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Intercultural Engagement Exploration Essay

Intercultural engagement is one of the many things an individual can do to grow and mature individually. This competency area provides honors students with opportunities to develop a wide set of skills, recognize current experiences, and determine areas they can improve on individually.

The competency area, to me, has two sides. On one hand as a student, I will be branching out to understand a culture that is not my own and learning to appreciate the differences. On the other hand, I will also be looking inward in my own life to understand privilege, my personal social identity, and self-reflect. While meeting this competency I will be developing skills such as awareness, flexibility, and respect. Awareness of my own identity is important to recognize privilege and be able to *accurately and appropriately* compare my own cultural identity to others. Flexibility will allow me to keep an open mind and seek experiences even if they may be uncomfortable. Lastly, respect is a basic standard when exploring culture. Respect ensures that I do my best to appreciate the cultural differences and not look down on them.

I can recognize intercultural engagement experiences in my everyday life. Most simply, by being a student at MSU and on a diverse campus, I can interact with cultures different from my own. I have had opportunities to talk to international students, learn about diverse student organizations, and get a glimpse into cultural events on campus. Through talking with international students, it is interesting to learn about different societal norms and practices. For example, something that seems simple like what

to wear, can vary greatly across cultures. Conversations like this have taught me that I should not assume that my ideas tied to culture, and society are 'normal'. This is important in the future for me to keep a more open mind and strive to learn first, before I assume anything. In the future I will also know not to look down on something that may seem different to me, because to someone else my 'different' is their 'normal'.

Although I feel I have grown within this competency area already, I can continue to grow in the future. I feel as though I have only cracked the surface, as culture is something that has many layers. I know that culture is something that cannot be fully understood in just one conversation. In order to develop my understanding more, I would have to experience culture firsthand, and more. To understand a specific culture more closely I could perhaps participate in one of their traditions or adopt one of their everyday practices. To go even deeper into differences in culture I would also have to put myself in a situation where I am in the minority. Being in the minority is something that I have not had to experience much at all. If I were in this situation, I would be able to better understand how minority populations may feel on an everyday basis. I could see how I am treated differently and better understand oppression, even if it is subconscious. These would deepen my understanding of the importance of keeping an open mind in the future.

Cultural differences are something that can never be universally understood. However, I believe that what makes someone interculturally engaged is their desire to understand and respect others' culture. Simple maturity and respect can go a long way for a society that is interculturally engaged.