

University of Leicester, England
Fall 2007
Reflection #1

Overall my study abroad experience has been absolutely amazing. It has made me grow as a person and I think that it has showed me how to enjoy myself even more than I did before. To anyone that is able to or given the chance to study abroad at some point during their college career I would definitely recommend that they take advantage of the opportunity and go. Everyday was a new experience and I do not regret a single moment that I was there. I studied abroad in England at the University of Leicester. I really needed a change of atmosphere from regular school and I ended up having some of the best times of my life.

I had been to England previously so I was pretty sure that I was going to like going to school there but I was still a little bit worried. I was nervous about being able to make new friends and whether or not I was going to fit in and actually make the most of my time abroad. However, right away I felt welcomed and quickly became friends with the other exchange students. Since the University had chosen to house many of the exchange students together we all instantly stuck together. I lived in Hastings House with a bunch of awesome girls and guys. The majority of the house was international and only about four English students. Although I did really like the people I lived with and became quite close with a few of them, I do wish that we would have been more integrated with the other English students. I only say this because the people that you live with are generally the people that you hang out with and become closest to. I did meet a few English people that I would call my friends but the majority I would say were just acquaintances. This separation of the international students was probably my main complaint of the whole trip and that really isn't even all that big.

Signing up for classes probably was the most difficult thing I had to do all semester. Instead of having class registration online like we have at JMU, Leicester requires you to go to each department head and sign up for a class and then get it signed by the head. This was an absolute pain and took all week to figure out. The classes here are just like at any other university. Some of the professors were so boring that you dreaded going to class and others were quite amusing. Two of my professors were completely intrigued that they had an American in their class and constantly would ask me questions. They were both very nice and I enjoyed their classes very much. Overall all of the teachers and people that worked for the school just wanted me to have a good time and worked so hard to ensure that.

In particular, the porter for our house was so nice and did absolutely everything he could to make our stay more comfortable. Anything that you need you will most likely get if you ask. The study abroad office in Leicester was also very helpful and nice; they tried hard to accommodate all of our needs as well.

One thing that I disliked about the school was the dining halls. Unlike at JMU, where we have tons of options of what we want to eat, there are basically no choices here at Leicester. If you don't like what they are serving then you either don't eat or you force it down. I guess most of the dining hall food was edible but the majority of it was not good. If you go down to city centre you will be able to find some good food places and bakeries and of course there is a shopping center down there. The stores are actually not

that bad and you can find some cute clothes for pretty reasonable prices. The city center makes for a good day out.

If you like to go out and night and have a good time this is definitely a school to consider studying abroad at. Nearly everyday of the week and weekend there was something going on. The University itself plans many student events, and these events are not lame like you might think, but they are actually quite enjoyable. Students are often passing out flyers for some of the local bars and clubs so that you know what is going on and where it is happening. For example, every Monday, without fail, there is a bar crawl. These are good to go on in the beginning of the year because you then learn where the good bars are and which places you want to go back to. There is never a dull night out in Leicester.

Personally, I really enjoyed being in England for Rugby season. The English are crazy about rugby and going to a bar on game nights was out of control. The Loaded Dog was one of the hottest spots, and by far my favorite place, for rugby players and fans to hang out in. Meeting people in England was so easy and everyone wants to talk to you so don't worry about not meeting people. The night life in Leicester is so different then at JMU; I loved it. The only downside is that the buses stop running pretty early, I think the last bus is at 11:45pm, which means that you are going to need to bring money for a taxi. This isn't that bad though if you have a group of people with you.

My main advice for going abroad would be to be prepared to spend money. If you are going to constantly worry about the exchange rate and how expensive everything is then you are not going to have as much fun as you should. You need to go onto the trip with a decent amount of money and be willing to spend it. In a way this is like a vacation from your real life so just have fun; it is worth every penny.

Also make sure you travel while you are at Leicester! If you book flights early enough on airlines such as ryanair.com or easyjet.com you will get incredibly cheap flights. I went to so many different places with some of my housemates and we had an awesome time. Most places we only stayed for about two days but it was plenty of time to do and see what we wanted.

