**Entry 1 (July 7, 2017- before trip)**

My excitement to serve the children at the National Children’s Hospital in Costa Rica is unmeasurable. I fly out of Omaha, Nebraska, at 6 a.m. on Sunday and I am filled with many emotions, including nervousness, happiness, and anxiousness. It has always been a dream of mine to travel out of the United States and medically assist individuals in a foreign country. The fact that I get to help and interact with children makes this experience that much better, for I have been a nanny for four years now and I absolutely love the joy and free spirit found in these young humans.

The National Children’s Hospital in Costa Rica serves children under the age of twelve with any serious medical conditions that require them to be hospitalized for extended periods of time, such as cancer, heart diseases, serious surgeries, and other related illnesses. As a child, I have personally experienced medical complications caused by the gastrointestinal illness called Celiac Disease and have spent many nights at several hospitals. My parents could not always be with me due to work and responsibilities with my other siblings. Because of this, I can empathize with the children to a certain degree, for many of these young ones are going through a severe illness alone. Since my main job as a high schooler was babysitting, I have also had several opportunities taking care of children, even during their illnesses. I understand how to talk with children, make unfortunate circumstances fun, and interact with their playful selves.

While I am volunteering at the hospital these two weeks, I hope to gain more insight on interacting with children of a different country and culture. Although I have worked with children on numerous occasions, I am always immersed in the American culture, whereas during this service learning experience I will be surrounded by the Spanish language and culture. It may take some time to adjust and learn some of the customs practiced by these people, but I believe it will be a great opportunity to broaden my global citizen mindset. I hope to increase my Spanish communication skills, learn the religious, government, food, music, etc. culture of the people in Costa Rica, and positively impact the children’s lives with my smile and contagious attitude.

**Entry 2 (July 10, 2017)**

After arriving in Costa Rica yesterday, I soon realized this trip was not going to be easy but would require perserverance and confidence. Having never been out of the country before, I was very overwhelmed with being alone, not being familiar with my surroundings or the people, and being a minority in a rather populated city. My Spanish speaking and listening skills are not great, which adds even more stress to the situation since I cannot always understand what people are speaking around me or to me. It makes me empathize with foreign individuals residing in the United States who are trying to learn English, for it truly does take a lot of practice and effort and can be an intimidating process. I believe individuals who study or volunteer abroad should be given credit for the amount of time and dedication it takes to learn a second language and understand the culture in which one is experiencing because it is a difficult and frightening process in my mind.

On Sunday, I had the entire day to myself in a hostel for my host parents were not picking me up until Monday morning. After getting settled into the hostel and taking a needed nap, I decided to go explore the city by myself. Afterwards, I learned this was not the brightest idea for I received many stares, an attempted robbery of my phone, and an overwhelming sensation of insecurity. Nonetheless, I visited many Catholic churches and shops along the several popular streets in San Jose, like Avenue 4. I was greatly immersed in the Costa Rican culture during this time. The beautiful, exquisite churches I entered were filled with numerous people adoring the Lord by sitting before Him in silence and prayer. There were statue-like figures of Jesus that could be kneeled before in the back of the church, which I have never seen before in the Catholic churches I have visited. The streets were paved and blocked off to traffic, so people were literally running everywhere. Along the sides of the stores, there were numerous individuals trying to sell their own items, such as food, clothing, or phone accessories. All one can hear is the yelling of the sellers and loud traditional Spanish music playing from every direction. Curious on what it would be like within the stores, I checked out an appealing clothing store. Although the clothes seemed quite typical of American style, the service I received was quite strange. An employee of the store followed my every move by walking behind me the entire time. Despite no feelings of danger, I thought it was a bit different to be monitored within a store without the employee asking questions or being helpful in the process. During this outing, I also learned that my bubbly, smiling self would rarely receive a smile in return. I cannot claim the reasoning behind this, but it made me feel vulnerable yet more motivated to know the ways of these people.

