

## Episode 2: “Study Abroad Helped My Career”

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[ANNOUNCER, MUSIC UNDER]

*“This program is a production the Rutgers Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs.”*

[MUSIC UP FULL]

[OPEN MONTAGE OF SOTS FROM TV SHOW, MUSIC UNDER]

*“Rutgers’ vision//globalized world//international learning//unique opportunities//global health//study abroad//expand my horizons.”*

[MUSIC UP FULL]

[HOST PRITA SINHA, MUSIC UNDER]

*“This is... Rutgers Around the World— a finger on the pulse of all things global at Rutgers.”*

[MUSIC STINGS]

**HOST:** Hi I’m Prita Sinha, Rutgers senior and host of the podcast Rutgers Around the World. Welcome! On this episode we look at how a single study abroad experience can open up a world of possibilities for some students. Our next guest is one of those students. Vanessa Herrera is a junior majoring in social work at Rutgers, and she says she had a life changing experience when she studies abroad in Merida, Mexico in the winter of 2016. Vanessa is here to share that experience with us. Vanessa, thank you so much for joining us.

**VANESSA HERRERA:** Thank you for having me!

**HOST:** So, Vanessa, you told me earlier that this study abroad experience changed your life. In fact, I hear that a lot from students. What I want to know is how has it changed you? Are you more efficient, more fluent in Spanish, smarter, what was it?

**VANESSA HERRERA:** Well, there has definitely been a lot of levels of changes that occurred from my study abroad trip. One of those happens to be the ability for me to be confident in my work in social work, to be sure that it is something that I want to explore even more as a career. I want to become empowered through social work. I feel that this opportunity to go abroad definitely solidified that. I think on a personal level it has allowed me to become more confident in myself and being able to travel to a country. And going and travelling alone definitely has a boost of confidence for me that I don’t think any other experience can give that to me. I feel that it has definitely encouraged me to keep in touch with the country. To be updated on current events, to be able to have the ability to go back and then explore the people, be part of a population. It’s definitely rewarding and I think it has definitely changed me in those ways.

**HOST:** You’re a social work student, and you told me that study abroad directed you towards a specific career path in your field. How did that happen?

**VANESSA HERRERA:** In winter of 2016 while we were abroad, as the program unfolded we came to the realization that we were in dire need of a translator for the program. So I kind of volunteered to be the translator for the program for our stay there. The directors of the School of Social Work were part of the program as well. So when we returned to the United States a couple of months later they reached out to me. They sent me an email saying that they were very happy with the work that I have done and they asked me if I was interested in actually going back and being a translator for the program and also being a program assistant. So that has definitely unfolded some great opportunities for me. On a different angle, the opportunity to go abroad in the winter of 2016 also kind of opened this door for me that allowed me to go into international education while still being a social work student. So, now I'm kind of focusing on both social work and international education and how international programs can enrich the social work field.

**HOST:** So have you had any job offers or clear paths to employment as a direct result of your study abroad experience?

**VANESSA HERRERA:** Definitely! One of those opportunities was actually to go back in the winter of 2017 as a translator for the program. I've also been offered the opportunity to do an independent study with a director of international social work for the School of Social Work. So, these are all opportunities that have opened since that one trip to Mexico.

**HOST:** You've probably had many memorable interactions while you were in Mexico. But can you tell us about a definitive moment that you remember.

**VANESSA HERRERA:** So, part of the program in Merida, Mexico, is doing field work visits to different social and humanitarian agencies. However, we also have a trip to a Maya village called San Jose Oriente which we do the second Saturday in the program. In this visit to the Maya community, we go and interact with the Maya teenagers along with the university students and the study abroad students. I remember my first visit there in the winter of 2016, I elected to do the workshop of making tortillas with the teenagers of this community. And they all take part in this program voluntarily.

So, we met each other, and we were walking to their house where we were going to make the tortillas, and as we were walking there, one of the girls—her name was Lizzy, and she had an MP3 player with her—was listening to music, and she had no earphones on and then we were all walking as a group with her and more teenagers. She was listening to a Britney Spears song, which she then asked me in Spanish if I could translate it from English, but her friends also wanted to know and they spoke Maya. So, it was a very interesting moment because I was translating from English to Spanish, and then the Spanish was being translated into Maya—and we were all able to communicate, and we laughed at different moments, but we all ended up laughing at one point or another, which was very great.

**HOST:** And what would you tell another student who is considering study abroad?

**VANESSA HERRERA:** I think I'll have them know that study abroad is a life changing experience. I think it is important to plan early to make sure that resources and traveling and expenses are all kind of accounted for very early in the game in order to have that good study abroad experience. I will also tell the student not to be discouraged.

For example, for me on my first trip, I was very hesitant to go because I did not know if I financially could afford it. However, I think I practiced some good self-advocacy, which is very important when going into study abroad. It's the ability to say, "I need help. I need these resources for me to accomplish something greater." I think there are a lot of opportunities for a lot of different people and a lot of majors and a lot of economic backgrounds, ages. I feel that there is a study abroad program open for anyone.

**HOST:** Well Vanessa thank you for sharing your experiences with us today.

**VANESSA HERRERA:** Thank you for having me.

**HOST:** That was Vanessa Herrera, a junior at Rutgers majoring in social work. Like Vanessa, you too can study abroad and have a transformative experience. The deadline for Fall 2017 Study Abroad is March 1<sup>st</sup> and there is still plenty of time to apply for winter 2018 and spring 2018. Go to [global.rutgers.edu](http://global.rutgers.edu) for more information. That's all for this episode of *Rutgers Around the World*. Join us next time as we discuss all things global with members of the Rutgers community.

Thanks for listening!

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