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Bridging the Cultural Gap between America and England

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Field Notes From Abroad: Bridging the Cultural Gap between America and England

When approaching this assignment, I chose to interview my hall mate Rob Walker. He is a first year biology student who is originally from Nottingham. I found through our interview that there are major differences regarding our education system that I did not expect. Generally, American students are encouraged to go off to college straight from high school to ensure that there isn't a lapse in education. From Rob's background, and from other hall mates' backgrounds, taking a gap year isn't only normal but encouraged in some respects. English students are encouraged to take some time off from schooling to explore a bit before entering university. From our interview I learned that Rob took a gap year and travelled around Indonesia for six months. Another educational difference I noticed that Rob elaborated on was the first year of university and its weight toward graduation requirements. For most courses, the first year doesn't necessarily count towards a student's graduation. As long as a student passes the minimum course requirements they can move on to the second year of their schooling. I was quite surprised at this difference because it is so dissimilar from what I am used to.

When I asked Rob how he felt about going into the work force after graduating from university, he was confident in his answers and his outlook toward the future, which is different from my own to say the least. I asked him whether he was worried about finding a job in the current economy and he said that he wasn't, and was in fact optimistic about the prospects in the coming years. For an English student they have specialized in their educational field for several years before entering university so they have a more definite path on the careers they would like to pursue after their education. Rob's outlook contrasts greatly with my own because I am worried about finding employment after graduating from Linfield. I am still unsure about which career field to go into, and I am not nearly as confident as Rob. It could be that because American rhetoric has often said that "you can be whatever you want to be," it can be overwhelming for a recent graduate to find their bearings because they have so many options.

While I found several cultural and educational differences between Rob and myself, by the end of the interview-- more often than not -- we found similarities between our cultures, which are not so different from each other. I learned that we have similar tastes in music and food (our mutual love of Muse and Italian food was a bonding moment), we've read similar literature throughout our schooling, and we had a similar appreciation for Quentin Tarantino

films. I was initially apprehensive about travelling abroad because I felt that I would transported to an “alien” part of the world, only to realize that people are people in any part of the world and go through the same basic trials and tribulations as any other person on the planet. Rob still interacts with friends just as I do, as well as worrying about grades on exams or any other menial or not so menial occurrences that happen in life.