This morning, my host parents, Alice and Edgar, came to my hostel and I began the adventure of getting to know them, their family, and their house. I was very thankful that my host father knew a tad bit of English and that they both were very patient with my communication abilities. I soon discovered they have two dogs, two granddaughters that live upstairs with their daughter, a son living in the room across from me, and another volunteer, Autumn, from the United States also living with them. Autumn has been so kind in helping me with my transition into this new home and assisting me in any way possible. My highlight of the day was sitting down and watching the news with my host father with his hilarious sense of humor and consuming the delicious homemade meals, such as white rice, fried chicken, and baked platanos prepared by my host mother. So far, I have felt very comfortable in their beautiful, organized home and am eager to continue to build my relationship with them and the rest of their family. I believe I have already demonstrated awareness of my culture as well as the Costa Rican culture through these interactions with the numerous people in the street and my own host family.

**Entry 3 (July 12, 2017)**

Today was my official first day volunteering at the National Children’s Hospital in San Jose, and I completely believe I am blessed to have this opportunity. I received information about my responsibilities from a group of about ten women called the “red ladies,” due to their outfits being completely red and all the volunteers being women. These ladies are the primary volunteers of the hospital that help with the children daily while also performing other tasks such as registration and related paper work. Their commitment to this non-paying job is overwhelmingly beautiful and astonishing. I was terrified when I first met these women, for they spoke Spanish very rapidly and appeared very professional and intelligent. Thankfully, they were very nice and spoke slow and clear for me so I could understand the instructions and become familiar with the hospital. I learned that my assignment is to spend time with the children by playing games, taking them on walks, entertaining them with conversation, and feeding and holding the babies. It is as simple as walking into one of the rooms, asking the nurse what patient could use some company, and being a friend to this child.

The setting and arrangement of this hospital is different than what I am used to in the United States. Like most medical centers, the clinic is connected to the hospital, which often causes confusion with directions and locations of certain places. I will be spending most of my time in the hospital where children who have undergone surgery or/and have serious illnesses are staying and only work in the clinic if requested. The hospital is where things appeared distinctive to me. Each of the five floors has two or three units/rooms along a lengthy hallway that is open to the outdoors. Every unit is home to a specific type of medical treatment, such as surgery, endocrinology, neonatology, etc. Walking into an individual unit, one can find the reception desk in front and a hallway going in both directions that is filled with doors to more rooms. These little rooms hold about five to ten children, depending on its size. Therefore, no child has a room to themselves but rather shares a larger room with no bathroom and little to no privacy. There is no air conditioning, no fans, and the children’s beds are like metal cages so they can barely move and cannot get out of the bed without assistance. The parents have hard chairs with no arm or back supports. Within each room is a faucet where it is necessary for each individual to wash his or her hands before contacting the children. Overall, the hospital is clean and very safe, but extremely crowded with no personal space for the patients.

I came on this trip thinking that I would positively change the lives of the children, but I already know that I will leave with an even greater impact. The children are going through so much pain and overpowering sadness and anxiety, but they remain to have a smile on their face and recall the beautiful gift of being alive through their jokes, hugs, and genuine conversations. One particular interaction that stands out to me the most today was playing with a little three-year-old girl that suffers from cancer. Her smile was so bright and big that it could easily change anyone’s mood in an instant. We played Legos and Barbie’s, and despite it being so simple, I could tell that she appreciated company and someone to laugh with for a little part of her day.

My low knowledge of speaking and comprehending Spanish has already proved to be a barrier, for I cannot always understand the children or have things to say in return. This honestly makes me sad for I want to be of help to these wonderful humans, so I am motivated to practice the language with my host family and apps on my phone. I am excited to continue on this journey and learn more about others and myself.

