*Introduction*

Reflecting on my time in the Master of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), I realize what an incredible and unique experience I sought and was allowed to pursue. As such, this essay will 1) analyze how global studies was the foundation of my Masters degree; 2) reflect on my semester studying abroad at Malmö University; 3) examine how my MAS 610, 620, and 630 classes have pushed me to explore and delve into numerous understandings of contemporary topics; 4) explain the importance of incorporating outside electives into my program of study; and 5) ponder how this Masters degree has shaped my personal and professional goals and passions.

*Foundation of My Program*

One of the main reasons I applied to the MAAS program was my belief that it would be an excellent continuation of my undergraduate degree in International and Global Studies (also from UNCG, Spring 2018). As I have always had a passion for global topics (e.g., traveling, languages, cultures), I knew that I wanted to hone in on global themes for my Masters degree. As graduate degrees are meant to be an advancement in a specialized field, I made global studies my own personal and intellectual specialized field, which ended up being the foundation for all of my classes. As a result, I made sure that each of my classes (both at UNCG and abroad) had some global component. This program was exactly what I was looking for as I have succeeded in fulfilling my specialized field ‘mission’ by investigating topics ranging from human rights violations from around the world (MAS 620 – Topics: Global Human Rights) to how various diseases affect all ages regardless of socio-economic status around the world (HEA 620 – Global Health Issues). Moreover, my appreciation for this program led me to apply for the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate (PBC) in Global Studies. I not only believe that pursuing this certificate will help me professionally, but I know that the efforts taken to finish this certificate (and this program) pushed me intellectually, personally, and emotionally.

*Studying Abroad at Malmö University – Sweden*

During my undergraduate degree at UNCG, I was fortunate to study abroad for the Spring 2017 semester at the University of Hull in England. One of the things I learned about myself from this experience is that I like to be placed out of my comfort zone so I knew I wanted to participate in a study abroad program again; this time in a country where I did not know the language – Sweden. While most Masters programs do not necessarily promote studying abroad, almost all prevent its students from studying abroad the first semester. Fortunately, my program did not restrict me from studying abroad my first semester (Fall 2018) at Malmö University in Sweden. Although studying abroad during my first semester of graduate school was difficult, it was *the* most rewarding experience of my graduate education. If it were up to me, I would make at least some form of study abroad a requirement for all students as I believe it opens one’s eyes to new ideas, experiences, and ways of thinking. One surprising and remarkable event was attending a presentation by the 14th Dalai Lama (photos listed below). Beyond the great friendships and relationships that I made, I was inspired to create my blog *Travels With Molly* (link listed below) the day that I left for Sweden, where I wrote about my time studying in Europe and gave tips and tricks for traveling, and some of my favorite places to travel. While I do not think I will blog professionally, creating this website was a great outlet that I would not have started had I not been given the chance to study abroad for the second time.

*MAS 610*

For my one and only MAS 610 class, I chose MAS 610 – Topics: The Contemporary World with Dr. Jeff Jones for the Summer 2019 semester. Throughout the class, students were introduced to a multitude of views on how the world was shaped post World War II. Not only did we analyze the world through the more ‘typical’ concepts/world events such as the Cold War, communism, and decolonization, but the class introduced me to events that I had not previously known. For example, before this course, I knew very little about Yugoslavia and the war which eventually divided the former country. Discussion Board 4 (listed in Past Works ‘MAS 610’ Portfolio Subpage), illustrated the role media can play in depicting conflicts like the Bosnian genocide. Moreover, I was surprised to learn that numerous media outlets had to retract their ‘facts’ on multiple occasions about the mass graves. This further demonstrated to me the sheer power and influence the media has over our interpretations of events as this can be the only source of information for many people. Luckily, there are some media sources (e.g., Susan Woodward on the war in the former Yugoslavia) who are considered reliable and ‘less biased’. Upon reflection of this discussion board, I have made an extra effort (personally, professionally, and academically) to check who my sources are to see 1) how much of a bias is involved and 2) if they are reputable. Overall, this class demonstrated how the world we live in today was constructed by a multitude of events in the past and how, no matter how ‘small’ an event seemed, it played a role in the framing of our modern world.

*MAS 620*

Throughout my graduate career, I was able to take four MAS 620 classes – 1) MAS 620 Topics: Global and Intercultural Engagement, 2) MAS 620 – Topics: Global Human Rights, 3) MAS 620 – Topics: Global Economy, and 4) Topics: Dangerous Minds: Terrorism. While I will only touch on three of these MAS 620 classes, each course challenged my initial interpretation of what ‘global’ meant. My first introduction to graduate classes at UNCG were MAS 620 – Topics: Global and Intercultural Engagement and MAS 620 – Topics: Global Human Rights with Dr. Carrie Levesque for the Spring 2019 semester. Personally, I am glad that I paired these two classes together as they acted as complementary courses because I was immediately struck by the importance of global human rights. Even though I had examined what human rights are, human rights abuses, and the importance of maintaining human rights, these courses gave “me the knowledge and skills to go from being a thinker to a doer” (Carter, 2019a - listed in Past Works ‘MAS 620’ Portfolio Subpage). Take, for instance, MAS 620 – Topics: Global and Intercultural Engagement which taught me how be involved in global change processes by being a change agent, meaning that I would advocate for communities, learn ways to become a better ally, and practice being an ally (Carter, 2019a). On a similar note, one of the elements that I really enjoyed about MAS 620 – Topics: Global Human Rights was participating in ‘expeditions’ where we, the students, would pretend to go to a certain county/region of the world and write a report explaining our findings and what our recommendations would be. When I was writing Training Expedition #2 Report for Afghanistan (listed in Past Works ‘MAS 620’ Portfolio Subpage), I was able to investigate female suicide in Afghanistan in a drastically different manner than if I were just reciting statistics from a textbook. I think that these activities were very powerful as they brought a more personal and ‘real-life’ element to the course when we had to ‘act’ it out - determine if a human rights abuse took place and why, if and what efforts had been taken to rectify the situation, and were there any recommendations that could be made.