I am so glad I had the chance to study abroad and I highly recommend you do it. Leicester was awesome, but even if you don't choose to go there I think that anywhere you choose to go you will have an incredible time!

University of Leicester, England
Fall 2007
Reflection #2

This past semester I have spent studying abroad at the University of Leicester in England and overall it has been an extremely amazing experience. The staff of the study abroad office here in Leicester is extremely helpful and very nice if you need help with anything at all. Before coming to the UK I tried to pick out what classes I wanted to take while abroad and then got them approved by the departments at JMU. However this really was not worth all of the time and stress it caused me before leaving because once I got to Leicester some of the classes were no longer offered and some of the classes clashed. I then had to choose all new courses to take and now need to get those ones

approved by the departments when I get home. Also, the registration process here at Leicester is extremely different from what we are used to and can be very frustrating. This is because during your first week at Leicester you have to go around to each specific department and get the classes signed off on and then make sure none of the classes you have chosen clash. This is especially difficult to do if you are taking courses from a variety of departments because in England most students just take classes from one department and therefore the department tries to schedule the different classes at different times. However, just be patient with the process because eventually you will figure out a schedule that does not have clashes in it.

I would strongly recommend that all students attend the week orientation program which the University of Leicester offers to its international students as well as being picked up by the arranged bus from the airport. This really helped me and gave me the opportunity to meet the other international students whom I would be spending the semester abroad with. I would also suggest living in a catered hall in Oadby Village so that you do not have to worry about cooking for yourself and can just enjoy your time here. I currently live in Oadby in Hastings House (which is basically an international house). Most of the rooms have their own sink and then there are four showers for 16 girls to share-I have never had a problem getting a shower when I needed one. If you have any problems or something isn't working just put in a request and it is normally fixed within a day or two- the porters are extremely nice!

For the most part I would say that most of the friends that I have made while being here at Leicester are other Americans, however I have met some English people through my classes and just going out at night and talking to people. Although, I came here wanting to make tons of English friends it has not been that easy to considering I live with all international students. However, living with all international students does have its benefits because everyone is experiencing the same thing and you always have people to talk to who know and can relate to what you are going through.

Oadby Village is about 3 miles from the University so you can either buy a bus pass which is £119 or about \$240, buy a used bike, or walk. I would suggest buying the bus pass because even though it is a lot of money it allows for you to use any Arriva bus route at anytime, so in the end you really get your money's worth. Another additional cost which I found out about when getting here was the gym membership which is £55 for the year so you get half of it back at the end of the semester if you choose to buy one.

Even though the exchange rate is not very good I would not let that stop you from experiencing and seeing things you want to see or going out at night because you are not going to have a good time here if you are constantly worrying about money. Going out is a big part of the student life here at Leicester and if you are not really into that this may not be the best school choice for you. Also, if you want to travel my advice would be to book the trips as far in advance as possible because you will then get really good deals- book trips using www.ryanair.com or www.easyjet.com and www.hostelworld.com for hostel booking. Even though I have spent most of my weekends away from Leicester traveling I have still been able to experience and enjoy what the city of Leicester has to offer. Throughout the week there is always something going on either with the halls of residence or at the student union. Definitely go out and see what they are like. There is a lot more going on throughout the week in terms of going out at night than there is back in

the States. My personal favorite is a pub called the *Loaded Dog* which is located on London Road. They also have good drink deals so share a pitcher with some friends!

I would definitely suggest studying abroad at the University of Leicester if you want to come to England even though it is not in London; London is only an hour and a half train ride away. This semester has absolutely flown by so don't waste any time doing and seeing everything that you want to because before you know it you are going to be getting ready to head back home while at the same time wishing that you could stay just a longer.