**Journal 4 (July 14, 2017)**

These past two days, I have been extremely busy at the hospital playing games with little children and holding and feeding the babies. Because of this, I am usually exhausted in the afternoon and spend my free time watching the news and talking with my host parents or reading a book in my room. I have learned several things throughout this week in Costa Rica and working at the hospital, and I can confidently say I am becoming more comfortable in my surroundings and feeling confident with talking to others and accepting that mistakes will happen. Despite my Spanish needing some work, it is reassuring that everyone takes the time to listen to me and use nonverbal communication, such as pointing, hand gestures, or facial expressions, to get their message across.

Throughout my time at the hospital, I have taken fascination in the communication and practice of the medical team in performing treatment to the young children. As of what I can tell, the doctors, specialists, surgeons, and head nurse make their rounds to the patients in both early morning and mid-afternoon. The nurses, dressed in all white, constantly run around each room trying to monitor and chart at least five patients at once. The parents are often the ones taking care of the child, such as feeding, bathing, and providing comforting, while the nurses are mainly there to give medicine and be present if an emergency happens. They appear to be more busy charting than being available to the patients, for I have noticed many babies alone crying endlessly and not receiving any help. This is why I believe my position along with the other volunteers is so important. We are another set of eyes, ears, and arms that can love these children and assist them when their parents cannot for whatever reason. I have realized through conversations and interactions with several parents that they are stressed and in need of God’s grace, yet are the kindest and most caring people I have met in this country. It is remarkable for me to see that the people that have gone through the lowest of lows are often the ones who appreciate life and its blessings the most.

Being alone is a big fear of mine, so I knew by coming on this trip alone that I would get the opportunity to tackle this obstacle. The first two days were hard for I was transitioning into a new country, home, parents, job, and co-workers. But God always provides, and I believe I am blessed with the best people and place to experience another culture and achieve personal growth. My host dad and I have connected the most so far. Since day one, he has always cracked jokes, joyfully tease me, and ask me to join him on his own little adventures, like walking to the supermarket or watching soccer on television. I have learned that parenting in Costa Rica is very similar to the United States, because laughter, fun, and love are at its backbone. My student co-workers are amazing and most of them speak English, which makes me feel a little bit more at home. What is really crazy is that I met a volunteer from South Dakota (my hometown) and another from Minnesota. It is such a small, beautiful world we live in! I am delighted in how such a different place can make me feel so much at home and in peace, for we are all humans, no matter our background, and desire to live a meaningful, enjoyable life.

**Journal 5 (July 15, 2017)**

Today was my first day to adventure outside of San Jose and visit the coast of the country. The other student volunteer staying at the same house as I decided she wanted to go on a one-day tour to Tortuga Island, and I was definitely down for exploring the ocean and beautiful countryside. We traveled with the company called Calypso Cruise and our day consisted of many adventures and delicious foods. My favorite part of the experience was soaking up the sun and meeting several people from the United States who were in Costa Rica to build houses, medically treat the sick, and spread the word of God. It is outstanding to see people wanting to make a difference and realizing that my desires to change the world are very common and realistic with the help of many people like these I encountered.

After a two-hour bus ride to Puntarenas, we were welcomed by the Calypso Cruise members with a satisfying breakfast consisting of scrambled eggs, rice and beans, bread, platanos, watermelon, and pineapple. Once all eighty-five people who were a part of this cruise had finished eating, we boarded a boat that had two little pools, an inside bar, and plenty of deck space. The boat ride took about an hour and a half, but time flew by for the beautiful scenery of mountains and smaller islands were strikingly gorgeous and their history was astonishing. For instance, one of the islands is home to about twenty-five families who permanently live there and receive their education in an electricity-powered school. Another island, San Lucas Island, had the largest prison in Costa Rican history that held some of the worst criminals in the country until it shut down in 1991. Now, the island is rehabilitated as a wildlife refuge and popular tourist location. Once reaching Tortuga Island, we had the opportunity to go snorkeling. Although I struggled with salt water entering my eyes and mouth frequently, it was amazing to see the diverse fish and take part in such a fun activity. Dinner was then served, which consisted of an appetizer, salads, entrée, and dessert. The appetizer was something I have never tried before, ceviche (raw fish) with corn chips. The salads were a noodle salad, a regular lettuce salad with vinaigrette dressing, and a cucumber salad with ranch and other spices. My favorite part of the meal was the entrée that consisted of grilled chicken covered with barbeque sauce, fried onions and peppers, and white rice. Throughout my week here in Costa Rica, I have realized that rice and beans are truly the country’s most favorite and popular food. Dessert was a piece of lemon cake with whip cream. After stuffing our faces full of great, authentic Costa Rican food, my friend and I laid out on the beach and people-watched. There was several individuals swimming in the ocean, playing beach volleyball, kayaking, and day drinking, which appears to be very prominent in tourist locations. Later on, I went banana boating, which is basically sitting on a tube and being pulled behind a fishing type boat. After this, we had to pack up and head home. My favorite part of this adventure was the boat ride home, for we got to see several dolphins swimming and playing in the water. Nature is so cool!