As to my other MAS 620 class, MAS 620 – Topics: Global Economy with Dr. Jeff Sarbaum for the Fall 2019 semester, I was introduced to a new and equally influential global topic – global economics. As I do not have a strong economics background, I was nervous going into this class. Now that I have wrapped up my final MAS 620 class, I am happy to state that this course was one of my absolute favorites. One of the enjoyable facets was Professor Sarbaum’s insistence on focusing on class discussions. While this can sometimes be difficult in an online setting, I think it turned out very well. For instance, in Unit 5’s discussion (listed in Past Works ‘MAS 620’ Portfolio Subpage) on whether or not the world should consider switching back to a fixed exchange rate system, students were able to collaborate together to work out questions, state their opinions, and generally work together on influential modern questions. Before this course, I did not understand what exactly a ‘fixed exchange rate system’ actually encompassed, but now, while I am not an expert, I believe that I can take a stronger, more-educated stance on the subject. Furthermore, as I continued through the packed seven-week course, my mind, examining some of the most critical and controversial topics in modern politics, was opened in ways I had not thought possible. Discussions like these showed how even complex questions such as ‘should the US return back to a particular economic system?’, can be answered in a variety of ways.

*MAS 630*

As I finish up my final semester, there is no better class to wrap up my graduate education – MAS 630 – Revolution and Revolutioners in Science with Dr. Robert Miller. As a course which asks its students to question - ‘what is science?’, ‘why do we trust it?’, and ‘how has science developed over time?’, I have learned a tremendous amount, even in such a short time. Through our first unit essay (listed in Past Works ‘MAS 630’ Portfolio Subpage), I have already considered how science has developed and changed over time. Moreover, this essay encouraged me to consider how important having various interpretations of a topic can be. While this course is focused on science, I thought about how all aspects of my courses could also be impacted. If we lived in a world where we thought we had all of the answers, then no one would likely strive for anything better as we would have already achieved this goal. However, like this unit essay, individuals strove for more. Whether this be because Plato thought that humans “will never truly know what force led to the creation of the universe” (Carter, 2019b) or because we determined that global human rights should be upheld, countless individuals have aimed for more.

*Outside Works (Electives)*

While my first semester of graduate school differs from most graduate students, I was not only able to gain a tremendous amount of knowledge personally from studying abroad in Sweden, but I also was pushed academically. Before attending Malmö University, I was not aware of the expanse of the migration system in Europe, especially Sweden. Thankfully my two classes – International Migration, Inclusion, and Exclusion and Identity and Ethnicity in a Global Community,introduced me to new and important concepts that affect millions of individuals daily. It was through both courses that I was able to learn more about what migration is like in Europe. As an American, I had a general idea about what migration encompassed, but it morphed into something else when I was placed in a classroom in Sweden surrounded by some students who were migrants or asylum seekers themselves. During the first course - International Migration, Inclusion, and Exclusion, elaborated upon through Essay 1 (listed in Past Works ‘Outside Works’ Portfolio Subpage), I learned how women account for almost half of all migrants. This fact surprised me as migration has usually been presented to me as something men or families do, not women on their own. Furthermore, this demonstrated to me that we have a long way to go when studying migration, as there are often false misconceptions associated with the topic.

Similarly, in the second course, Identity and Ethnicity in a Global Community, our theory in practice presented another perspective on migration. Through a practice mini-thesis, I was able to theorize a model considering whether Mexican nationals would remain engaged in the US labor market based upon their evaluation of whether coming into the US had been a positive or negative investment. While this MAAS program does not have a thesis, it was interesting to see how a Swedish university, with a program taught in English, would want a migration thesis to be constructed. Finally, the only elective course taught in-person at UNCG’s campus was HEA 640 – Global Health Issues with Dr. Sharon Morrison for the Spring 2019 semester. A wide variety of health issues that impact not only the developing but also the developed world, were presented. Through discussions with classmates, we were able to acquire a more complex understanding of how global health impacts the world and how the global community responds (e.g., UN Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals). One way that I got involved in unpacking the complex world of global health issues came through my case study on tobacco use in Poland. Through this case study, I was able to do a virtual presentation (listed in Past Works ‘Outside Works’ Portfolio Subpage) and led our class in a discussion on Poland’s tobacco use. As a result of completing this presentation, I learned a tremendous amount about how something as simple as an incentive can dramatically change millions of people’s lives. This shows that major changes can take place, it just takes a lot of planning, time, effort, and money.

*Conclusion*

Looking back on this Masters degree as a whole, this program has transformed my outlook on global studies. My personal study abroad experiences supports my pursuit of a profession that continues to educate and challenge me. The classes and overall experience of this program challenged me to grow academically; I can see a dramatic improvement in my writing ability from even my senior year of my undergraduate education. I feel more independent and am excited to take on new challenges. Thank you for allowing me to participate in this program, for which I will be forever grateful. Thank you.

Works Cited

Carter, M. (2019a). Final Reflection Paper.

Carter, M. (2019b). Unit 1 Essay: Comparing Timaeus and Myths, 2019.