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Person to Person in Chile

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Bio Bio, Chile

October 29th, 2019

Chile's Cultural Differences

For this assignment I chose to interview Joaquin, a friend here in Chile who is 19 years old and studies engineering at Pontificia Universidad Católica in Santiago. I started the interview by asking about his life in the University: what his course load is like, whether he works while in school, etc. One of the first things to surprise me was when Joaquin told me that he spends approximately 30 hours each week studying for classes. For one to fully understand my surprise it is helpful to see my point of view on the subject. One big difference about the Chilean education system that I have noticed since arriving here is the class structure and course organization. I quickly realized that class grades are usually based primarily on examination with the occasional presentation or project. For this reason it at first seemed to me that the course load was much lighter on the students. What Joaquin helped me to realize in this interview is that the course load is, in fact, not lighter, just alternatively dispersed. While students' grades rely primarily on tests, they spend a great deal of time (such as 30 hours a week) doing independent studies to prepare for these exams, often reading outside texts and related non-class materials. I discovered another big surprise when I asked him about his classes/electives. Unlike the United States, the Chilean education system is much more career-oriented, that is to say, that once one picks an area of study there is little varying from it. Joaquin, who is on a 6-year degree plan in his engineering career, takes essentially the same

classes as all other engineering students at his school, all of which oriented specifically towards engineering and developing the skills necessary to make a good engineer. This is a huge difference when considering the variety of classes one takes in a liberal arts school such as Linfield. Additionally, it was explained to me that once one picks a career (which must be done when entering the University), there isn't really much that they can do to change it -- with the exception of starting over from the beginning, an obviously daunting task.

Another cultural difference I discovered while interviewing Joaquin occurred when I asked him if he worked a job (part or full time) while in school (a not so foreign concept to those of us in the US, myself included), to which he told me no. He also explained that it is not extremely common here in Chile to work while in school. While this was a clear cultural difference for me, it makes sense not to mix 30-hour study weeks with 30-hour work weeks. In spite of the vast array of differences I discovered throughout my interview there were also some distinct similarities. For example, Joaquin was quick to tell me that when he does have free time he enjoys getting to know new places, spending time with friends and going to parties, all of which I think are very similar to pastimes of the average US college student.

The final part of the interview that I would like to discuss here and believe to be a very important topic of the interview, are the current socio-political events that have taken place over the last several weeks here in Chile. I asked Joaquin how he felt about the protests, both in terms of the mechanisms and reasonings. He explained to me how he felt that the protests were good for society and a positive change for Chile. He fully supports the peaceful protests and marches that are taking place but believes that the destruction, rioting, looting, etc. is not

the best way to evoke change. These answers resonated strongly with my own personal beliefs on the subject, and I think it is important to keep this in mind when viewing a country from an external standpoint. Overall, being in Chile and conducting this interview has had a significant change on my perceptions of Chile and the US; specifically, it has helped me to realize that change is not easy and watching the international news is not sufficient for understanding global problems and events (although it does not hurt). On a separate topic, this interview also helped me to more strongly understand and form my perceptions of both Chile and the US on a cultural level. It has helped me to see the cultural differences and view each country in terms of their own cultural values rather than through my personal cultural lenses. Understanding Chile's collectivism is important to understanding why the majority of Chilean students live at home with their parents rather than in dorms, a concept I would never understand through the individualistic lens of the US.