

# Deliverable 4: Experience Abroad Reflection

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## Introduction

When I told friends at home that my university was sending me to Indonesia for six weeks, their responses were polite but muted. To them, the experience carried less weight than if I had said, “I’m going on vacation in Bali.” In Canada, the assumption is that students sometimes study abroad, but the idea of a funded leadership project doesn’t inspire the same kind of awe. In Indonesia, however, the reaction was completely different.

Time and again, whether I was with interns, NGO co-workers, or community members, I was met with surprise—and often admiration—when I explained that my presence wasn’t for tourism, but part of a *university program*. These conversations were among the most meaningful of my LiA, because they illuminated not only cultural differences in how experiences are valued, but also the privilege I carry as someone whose university creates opportunities like this.

## The Conversations That Stayed With Me

I remember one particular moment with an Indonesian intern. She asked casually if I was “on holiday,” and when I explained that I was doing a leadership project through my university, her jaw literally dropped. She said something like, “Wow, that must be incredible—our universities never give chances like that.” It wasn’t said with bitterness, but with genuine wonder.

Similar moments came up in classrooms, at coral sites, and even in cafes. Each time, I was reminded of how *rare* this experience was for students in Indonesia. While Bali is filled with international tourists, it was explained to me that very few Indonesian students have access to international education opportunities, and even fewer have the resources to travel for academic work. To them, my being there symbolized something beyond leisure; education crossing borders.

## Cultural Competency in Practice

These conversations helped me understand cultural humility in a new way. Before arriving, I assumed I might stand out as a foreigner—but I didn’t anticipate that *why* I was there would matter so much. In Canada, studying abroad is sometimes framed as optional, even indulgent. In Indonesia, it was seen as a privilege that carried responsibility.

What struck me was the **contrast of value systems**:

- In Canada, “vacation” was seen as exciting; “university program abroad” was met with polite curiosity.
- In Indonesia, “vacation” was ordinary (something every tourist is doing), but “university program abroad” was inspiring, almost aspirational.

This contrast pushed me to examine my own assumptions. I realized how often I downplay academic opportunities back home, seeing them as part of the system I move through. But in Indonesia, people reminded me not to take them for granted.

## **Gratitude and Responsibility**

Their awe also brought me face-to-face with my own privilege. I didn’t earn this opportunity because of wealth or connections; I earned it through the Laidlaw Scholars Programme. But the fact that such programs even exist at my university is a marker of global inequality.

I felt a mix of gratitude and responsibility. Gratitude, because the experience truly was life-changing: it gave me a front-row seat to the ways education and conservation intersect in different cultural contexts. Responsibility, because I realized that I am accountable not just to myself or to Laidlaw, but to the communities that reminded me of how rare and valuable this experience was.

These moments shifted my leadership lens. Leadership isn’t just about what you do in the moment—it’s also about what you carry forward. For me, that means honoring the opportunity by sharing the stories, insights, and skills I gained in ways that make a difference, not just letting them fade as a personal adventure.

## **Building Global Awareness**

I often thought about how these interactions highlighted structural differences between universities. In Canada, we talk about “international experiences” as résumé builders. In Indonesia, people spoke to me about them as near-impossible dreams. That gap matters. It shapes who gets access to knowledge, networks, and leadership pathways.

As a result, I came away with a stronger sense of global citizenship. I want to use my education and leadership development not just for personal advancement but to help close those gaps, whether through collaborative research, equitable partnerships, or amplifying access to immersive education.

## **Conclusion**

My Experience Abroad Reflection isn't just about my time staying in Indonesia—it's about the conversations that revealed the meaning of my being there. Each time someone expressed awe at the fact that I was in Bali not as a tourist, but as a student, I was reminded of the privilege of access and the responsibility it creates.

In Canada, people saw my experience as less glamorous than a vacation. In Indonesia, people saw it as extraordinary. Both perspectives shaped my understanding, but it was the Indonesian reactions that touched me most. They reminded me to never take opportunities like this for granted, and to channel my gratitude into meaningful leadership.

Going forward, I want to carry those moments into every space I enter. I want to lead with humility, recognizing privilege. I want to create pathways for others to access similar opportunities. And I want to live in a way that justifies the awe and hope I saw reflected back to me in those conversations.