University of Leicester, England
Spring 2008
Reflection #3

I attended the University of Leicester, England in the Spring 2008 semester. I really did not know what to expect of the experience as I had not met anyone who did it and there was little to no information on the internet about study abroad programs or experiences there. I chose the program because it was an exchange so I would still be paying in-state tuition as money was a big factor in determining whether I could study abroad or not. After looking at the exchange options JMU offers, I decided Leicester was the most fitting to my needs.

As a German minor, I really would have preferred to study abroad in a German-speaking country. However, after looking over the courses available at Leicester (you could take any courses they offer) I realized I would still be able to work on my German minor while I was there. It actually seems like their German department is more extensive than that of JMU. They offer a broad range of classes in many topics and the great thing is you are not limited because they are all taught in English anyway! I had some initial courses approved at JMU before I left but once I got there, I ended up choosing completely different ones.

Arriving in London was kind of daunting because they hadn't given us much direction about where and when to meet. I luckily saw someone with a Leicester guide so I knew they must be in the same crowd. I however was the only one from JMU! We waited for a few hours at the airport for everyone to arrive and then took a coach bus to Leicester. Of course everyone was kind of uneasy and nervous at first but all was well in no time!

The American exchange students did not all live together as one would expect. We had the choice of living in catered or non-catered accommodations. Ninety-nine percent of us chose catered but we still did not live in the same buildings. I lived in Beaumont Hall which is a hall-style accommodation right next to a lovely botanical garden. My floor consisted of about one-third American students and two-thirds British students. It was a two-floor dorm where girls live on the second floor and guys on the first (although the first floor is considered zero in Europe). It was definitely daunting to arrive because they just kind of threw us in our room and said to meet up later that night.

Everyone was really friendly and immediately introduced themselves but it was still hard to brush off the feeling of homesickness right off the bat.

The catered halls offer breakfast until 10 and dinner between 5:30 and 7:00. It was very limiting compared to the ease and variety offered at JMU but we adjusted quickly. Everyone goes to dinner together and you sit in a Harry-Potter style dining hall. The food was honestly kind of disgusting and there was not a lot of variety. The breakfast was very English—fried eggs, sausage, etc. Not being a huge fan of that, I was kind of annoyed with the lack of variety. Not only that, they only served hot breakfast until 9 when no one was ever awake!

Signing up for classes was a GRUELING process. Apparently Leicester still lives in ancient times and does not have online registration. Basically you had to get a form signed for each class you are taking by the head of the department (they had certain times you could go to each one). Half the time the teacher was not available or there was some kind of difficulty with the schedule or class. I ended up taking completely different classes than the ones I originally intended for. Their credit system is also different—they have 10 or 20 credit classes. Ten credit classes equate to three U.S. credits and 20 credit classes are 5 U.S. credits. Most people took 3 20 credit classes but I took 3 10 credit classes and one 20 credit class. Everyone was really stressed about the process at first and there was a lot of running around campus to get things done. Eventually it all comes together though.

England has a completely different style of schooling. They focus more on individual learning than class time. I took 4 classes but I only had a few hours of class time per week. The exchange students also do not take final exams or any tests or quizzes! Most students had to do a few essays but it was a lot easier than taking a few tests per class. They are also very lax and accommodating with exchange students in general, which was really nice.

The British are definitely really into partying. We went out at least 3-4 times per week. The funny thing is we would go to the Student Center on campus to “go out.” They had 1 big dance/club style place and one big bar. It was strange to go back on campus at night to go out. However, it was nice because the drinks are cheaper and everyone went to the same place. I’m sure you will be introduced to Strongbow, an alcoholic cider, within days of being there (so delicious). Also, it was strange because they went out more during the week than the weekend. Thursday and Saturday nights were considered calm/quiet nights.

Another great part of Leicester was we got a five week Spring break. This was what I really considered to be the “study abroad” portion of the semester because I don’t find England to have too much culture compared to America. Since it was kind of a pain to do weekend trips, most people saved their travels for the Spring break. Definitely get a Eurail pass! If you want to do weekend trips, use Ryanair or book train tickets FAR in advance to avoid hiked up fees. I didn’t realize they had a few trips organized for study

abroad students to places within England and also Edinburgh, Scotland which were a great deal and I was really bummed to miss out on them.