Being a tourist for the day was fun but very exhausting. Like most countries, Costa Rica knows how to have fun and get a little crazy, which was very evident in some individuals at the beach. The tour guides, crew members, and employees of the island almost all spoke English and were extremely kind and patient with the many people they had to assist. It was wonderful to see so people come together to enjoy the beauty and simplicity of life.

**Journal 6 (July 16, 2017)**

Today is the first whole Sunday that I got to be in the country and discover how the Sabbath is spent by the citizens of this city and my own host family. I found that Costa Rica and the United States spend this holy day very similar by both attending church (mainly Catholic in Costa Rica), eating a large brunch/lunch that includes breakfast foods like eggs and fruit, and relaxing and watching television or being outside in the sun the rest of the day. According to my family, though, there are many individuals who choose not to be religious or attend church services but rather continue with their everyday lives and fail to recognize the importance of God and family on this valuable day. I would have to say this is also the attitude of quite a proportion of individuals within the United States, for many people do not take the time to rest, praise God, and be with loved ones during the hectic week and overall crazy life. Because I cherish my religion and faith, I decided to attend a Costa Rican Catholic mass spoken entirely in Spanish (which was the highlight of my day) and then watch sporting events on television with my family and rest for the remaining part of the day.

There were several similarities and differences between the Catholic mass I attended in Costa Rica and mass at my home parish. The events and order of mass were exactly the same, with the most crucial part of the mass, the Eucharist, being after the readings and before the final prayer. A thorough, detailed homily was given by the priest that provoked thinking and reflection in one’s own life. Worship music was played at the appropriate times, but included a guitar, drums, and numerous singers that is unlike my church at home that only has an organ and one singer. The biggest barrier and difference between the masses was the language being spoken, with Spanish in the Costa Rican church and English in my hometown church. This was a powerful obstacle for me, because I couldn’t always make out what was being said during the readings or homily because of the rapid talking. A dog walking through the church several times and no one seeming surprised was the strangest event. Also, there was no kneeling before Jesus in the Eucharist, which is a practice carried out in the churches of the United States to respect and subordinate ourselves before our Lord. After the final prayer when the priest was existing the church, the congregation heavily applauded instead of singing a song in rejoice to God. Lastly, there was a lot of talking before, during, and after mass within the church, which is not very common in churches back home for it is known as a time of reverence of God. Overall, the mass was executed the same way as within the churches I have visited in the states with little but possibly significant differences, but the person who matters the most, our Lord Savior, was most definitely present as He is back home.

Although these differences exist, I remind myself there is no right or wrong. I am keeping an open mind and realizing that every culture has their own way of doing things and that doesn’t make them any better or worse than the next culture. It is quite interesting and enjoyable to be immersed in the Costa Rican culture and experience life from a different perspective. I am grateful to be surrounded by such welcoming people and a comfortable home to learn and grow in my global citizen mindset, for I believe I am being greatly impacted by my time in the city and the hospital with the many observations and interactions I encounter daily.

