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Honors post- Enrichment Award Report  
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For the month of July this summer, I had the privilege of studying abroad in both Copenhagen, Denmark and Athens, Greece - in part thanks to my generous Honors Enrichment Award. The title of my class was “Tasting Culture: Nordic and Mediterranean Food, Tradition, and Nutrition.” I chose this course because it is related to my Food Science and Nutrition Major, and is also inclusive of diverse topics such as food systems, anthropology, history, etymology, psychology, and overall cultural comparisons of these varied topics. It is important for my Nutrition education to not only be one founded in science, but also enhanced by the more anthropological and emotional spheres of food as they relate to our lives.

One of the ways this program contributed to my education was changing the way I think of myself as a consumer of food, products, and history -- as well as the language I use in relation to these variables. We were constantly told at restaurants, markets, and museums to unpack the meaning of words and phrases that we use so often, we have lost our connection to them; it wasn't until I was asked to define “traditional” or “authentic” that I realized these can often be meaningless marketing tools instead of indicators of history and quality. “Commensality,” or the act of sharing a meal also became an important word for me and my experience with food and nutrition; the primary way I experienced culture and made friends in my travels was by breaking bread.

Sharing meals in these countries and a wide range of cities, farms, and coastal or mountain villages, I was able to expand my knowledge of diets and lifestyle culture through direct participation and comparison. Nordic cuisine -- especially the more recently popular “New Nordic” back-to-nature movement -- emphasizes locality, old family recipes, and organic vegetable-focused dishes. Denmark also has an even greater variety of diet-friendly options than I have seen in U.S. cities like New York - with vegan, gluten-free, and paleo options abundant even in such places as 7-Eleven. Greece on the other hand strives for simplicity, in both the ingredients, their low heat cooking methods, and their emphasis on nationalistic cuisine like their legally won brand in Feta or Kalamata olives. Experiencing the ways in which food can become symbolic, but can also contribute to the core identity of a person’s health, has improved my understanding of nutrition. I have a new appreciation for the research behind the effectiveness of the Mediterranean diet, and have also witnessed and tasted the emotional effects of this delicious food.

One of the most enlightening aspects of my journey was witnessing first-hand the reality that people’s relationships with food can be problematic. So many of my classmates confessed their current or former struggles with indulging in food -- an issue that seemed especially daunting in a class focused on the exploration of foreign cuisine. Even friends I met who were locals to either Denmark or Greece lamented their extreme diets or unhealthy habits. The silver lining of realizing just how many of us grapple with nutrition is that it made me even more sure of my desire to become a dietitian. My conversations with people reinforced to me the

importance of being a nutritionist - not only to teach people what foods to eat for physical benefits, but how to have a healthy emotional relationship with food.