Overall, Leicester was a good experience. Try to make friends with as many people as possible at the beginning and you will be fine. It can be tough the first week, but it turns out to be a lot of fun and definitely worth your while. Make sure you save enough spending money beforehand because the Pound and Euro are killer on the wallet. Other than that, have a great experience and enjoy the more laid-back schooling in England. Also, travel as much as possible. Even if you have to go somewhere alone, it is so worth it to be able to experience all the different cultures available!

University of Leicester, England
Fall 2008
Reflection #4

I spent the last semester studying abroad as an exchange student at the University of Leicester in England. Overall, it was an incredible experience, and the highlight of my time so far in college. I would highly encourage other JMU students to study abroad here. However, it is important to go into the experience with a positive attitude. Be open-minded, and accept that things are not done the same in Britain as in the States; this is precisely why students want to study abroad.

I had been to Britain previously, and I visited a friend who did her degree abroad in England, so I had a good idea of what to expect. I cannot say that I experience culture shock of any kind, but it did take me a long time to grow accustomed to the university food. At the University of Leicester, with your meal plan you can only eat at your assigned dining facility nearby your house of residence. You are given breakfast, which I rarely went to because it was served at obscenely early hours and was a disgusting “traditional” English fry up, and dinner. At dinner, you only have two or three choices, and generally none of them are all that appetizing. However, after a few weeks I grew somewhat used to the food, and I even found myself enjoying the curry and baked potato nights. I often made trips to the nearby ASDA, (the British Walmart) for cheap food.\

I lived in Highgrove House in Oadby, which is a student housing area about three miles from campus. It is worth either buying a semester Arriva bus pass, or depending how often you plan on using the bus, a 10 trip pass. My house was a beautiful, older house, and the room that I shared with my roommate had a back door that opened up to a garden. I liked all the girls that I lived with, but my only major complaint about the exchange program is that there was a huge separation between the foreign students and British students. In my house, there was something like 14 Americans and 2 British students. Naturally, this made it hard to meet British students. Some of my English friends in Leicester told me that at university British students never share rooms, which I wish I had known when I was choosing my accommodation. All British students choose single rooms, and the exchange students I met that lived in the “blocks”, which consisted of single rooms, got to know many more British students than I did.

Leicester is a good-sized city in the Midlands of England. It is close to Birmingham, Nottingham, and Coventry, and only a few hours from London. Leicester

has a cool town center with a shopping center called Highcross with some great stores. I would also recommend trying out the local pubs like the Loaded Dog and Wetherspoons, which has cheap drinks. The University campus is much much smaller than JMU's; I think that most of it could fit in the Quad, which makes it easy to find your way around.

Classes at the University of Leicester are set up much differently than at James Madison. A British degree is more specialized than an American degree, which is why British students do not have to take general education classes. Also, each British class is generally more work than an American class. I thought that I would have an easy semester with only three classes, but they ended up being a lot of work. However, since you only have anything from one to a couple of grades for each course, I felt like most of the semester I didn't do anything and then a week or two I was frantically pulling all-nighters. In British classes, the professor never assigns only one textbook, but instead you are given a large list of textbooks and essays to browse through in the library. This can be a pain, but it also saves you a lot of money. The British grading scale is also much different than the American grading scale; the best grade, a first, which is considered exceptional, is 70 or higher, then upper second class honours, which is still excellent, second class, which is commendable, and third class, which is satisfactory.

When I was studying abroad in Leicester, the university won the British Times award for university of the year. This is a tremendous honor, and it was obvious how much it meant to the university. Because of this achievement, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited the university. I stood outside at the university campus with a huge crowd of students to see the Queen. It was an awesome experience.

