



An ancient Chinese proverb says, “A closed mind is like a closed book: just a block of wood”. As technology enables an interconnected world, it is ever more perilous to have a narrow-minded, arrogant view about the world. America’s competitiveness in a global market is dependent on our generation to stay on the band wagon or get left behind. Spending 14,000 minutes of my life on a tour to China would provide me with an invaluable experience, heightening my communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills through conversations with international students and increased global awareness. This tour will equip me with the necessary background to pursue opportunities in high school and college, from Model United Nations to paths in international relations.

Sitting in class, my thoughts often frequent to students in other countries ... “What are they like?”, “What is their school life like?”, “What about home life?”, “What’s their social norm?” Dreaming about a life outside of the Rio Grande Valley (or ‘the Valley’ as we often refer to it) has become commonplace for me. I live in an impoverished area; my school ranking among the top FARM (Free and Reduced Meals) schools in the nation. To the students at my school travel is considered a luxury, almost an impossibility, focusing instead on basic necessities, like food. Questions about other countries are left unanswered, replaced with questions of pending high school graduations and life after. Because of this, our thoughts rarely travel outside of the Valley borders. If you would have told me a few years ago how ignorant we were of the world, I wouldn’t have believed you. Fortunately, a few extremely significant circumstances in my life have changed my perspective pertaining to global awareness.

The first person to inspire me to think beyond our tight-knit community was my sister, Emily. Emily is the third child out of four, the third to go to college, but the first to travel beyond the borders of Texas. As she began her college search outside of Texas, my thoughts of pursuing a higher education beyond the Valley walls traveled with her. Initially, I thought that going anywhere but the University of Texas Pan American, the university 20 minutes from my home, was a lofty, unattainable goal. Yet, my sister laid the foundation of my future; she took a step where none of my brothers before her dared to go because of financial issues. Emily made what we thought was purely visionary into reality, by gaining financial aid and scholarships through hard work in the course of her high school career. She became my role model; I now strive not only to “fill her shoes” but to exceed her. Through



determination and relentless pursuit, I watched my grades skyrocket, only hoping to follow her lead. My sister, Emily, who currently attends the University of Pennsylvania, once said to me, “When I got to college, I thought I would be the smartest one there, since I was valedictorian in high school. Oh boy was I wrong. In college, practically everyone was a valedictorian. Not only that, those high schools were above and beyond PSJA North.” She made me question myself: “If I think I’m smart, but outside the Valley are ions of more knowledgeable people out there. What am I doing?” She encouraged me to travel to Pennsylvania and New York. I was able to experience some of the history of the places I visited that I had only previously read about in textbooks. Through these experiences I gained a broader perspective, however, I still knew nothing of the people I was going to compete against in the future. That is, until I joined the first ever Model United Nations team in the Valley.

“Umm... Ms. Wilson, I want to get out of M.U.N.” I would inform her, often. “Why?” Ms. Wilson would inquire. “Cause I have to raise a lot of money and I don’t think I can do it. Plus, I really don’t think I am suited for debate.” I rebutted. “No way. You are NOT giving up” She scoffed. Convincing me with a charismatic push for opportunities outside of the Valley, I was able to raise the money to go to Washington D.C. after a great deal of effort. Asking local businesses for monetary donations helped me build my speaking skills. Selling potato and egg breakfast tacos for a dollar helped me slowly in my quest to experience the world. It also helped develop the business skills I thought I never had, sparking an interest in an area besides science. Eventually, I made it to NAIMUN (North American Invitational Model United Nations) conference, the largest Model United Nations conference in the Western Hemisphere. At this conference I would be competing against student delegates from other high schools nationally and internationally to collaborate our ideas in hopes of solving global issues. In my committee, I represented the country of Mexico helping to define humanitarian aid and strengthen laws on terrorism. Working with students from around the world, including delegates from China, Japan, Kuwait, and Nigeria, we were able to pass multiple “resolutions” to these pressing issues. This was a great learning experience in many aspects. I was able to stare in awe at the gargantuan, Lincoln Memorial and marvel at the simple beauty of the Washington Monument that I had only seen in pictures. Nothing could prepare me for the sheer magnitude of the gloriousness of it all. I was also able to witness firsthand the gulf that separated me from other students around the world. Therefore, not only did I stare in awe at the Lincoln Memorial, but I stared in awe at the stu-



dents that came from Lincoln Memorial High School and their ostentatious manner of speaking. This experience, however, didn't encourage me to say, "I'm stupid. What's the point of trying anymore?", instead it fueled my academic competitive edge. Finally, conversing with students from different countries sparked my curiosity of diverse cultures. These brief encounters showed me the impact of education on a global scale. Through these experiences, I have confirmed the importance of building international relationships in efforts to solve problems worldwide. Hopefully travelling to China this summer, I will strengthen my skills for future Model United Nations conferences and for possible careers in international politics.

Going to China this summer, I will benefit in multiple ways. First, I will observe the culture and hopefully add to my inquisitive thirst for global awareness. I hope to engage in the many unique aspects of Chinese daily life. Second, through these observations, I will undoubtedly add to my already existing knowledge of Chinese history. By witnessing history firsthand, I will take the leap beyond the pages of a textbook, and delve into an experience only achieved through actual interactions. Third, my interactions with internationally diverse students will allow my limited global perspective to expand. These conversations with students from around the world will help prepare me for the competitive arena in college and beyond. I will gain valuable speaking and listening skills needed to succeed in life. Last, but not least, this trip to China will fuel my already existent "travel-bug" syndrome, and hopefully push me to explore more countries and cultures. Most importantly, I will gain a broader insight of other lifestyles, thus, exposing me to a customs a far cry from my Mexican heritage.

Ms. Santiago, my Environmental Science teacher, quoted an old student of hers, "I've been told before that people from the Valley are so narrow-minded and ignorant, but I didn't believe it before until I went to college. There I'm not only competing with people from my own community but with the whole world. What I've learned in 6 months of M.I.T., is beyond what I've learned in 4 years of high school." Taking these words to heart, I fully understand the necessity of global awareness. This trip to China will close this educational gap and push me to broaden my horizons. I am ecstatic to engage in such an opportunity, knowing it will bring a plethora of benefits to my education. This unique endeavor will set me up for success in my immediate and long term future. I sincerely hope you consider me for the Global Citizen Scholarship Program.