Program: IFSA Study Abroad at Universidad de La Habana, Spring

Paul’s Majors: Economics; History; Spanish

Academic Life: I took courses directly at Universidad de La Habana with Cuban students. Classes were small and intimate. Once you select a “major” in Cuba, you are with the same students throughout your university experience. Accordingly, professors and students alike have strong and familiar relationships. I enjoyed this setting as it was easy to get to know both peers and professors. Classes met 2-3 times a week for anywhere from 90 to 120 minutes. Courses are mostly lecture based, without a lot of out of the classroom work to be done. Classes differ most by the fact that there is very little student participation. Every other week, however, most courses had a seminar that was similar to a discussion at UW-Madison, but more in a debate setting.

Housing: I lived with a host family in the neighborhood known as Vedado. I lived in a beautiful colonial mansion with an incredible family. I shared a room with another student on my program. I was taken in by my host family as one of their own. Families of my fellow Cuban students also did not hesitate to invite me over for dinner and gatherings.

Advantages of Studying in Cuba: The number one advantage I gained was my language proficiency. My Spanish proficiency is basically fluent at this point. I now feel I am more attuned culturally to Latin Americans and have a broader perspective to bring to the workplace. I gained a starkly different cultural perspective by living in a socialist country.

New Perspectives: My use of technology after this experience was affected the most. Connecting in Cuba is not easy or cheap. Most of the time, I was only checking email/the Internet once every other day for less than 30 minutes at a time. While in Cuba, I realized that checking our social media non-stop is unnecessary.

Advice for Students Considering Cuba: Please remember that Cuba is portrayed by the United States media in particular ways for particular reasons. Some of what you read may be true, but it tells one side of the story. Perhaps the largest motivation I had for studying in Cuba was to experience it all firsthand.

“If you are looking to truly expand your personal and cultural boundaries, you will find Cuba deeply rewarding.”