England is a very expensive country, although it is not as bad as it was over the last few years for Americans since the exchange rate has improved. You will want to have a lot of spending money available if you study abroad. British students are really into partying (yes, even more than JMU students.) Many people went out every night between Monday and Friday, which are the big nights to go out. Going out in England can be quite expensive, and most students spent most of their money that way. You definitely should go out at least a few nights to get a taste of their crazy nightlife. However, I was on a pretty strict budget, and I decided that I would rather spend my money traveling than partying, so I didn't go out much compared to most people.

Make sure that you put money aside to travel during your semester abroad. Traveling in Europe is expensive, but worth every penny, and there are plenty of ways to economize. If you plan ahead, you can get cheap fares with Ryanair. Hostelworld is a great website to use for youth hostels, and National Express is the website to use for train and bus travel in Britain. London is only two and a half hours by bus from Leicester, and it is easy to get cheap bus fares there. I went to Britain two weeks before the program started, and traveled to London, York, and Scotland. During the semester, I went to London, Cardiff, Dublin, and Paris, and after the semester I went to Rome, Berlin, and Ireland. The student union organizes some great, cheap weekend trips during the semester, so definitely look into that.

The most important thing that I can stress is how important it is to try to learn about Britain before you leave for Leicester. This will make your adjustment much easier, give you an idea of places that you want to go, and give you an appreciation of the incredible history of this important nation. I know a considerable amount about Britain because I have been there before, and because I am studying European politics, but many

Americans studying at Leicester knew next to nothing about Britain. I do not mean to be snobby, but at times it was embarrassing when Americans I was with did not know who Winston Churchill was or that Wales was not a part of England. Also, if you are interested in politics, you should read a little bit about British politics before you leave and occasionally pick up a British newspaper to read about current events.

If you decide to study abroad at Leicester, you will have a great semester. Make the most of your time abroad, because it goes quickly!

University of Leicester, England

Fall 2008

Reflection #5

My experience in Leicester, England was both mentally and spiritually rewarding. The time away from the United States broadened my horizons on how other people in the world live. I became more aware of the excessive luxury and space I enjoyed living in northern Virginia. England is by no means an impoverished country but there is more focus on the environment and thinking openly about social issues, such as gay marriage. I became more independent and self-sufficient after only 3 months of living in England. Before I left the country I don't think that I would have been able to live on my own. It was even my first time riding alone on an airplane when I flew to London. The experience was overwhelming at first because of all the new people, places, and the popular slang. I remember trying to take the bus to campus and the bus driver asked me where I was going. I told the driver that I was going to campus and he gave me an odd look and asked me if I was going to uni. I kept a journal to keep track of everything that I felt confused about. One of the instances where I felt lost was during my criminology lectures. The professor used a lot of examples from popular British crime cases that I was not aware of. The entire class seemed to always follow and I felt behind a lot of the time. It was especially bad in the criminology course that was meant for second year students. The course was harder and I had to adapt to material that I had taken no preparatory classes in. My living situation was good but at first I did not feel that way. I had an amazing roommate but no one in my house really seemed to go out much. Eventually I made friends who shared common interests but at first it was hard. One thing that I was extremely pleased about was the items I had packed. I only brought one huge suitcase and decided that I would buy another suitcase for when I traveled home. This was the BEST idea ever because I had so much new clothes from shopping that I filled the second suitcase right away. The weather was rainy but mostly beautiful in the mornings. I had a back door that would look out into a garden and an abandoned green house. The mornings in England are indescribable. I have never seen anything like it and there are no words that would do it justice. I would definitely suggest that exchange students bring their running shoes because I forgot and had to have them shipped to me. This brings me to another point, exchange students should remember to bring all their medication and contacts because shipping things to the UK is expensive! My mother sent me a care package of food and snacks and it cost her almost 50 dollars! Other culture shock experiences were the food. I was clueless to what marmite or rhubarb was before I moved to England. It was hard to adapt to the food at first but sooner or later I started to wish for

