

Education Abroad Returnees of the Month December 2017/January 2018

Dominick Giovanniello

4th year Middle Eastern Language and Literature and Global Security and Justice major
CET: Intensive Arabic Language in Amman, Jordan, Year 2016-2017



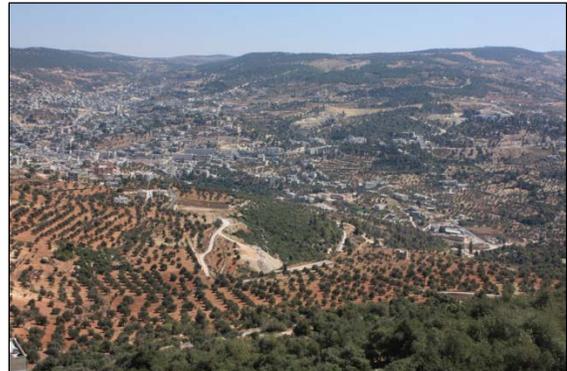
Most interesting class and why? Did you take classes in connection to your major or electives?

My favorite class was my first semester Arabic language class because my teacher was amazing and my Arabic improved insanely fast.

How was education abroad different than anticipated?

In terms of adjustment, studying in Jordan was actually pretty difficult. I've never lived in such a socially conservative country before

and it took me a while to get used to not being able to do the things I would do back home without thought, like going out on the weekends. In terms of classes, it was definitely one of the most rewarding years in my academic career, and I learned more in two semesters than I have in the rest of college combined.



Number one way the experience contributed to your growth

Living in Jordan definitely forced me to reevaluate my own beliefs and perspectives, not only about the US and the Middle East, but also about who I am as a person.

Favorite local hangout, and why?



My favorite local hangouts were the cafes where I would go with my friends to play cards, smoke hookah, do homework and talk.

Most interesting/delicious cuisine tried

Avocado smoothies, which are made with nothing but avocado, milk and honey.

Most meaningful experience abroad

I honestly can't say. I think just being abroad in such a different culture was meaningful in itself. Every day brought a new lesson or

small adventure, and I think the sum of those experiences is what impacted me the most.

Sum up the experience in three words

Challenging, stimulating, rewarding

Dominick also submitted blog posts during his year abroad to the Hoos Abroad blog (<https://hoosabroad.wordpress.com/>). Below, read an excerpt from his initial post from Jordan, and read his additional blog posts at <https://hoosabroad.wordpress.com/category/middle-east/jordan/>.

It's hard to say what exactly compelled me to exchange my friends and life at UVA for nine months of living and studying in Amman, especially considering that I've never been exposed to Arab culture or the Middle East outside of the classroom. However, as much as I love UVA, I was hungering for an adventure and I know there's no better way to master a language than to actually live in a country where it's spoken. So...for the next nine months, I will be studying Arabic full-time at the University of Jordan with CET Academic Programs and calling Amman, Jordan my home.

Every day here poses a new challenge and a new adventure. Whether it's learning how to play Jordanian card games, having an in-depth political discussion with my professors after class, getting a haircut, or simply ordering food, I'm constantly pushed out of my comfort zone and forced to set aside my own habits and ways of thinking. I may seem like a total idiot most of the time, but I'm gradually becoming more comfortable speaking, moving around and engaging with Jordanians. Just the other day, for example, I was literally pulled off the street into the wedding celebration of a random stranger. The man noticed me and my friends photographing the gaudy glowing tent that had taken over the street, but rather than chasing us away, he welcomed us into the party, where we listened to live music and dubke-ed (the traditional Arab dance) hand-in-hand with a large circle of men and boys until the late hours of the night.

More than anything else, it's these small interactions (and occasional victories) that make living overseas so fun and rewarding. Not only do these experiences provide a window into the cultural differences and unique perspectives of others, but they also illustrate the universal normality and mundaneness of everyday life across the globe. Oftentimes, our only exposure to other cultures and ways of life comes from the news, and we don't realize that beneath all the problems and conflicts, most people want the same things from life, even if they conceptualize them differently. At the same time that living overseas exposes you to other cultures, it also makes you more aware, critical and appreciative of your own.



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