investigated: how does activism look at the government level compared to a community-founded organization? How do the inner workings of a student run university group differ? What power shifts take place and how does that affect the outcome of the social justice work? We'll also delve further into the bowels of what makes Seattle unique: we'll explore the media of underground art, where mobs of young adults relate and educate through spoken word and local hip hop. The hope is that your lens of your own hometown will not only be wiped away of the dusty biases, but also rounded and turned all-lens encompassing. This program will jog your idea of the place you might call home—in order to feel the warmth of the sun first you need to brave the Seattle rains.

Grades are based mostly on participation and reflections for each time with an organization. We'll be hopping from various organizations and locations, partaking in things that they do, but also interviewing and exchanging ideas.

Most of our time will be spent with these organizations. Activities/assignments are also listed below.

Race and Social Justice Initiative: A constituent of the Seattle Office of Civil Rights (SOCR), focused on eradicating institutionalized racism. New and the first of its kind, you'll be asked to roam both their office and the SOCR and inquire about their present and future plans. You'll attend the same RSJI workshop city workers partake in and then write a report reflecting on both the information disseminated and how that fits into the context/bias of the city government. This information will initiate the spongy foundation you'll both question and use to put other organizations into perspective as we continue. <http://www.seattle.gov/rsji/>

Seattle Education Access: Focused on preparing and supporting low income young adults through college, this community-leader-run organization also strongly welcomes anybody facing adversity, “no matter their legal issues, parenting status, sexual orientation or immigration status.” This small grassroots organization has a board of directors of college graduates and city workers. Several presentations by the staff will

again provide more information to soak up and carry with us for the duration of our trip. Along with a reflection, you will be given a chance to be Mentors For a Day. Both you and one of the organization's participants will spend a day as each other's mentor—exchange stories and recognize the differences and similarities of a lifestyle worlds away from a person of your own town. During this day you'll create a mini art project (collage, video, poem, etc.) that commemorates this day of meeting and connecting in a space where differences are recognized *and* overcome.

<http://www.seattleeducationaccess.org/index.php>

Dream Project UW: We're kicking off our investigation of the university scene by connecting with a huge student-initiated organization dedicated to helping first generation and low income students prepare and apply to college and teach them about local social issues. We'll attend their lecture and see what and how they prepare their mentors to prepare high school students. We'll tag along with a cohort to see how they interact with their students. Afterwards we'll have time to dig deeper into what and how they feel about their actions. Are they the right students to be teaching others? What happens to the quality of mentors when a club blows up to such huge levels? What is the difference between this program and Seattle Education Access?

<http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrmprj/>

washPIRG: A prominent Seattle body in initiating political rallies and movements. They do a plethora of research resulting in banks of statistics to help them make their cases on behalf of the population. This is a different type of activism than what we will have experienced so far. Instead of your reflection, you'll be doing research on a topic of your own choosing. Using those statistics you'll make an argument for your cause and present it to the class. Discussion will follow on what tactics and motives can invite positive political movement. <http://www.washpirg.org/>

Real Change: A non-profit that serves as a voice and source of opportunity for low income and homeless people. They provide literary workshops and newspapers that help spread awareness of economic injustice while providing income and, therefore, economic support. Our main focus is to meet with and recognize as many participants of the program as we can. Here we will put ourselves out there on the street with our partners. With the knowledge of issues in mind you will have the chance to put it into physical action and feel the experience of vulnerability in spreading the word of economic justice. <http://www.realchangenews.org>

ROOTS: Our final stop is a non-profit at the crossroads of government and community lead organizations. They provide shelter and food to the homeless. We'll see how the dynamics and politics of a Government supported program supervised by a church runs.