spaghetti-o's at breakfast (I know it is odd). I would definitely advise students going next semester to just keep an open mind and realize how lucky they are! I feel that the experience has brought me friends that I will have for a lifetime. Two of my best girlfriends live in such different places in the United States. One girl is from California and one is from Ohio and we still talk to each other. I am already thinking about ways to save money to go to England at the end of next summer. Some of my British friends have already invited me even though they have only known me for 3 months! I feel such a strong connection to the rest of the world after traveling so much. The people and the places that I have seen have taught me things that a classroom just cannot. The experience that I had in Europe gave me a new awareness about different cultures, languages, and people. When I travelled to Italy alone it was my first thanksgiving away from my family. I was scared to do a trip alone for five days but I went anyway. It turned out to be the best trip I have ever had because it was something I did by myself. I had to take care of myself and make important decisions every day. I rode on the train for the first time and met Italians who told me about their life in Rome. I made friends travelling who have offered to let me stay at their place if I ever visited again. The opportunities that are presented when you travel in a different country are endless. There is so much out there in the world to learn and to do. I always believed that I could do or be anything I wanted but after my trip I don't just believe, I know.

University of Leicester, England
Fall 2008
Reflection #6

As a study abroad student, I feel that I've been through an experience that is almost hard to put into words. Living England for 3 months taught me a lot about the culture, as well as about myself and how I can cope with being on my own. I feel that there really isn't a whole lot out there aside from being on your own in a foreign country that can teach you so much.

To begin with, I had never really been out of the country. So when I got to England there were really no nerves, but just excitement. I was interested in how they talked, if it was really like it is in the movies, how receptive they would be towards an American who knew next to nothing about them. What I found out pretty quickly was that for the most part they were incredibly friendly to me. Not only were they warm, but they were interested in the American culture. From the get go at Leicester, the British kids knew me as "the American," and made sure to include me in student events.

I expected to meet lots of British kids. But I had absolutely no idea that I'd be meeting people from all across the world. Leicester has such a huge international program that from the very beginning I was meeting Australians, Poles, Germans, Asians, Indians, Canadians, Icelanders, South Americans, etc. You name a country and most likely there were students from there. This was my favorite part of the whole trip. Never had I met so many people from so many different cultures and backgrounds. I really felt a

sense of finally having a world view on things, as we discussed American politics, life in Germany, and what it's really like to live in Croatia, or other countries that I knew nothing about. There were also huge opportunities for me to travel. The other abroad students that I made such good friends with went with me all over Europe. We went to Amsterdam, Belgium, Barcelona, Paris, Prague, and Edinburgh, Scotland. This not to mention all the places we visited in England, such as London, Bath, New Castle, Birmingham, and Salisbury (where King Arthur was buried). I saw places that I'll never forget, and they'll stick with me for the rest of my life.

I really never felt a sense of real homesickness, because the program over there did such a good job at getting all of the students together in ice-breaker activities. The first night I was there they had all the abroad students meet in a bar next to my dorm to play "bar quizzes" which were basically trivia games. Since the pub environment is such a big part of Britain, it was cool to jump right into it like that. There was also a lot of fun in all the different clubs and restaurants they had in Leicester. It was a city that was perfect in size for the abroad student. It was big, but not too big. I got the feel of a metropolitan environment, but never felt lost like I might have if I had studied in London.

The only aspect that I didn't really care for was the fact that I had to write three essays from home which were each 60% of my grade. Since the semester ends with the exam period after Christmas break, I was given essays to do at home. Part of this was extremely hard because one of my classes was on British urban history in the 18th century, and the libraries at home that I had a for research gave me next to nothing compared to the libraries at Leicester. This didn't really seem fair to me. One other thing that seems to be big of a hassle is the fact that I've recently been told by my professor that I didn't turn in one of the essays that I gave right before I left, so in that aspect it's hard to keep in contact with people from another country to sort things out (Luckily I saved copies on my hard drive). But these cons are so minute compared to my whole experience.