**Journal 7 (July 18, 2017)**

Now that I have been staying with and surrounded by my host family for a good week, I thought it would be an appropriate time to reflect on my experiences and thoughts with this great opportunity. Alice, my host mother, and Edgar, my host father, are great people who apparently love to have students from the United States live with them, for I am the tenth American student to be a part of their family. They are both in their mid-50s, have a 30-year-old son that lives across the hall from me, and a daughter that lives upstairs with her husband and two little girls. Alice and Edgar do not have official jobs, but they take care of their granddaughters and earn money through hosting students. Their day to day schedule would look something like this: waking up at 6 a.m. to get ready for the day, cooking breakfast for their host students, driving their granddaughters to school (the school year runs from February-December in Costa Rica), hanging out in the afternoon (most likely “resting,” as they would say) until their granddaughters are finished with school and then take over babysitting until the parents get off work, cooking dinner, and then watching television, mainly sporting events like soccer, and chatting until they head to bed around 9 p.m. This may sound like a pretty easygoing day, but for mid-aged individuals, it keeps them plenty busy and entertained. From what I have observed, they are very well-liked by their neighbors and have several friends who call regularly to catch up on life. They have been very generous in opening their house to me, make me laugh daily by their jokes and teasing, and spoil me with delicious food, often including some form of chicken, rice, fruit, and a salad. I can tell they also like me, for they often ask me to do favors with special gratitude, vent to me about the other student, and give me daily hugs. It is a blessing to have such a wonderful second family. I have a strong feeling that I will be in contact with Alice and Edgar frequently when I return to the United States and continue forward with my education and personal life.

My work at the hospital has also been going very well. I feel a bit more experienced with talking to the nurses and parents, handling the babies, and understanding the needs and wants of the children. I made a connection with a little one-year-old last Wednesday, and since then I have gone into her room (shared with three other babies) and played, fed, and cuddled with her for about one to two hours every day. Fortunately, she got discharged from the hospital today for her little body was much healthier. I cannot believe it, but it was bittersweet for me to say goodbye, for I felt like we had a mutual benefit; I would give her company and love while she would provide me with joy and gratitude for the simplicity of life. I believe part of the reason my volunteer experience is going so well is that I love children and helping them in any way possible with an optimistic attitude, which makes a difference in how I view my work and enjoy the gifts the children grant me without any effort. It still remains hard for me to see such small humans in so much pain and hooked up to several machines with wires coming in every direction from their bodies, but it also strengths my appreciation for the advancement of medicine and good health. If I could bring everyone in the world with me to this hospital, I believe our world would be changed in an instant due to the beauty, peace, and happiness emitted from these children even in their darkest trials.

**Journal 8 (July 20, 2017)**

It is crazy to think that tomorrow will be my last day volunteering at the National Children’s Hospital in Costa Rica. I have truly been touched by this experience, and although I may not have helped the children tremendously, I was someone they could smile, cuddle, and find comfort in. The children I spent the most time with were the tiny babies in the endocrinology unit and children of various ages in the oncology unit. Being with the babies was quite easy, for it required little communication and lots of snuggles with the cutest little beings. Because I wouldn’t have to talk to these children, I would often listen to the conversations of the parents and join in if I could understand what was being said. I know my Spanish isn’t great, but I thought this was a wonderful way to practice my listening and speaking skills. Spending time with children in the oncology unit was by far the hardest thing I have ever done. Seeing kids with no hair, vomiting because of their chemotherapy, and going through so much pain that is often incurable is heartbreaking. Cancer is a horrible disease that I would never wish upon anyone, but it is even worse to see children who have barely experienced life to be suffering from this nightmare. Holding and playing with children in this unit made me realize how blessed I am to be healthy and have a properly functioning body. My appreciation for the things I possess has greatly increased throughout this experience.

