

Laura Sofia Cordero Jaimes

2020

Changes, whether we are expecting them or not, are one of the most important factors that help us grow as individuals in society. Like many other students around the world, a year ago I was preparing myself to begin what would be the beginning of my “adult” life. Since I can remember, I have always wanted to be a doctor. I remember when I was around 7 people would ask me what I wanted to be when I grew up, and I would respond without hesitation, I am going to be a neurosurgeon because I love my brain. I still have no idea where I learned what a neurosurgeon was, but it sure made me sound very smart. Nowadays, I still want to be a doctor, but I realized I most enjoy spending my time with kids and taking care of them, so if anyone asks right now I would say, when I grow up I want to be a pediatric surgeon.

There is no doubt that to be a doctor, one must make many sacrifices to get the best education possible and to grow as a student, and even more as a person. I grew up in a mid-size city in Colombia, and as you may have heard we as Latinos are very proud of our culture, but it is not a secret that opportunities to succeed in college and professional life are fewer than in first world countries. So, of course, when I talked to my parents about the opportunity to come and study in the US and they said there was a chance that could work, I dived in and took a chance for my future. I had everything to be accepted in most institutions to which I wanted to apply but the only factor that was narrowing my options was the financial proof I had to show to be admitted. My dad was able to get some bank statements that staff at SFCC accepted and I was ready to come to the US and start my journey.

In my mind, I knew there was a huge change coming up for me, I was not going to be at home anymore, I was going to get out of my comfort zone and challenge myself in the communication and socialization in a country I had never been just by myself. I knew that was going to happen and I was expecting this change with arms open. I knew that the feeling of discomfort was going to push me out of my box, and it was going to help me to get to know myself better. I am not saying that staying at home and starting college in my home country would not have brought the same knowledge and experience, but my point is that we, as humans are adaptative machines, our brain is programmed to adapt to challenging situations and learn better and quicker from situations of pressure and discomfort.

Then, 2020 brought a different change, one that probably no one in the world was expecting, the Covid-19 pandemic. While trying to get ready for every wrong possible outcome starting my college education in the US never in my mind, I thought I was going to get through a world pandemic without my family. This year has been full of surprises and unexpected outcomes that now, looking back to all that has happened in this year have built me as a completely different person than who I was before all of this. I know it is very common to hear that studying abroad will bring you new perspectives and it will change you. I sure heard that from many companies advertising exchange programs, and there is so much truth in this! Scientifically, neuroscientists state that a part of our brain cells handle cognitive flexibility, which is our ability to adjust to new environments and concepts, and we can train these brain cells to adapt faster and behave better in new environments if we are constantly trying new things. Those are general reasons why I believe international education in these times can help me to succeed as a professional. But here is probably one of the main reasons why I decided to stay in the US and keep gaining an international education in the middle of a pandemic, even when I had the chance to got back home and study

there. About 3 months ago, before starting my second quarter at the community college, I found myself in the emergency room due to severe abdominal pain that turned out to be appendicitis. That was my first experience as an 18-year-old in an emergency room, and in surgery and, recovery by myself. I was extremely scared, because I was alone, and because I had no idea how much money everything was going to cost, also because the pain was intense. That night I was admitted to the hospital, and I had to wait until the next day for the doctor to perform the surgery. It was around 3 am, and one of the nurses came to my room, I still cannot remember her name, due to all the pain killers I was on. I remember I was worried, and about to cry, I could not sleep and she just looked at me and said, everything is going to be ok, I know everything seems to be falling apart in the world, and you might feel like you are alone in here, but you are not, we are going to take care of you; then I fell asleep. That helped me realize that even when everything seems to be falling, you must adjust your perspective. There is always a bright place in the picture, even in other people's realities, just like that nurse made me feel you can be the bright place in someone else's picture. This was an experience that I am sure I would have not been able to live if I would have been in my home country surrounded by family. When we get out of our comfort zone, we learn new things, and we see different perspectives of things. Gaining an international education, more than knowledge also gives us a certain understanding of other people's reality. This last one is specifically an important one when it comes to looking forward to professional education in the health field. More than helping the patient with medical problems, emotional support and care are very important.

I think that gaining an international education while living through a pandemic, can be categorized in both expected and unexpected changes that help us to adapt better to new situations. I want to be able to help people that find themselves in situations that they were not expecting nor

prepared for, specifically in situations like health where a physician plays an important part in the patient's peace and security. Thus, getting an international education while living through a pandemic will help me to train those brain cells that are going to be crucial in my future professional career.