I left Leicester feeling like I had gained so much more than average semester would offer. Although it's good to be home, I miss it so much. The friends I made I'll know for the rest of my life, and the experiences I've had I really do feel made me a more well-rounded individual. I would recommend the Leicester abroad experience to anyone, and personally feel like I've had an experience that is unparalleled.

University of Leicester, England
Fall 2008
Reflection #7

Without expectations and without fear I headed to the airport and off on my journey to England. It wasn't until I was lost in Hethrow airport, exhausted, carrying entirely too much luggage, that I realized I was alone, without a phone, and without any clue what I was doing. Trying to figure out whether the past 24 hours counted as two

days or one, I stumbled into a sign that said Leicester University. It was then that I began the most incredible experience of my life.

I relived the experience again and again telling everyone about my travels, the friends I met and the places I visited. I was taken back to my first week, moving into a Leicester dorm, making my way through the city, signing up for classes and marking up my calendar with weekend excursions. Classes were very different than anything I was used to. Instead of multiple quizzes and assignments due throughout the semester, we were assessed on the grades of two 3,000 word papers and a presentation. Lectures were held once a week followed by one tutor session once a week as well. I was very happy with the outcome of my grades and felt that I worked hard to change my learning style and writing style to impress English professors.

After finishing class requirements for the week, I often found myself heading to the airport or bus station to head off for a weekend adventure. My new friends and I became very close, very fast. You learn about people much faster when you spend 24/7 with them. We made plans, found transportation, found food to eat within our budget, and managed to move our way through England, Spain, Ireland, and Scotland. As far as transportation... bus passes for the semester seemed a bit pricey and therefore many of the internationals opted for bike rentals! We had a blast cruising to and from the city and 'uni'. We made due in the rain and managed to make it through two months without paying a single pence for a bus. We did however pay premium for a car rental and made our way up to Scotland the last weekend. So many memories driving through the hills of Scotland... including finding ourselves stranded on the side of the road with a flat tire! To pay for my expenses throughout the semester, I actually applied for and got a job working in the dining hall. I served the other students dinner three nights a week and made enough money to travel on the weekends and bring home many souvenirs. It was well worth the hours wearing a hair net.

Leaving Leicester I found myself mixed with so many emotions. With a week to go, I found myself looking back on my experience in awe; how could it have been three months already? How could I be leaving this place, these people, with the possibility of never coming back, never seeing them again? It's a strange concept to actually live a life, for three months, which will just end. We all grew together, learned a lot about the world and about ourselves, and shared experiences that we will never share with anyone else, only to be followed by our separation. It was something that I had never experienced. Leaving JMU, leaving the U.S., I wasn't leaving never to come back again. I was leaving to come back to the same place, as a different person. Leaving Leicester, we were leaving as different people going back to the lives we left.

For me, there were mixed emotions. My boyfriend (at the time) had made the voyage to England, flown with me to Paris, and to my surprise... proposed! So naturally, with only three weeks left in my semester, my heart was in two places. There was so much in Leicester that I couldn't bear to leave, but at the same time so much waiting for me at home. I remember the feeling that I could never describe. I wanted to fast forward just as much as I wanted to rewind. Those weeks felt like years and like seconds at the same time. As always though, before I knew it... I was home again.

Advice for anyone debating whether or not to go; GO! It may seem like a lot of effort working out details and getting there, but please believe that it is worth it. What I gained through this experience was worth every email, trip to the abroad office, and

minute spent on the internet. Advice for those who have decided to go; GET EXCITED! I would say to you, erase all expectations, go without fear, take risks, put yourself in uncomfortable situations and invest in friendships even though you may never see them again. Be prepared to learn so much about yourself and what you stand for. Your independence and self confidence will be put to the test and strengthened. Be smart about how you spend your money and your time. What are you there for? Don't let others make it what it will be, make it what YOU want it to be. Away from everything comfortable here in the United States, at JMU... you have the freedom to be absolutely YOU, without any boundaries created by others. Be where you will be. I am so excited for you! I wish I was coming!