For the most part, this will be another chance for us to connect with people within our own city who we have been conditioned to walk past. We'll volunteer during their Friday Feast (where they serve dinner to hundreds of people of all ages). Reflections will be a comparison of our perceptions of the homeless or low income before and after the trip. <http://www.rootsinfo.org>

The program will end with a full day of underground entertainment. Youths Speaks Seattle will share with us the inspirations for their visionary spoken word performances, and later perform them for us. They'll give us a workshop on conveying our own ideas via spoken word. Your assignment will be to prepare a spoken word performance for later on in the day. Afterwards, we'll meet with some of Seattle's biggest names in its underground hip hop scene. We'll exchange food, words, ideas and hospitality with the Blue Scholars and Mackelmore. At the end of the night we'll perform our spoken word (a type of activism!) and then enjoy performances by our newfound friends.

This program is similar to Bangalore's in that it will be exploring different types of activism—from "digging a well" to political movement. A reflection is required for each organization experience so that we can later "map" our progress. I feel that the individual investigation of organized bodies that we sometimes did in Bangalore is important in this trip. As a local program, I feel that it requires more well digging—more realizing through doing because there is no shock factor in learning about what may seem like the "history" of social justice in your hometown.

Question 3

October 2011

Dear Old Donelyn of Seattle,

You're back! You're at home, you're at school, and you're back into a routine. But you've changed... you didn't *fall* back into the same old routine-- congratulations! Your letter has been such a chameleon of support for me. At the start of the program your words calmed my fears and night terrors. You reminded me that I was here to push myself beyond my boundaries. In the first few days I was wishing that I could go home, that I would never have to hear the pattering of ricks or the stammering of my heart against my chest as I crossed streets. Reading your letter transformed my mentality—I had words to live and get by with during my travels. You provided reassurance that I so often looked for; reassurance that only good was to come out of all the physical and mental challenges. My culture shock, my self-image issues, my exhaustion and my problematic of us, a large group of American 'tourists,' dissecting activism abroad as students of a foreign university were all complex obstacles, yes, but above all these experiences were justified by sources of reassurance such: our ESG and HHS colleagues, acquaintances and you. Now, as I sit in the familiar gray of Seattle, your words offer me a colorful peace of mind. I did it-- we did it, and our new being is proof.

To tell you the truth, Donelyn, I started off slow. I didn't heed you too seriously at first. Hartman, Behar and Poulos became whispers to me during my + time and Butalia stared at me from unpacked book bag. I forgot about your letter but kept thinking about the 4 to come—how do I prepare? How do I communicate my stories once I'm there? How do I deal with being a tourist? What type of audience will I be to the performances that locals will present? Will I perform as you expect: a completely aware ethnographer seizing every opportunity to grow from discomfort and sponging up and steeping in moments that will later be squeezed out into a blogspot bucket as memories? I may have forgotten you on paper, but the guidance and "training" you talk of never left me during the +.

It's touching to hear how optimistic you are—it's as if you temporarily caught clairvoyant abilities foreshadowing the rollercoaster of emotions I was about to ride.

A little about you, or me... the New Donelyn of Seattle—the post Bangalore, post 10+4—the right side of the equals sign. You are missing Bangalore terribly. More specifically, I'm missing the space that we had to be inquisitive and daring. But now it's my job to find that space in Seattle and the answer to the question, "What now?" Bangalore has definitely given us a new lens to view our small world from. I feel the need for activism more than ever. I understand its putty-like ability to mold and imbibe itself with the needs of its environment. Bangalore

changed our direction: I'm aiming the tip of my arrow towards researching clean water projects, a more direct application of our degree than I had thought was necessary before. Even though I'm dedicating most of our time to this type of activism I offer my voice to other types. When talking about social justice (from a global context, to India and Seattle), I feel levels of conviction and curiosity that have never been so balanced or strong before. I'm as inquisitive as ever—an ethnographer in my own town!

It brings a knot to my throat knowing that you were right about one other thing: my moment in India was unique and much too fleeting. But some comfort for you, me and Future Donelyn: this 10+4 will never end, it's only the foundation—the start of an equation that will be added to, multiplied and divided as the years of your life approach infinity.

Love Indefinitely,

(NEW) Donelyn of Seattle

PS. Thank you Anu, Brandon & Amy for the most wonderful experience of my life (thus far)!