Since I started volunteering last Wednesday, I have learned many new things about the leadership and practices within the hospital. For starters, I now know that the medical team (about 5-7 people) that comes to each room for rounds consists of a head doctor, one or two specialized doctors, one or two residents, and the head nurse. They all work together to form a successful plan of treatment and are necessary for the operation of the hospital. In my opinion, it seems to be mass chaos for the rooms are very small already and adding five or seven more people creates little personal space for the parents and children. I believe it would be more beneficial if the medical team all did their rounds separately, or assign someone different each day, and then discuss together what steps need to be taken to treat the patient. But, I am not expert and this idea is purely based off observation. I have also noticed the nurses seem to provide little care to the children or assistance to the parents, which breaks my heart for I believe it their job to be supporters and caregivers. It is often very difficult for me to get the attention of a nurse, and I frequently feel unappreciated by them for helping them out when I know they are constantly short staffed. Regarding the practices within the hospital, I have realized that a lot of things seem very similar to the United States, such as sanitation, confidentiality, and providing medicines and treatment through IVs, but important distinctions do exist. In my opinion, the biggest difference lies in the fact that after a child undergoes an orthopedic surgery, such as of an arm or leg, his or her limb is placed in a large metal apparatus that prevents movement. I have never seen something like this before, for in the states the rods/screws are within the bone(s) and a cast usually covers the limb. I am positive there is reasoning behind the apparatus, even if that reasoning consists of less advancement in surgery and technology within this hospital or country. The other main difference I have noticed is that the children urinate within small metal cups found underneath their cage-like beds, for there is often no bathroom, or possibly one personal bathroom, on the entire floor. Overall, the kids are being treated very well in this hospital and receive love from their parents and the many volunteers with kind hearts to give their time to these children. In return, I am being greatly loved by these amazing, strong children and reminded daily that life is a valuable gift.

**Journal 9 (July 22, 2017)**

My time in Costa Rica is sadly ending, but I could not be more grateful for this experience and all it entailed. Working at the Children’s Hospital was a dream come true, for children are my best friends, the hospital is my favorite setting to work in, and helping others is my favorite hobby. Having a wonderful, caring, kind host family was also very fun, and it forced me to practice my Spanish language and directly interact with a typical family of the Costa Rican culture. The authentic food, exploration of many shops, churches, and parks in San Jose, and the visits to popular tourist locations along the coast of the country was so rewarding. I often felt like a minority or “outsider” in this country, which was unusual for me but interesting to realize that the world holds more than just Midwesterners from the United States. This planet is such a beautiful, remarkable place to explore, and I am excited to continue to grow in my global mindset by traveling to many other countries, specifically Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

Since today was my last day in Costa Rica, I decided to make the most out of it and go on a one-day tour hosted by the popular company Desafio that included ziplining in the forest canopy at the bottom of the famous Arenal Volcano and relaxing and swimming in a hotel resort with natural and hot springs. To say I enjoyed this experience would be a huge understatement. Ziplining was by far my favorite, for it brought such an adrenaline rush and many gorgeous sights. The young men running the canopy tour were very nice but flirty, which I have concluded is a norm in this country to flirt with “pretty” girls from the United States. I felt safe and played along with it, but if I wasn’t careful, it could lead to danger or insecurity. Being with a group of people, especially from countries other than Costa Rica, always provide safety and comfort. After traveling to the Hotel Lagos Resort and consuming a delicious lunch buffet of fruit, salads, rice, beans, fajitas, tropical juices, and many more appealing foods, I got to sit in the numerous fancy pools and relax on the hot, humid day. What was most interesting about this experience was the diverse number of people from different countries speaking their own language within this resort. During the three hours I was there, I encountered and attempted to visit with individuals from Costa Rica and other Latin American countries, England, France, Germany, Denmark, and the United States. Most of them spoke some at least some English, but it was also a great way to practice my Spanish for I had no fear of judgement. It was fascinating to listen to others speak different a language that is no better or worse than the only language I know and am fluent in.

To see many people from around the world in one central location is something I will always remember. The fact that everyone got along and were more than willing to interact despite our differences shows that world peace is possible if everyone obtains the mindset that we are more similar than we are different. I have realized that although cultural differences exist in this world, we are all human beings and it should be celebrated that we get the chance to be together. Living in such a closed world all my life until I came to college, I didn’t know it was possible to meet and actually talk with those who looked or sounded different than me. But in all reality, it has been such a blessing for me to learn that my ways aren’t always the best ways and I can make long-lasting friendships with individuals from all over the world. In the end, we are all living for something greater than ourselves even if that looks different from person to person and should be enjoying our lives that are too short to not explore what has been given to us.

**Journal 10 (July 24, 2017)**

I have never realized the truth in the saying “there is no place like home” until I arrived at my house in small town South Dakota after being abroad for two weeks. I didn’t long for home too much while I was gone, but more missed the people and luxuries, like air conditioning, warm water, and a safe environment, that are found within my community. For this journal, I want to reflect on how my Honors competencies developed within these two weeks in Costa Rica. I believe I have achieved great personal growth and obtained a new mindset with perceiving and learning about my culture and the Spanish culture through my numerous experiences and people I encountered.

My leadership teams competency has grown by observing and participating in the practices of the medical team at the National Children’s Hospital. The general doctors are the leaders of the team with making the executive decisions but they could not do this without the specialized doctors providing their input and the nurses contributing their accurate notes from their charting and interactions with the patients. Parents are also a vital part of this group, for they are the ones taking care of their children, questioning any decisions made by the medical team, and loving their little human to their best ability. The presence and help of volunteers, like the official “red ladies” and students like myself, are also critical to comfort, feed, and be a mother to children without guardians. Although the volunteers do not get paid and may be looked down up because of their status, they are essential for showing optimism and affection in the trials faced at this hospital. Finally, the residents, or “doctors in training” according to the Costa Rican people, are important to ensure this hospital will continue to have doctors in the future and are another eye, ear, and brain to catch anything mysterious in the status and treatment plan for the patients. Together, everyone works together to increase the health of the patients and work towards the goal of allowing them to go home. Overall, the medical teams in this hospital are very similar to most hospitals within the United States, with possible exception to heavy reliance on volunteers and parents, for nurse aids are often present to carry out this task within the states.

The competency most focused on during this service learning experience was global citizenship due to the fact that I was in another country and immersed in their culture and language. My self-awareness of the American culture was put into perspective when I interacted with my host family and everyday people within the city of San Jose. I realized that differences of ways of life is what makes this world so beautiful and fun to live in. For example, the Costa Rican practices of consuming large amounts of rice, attending Catholic mass every Sunday, and having no military is no better or worse than the foods, religion, and form of defense within the United States. Each country is functioning and still surviving. What I have realized most about my own culture is that Americans tend to put ourselves on a pedestal and think we are better than everyone else and our ways are the only correct way to live. This is nowhere near the truth and only creates closed mindsets and extreme egoism that harms individuals and the country. My knowledge and understanding of the Spanish culture increased from conversations and activities, such as watching the news, with my host dad, observing the practices of the hospital, conversations with Uber drivers and individuals on the city buses, and my experiences of attending church and visiting the coast of the country. Finally, my Spanish communication ability has greatly developed through being in an environment where most everybody speaks the language with little to no knowledge of English. Hand gestures and facial expressions became more necessary than I knew they could ever be. I also appreciate those who are bilingual and realize the importance of learning a second language for travel, medical, and personal reasons.

It has been such a great opportunity to be in Costa Rica for an entire two weeks. I believe I have advanced through the competencies but still have room for tremendous growth. Learning more about other cultures through events on campus, interactions with diverse students and community members, and more traveling experiences is vital to becoming a global citizen and appreciating the diversity of human beings. After all, learning is a gift that never ends and gives purpose to our crazy lives.