

“Leaving home in a sense involves a kind of second birth in which we give birth to ourselves.” I will never forget this quote since these were the words my father told me before I left for the United States. Looking back at the past three months I spent at George Mason University as an INTO student, I can clearly resemble my situation to his quote. Till now the entire semester has been an overwhelming experience. I had start from adjusting to new place to learning about different cultures of international students to learn about new education style adopted by the Western world.

Since my undergrad I had started preparing for my Masters education in US by giving GRE and TOEFL side by side education. Since then, I knew the education would be challenging and get exposure of different international cultures and learn from them. For me coming to the US was an academic and personal achievement since no one in my family had been away from home to another country for education. I believe firmly that this decision will take me one step further to my life goals.

Through one of my course – PROV 504, I learnt about the differences in Western and Eastern education. Western education focused more on “learn it by yourself” via research and critical thinking strategies whereas Eastern education focuses more on the mentor disciple relation. None of the information is spoon fed to us. Most of my assignments/projects during my undergrad were not my original work. But at Mason, all my assignments and projects have to be strictly unique and authored by me due to the zero tolerance policy against plagiarism in the US. Initially I felt intimidated because of no knowledge to the work by myself. Since Mason provides a large number of resources such as library, onsite information, academic advisors etc for students, I decided to use them and made progress with my work.

One of the academic component that I had never faced was “Writing a research paper”. This was one of the scariest part of academia which I never wanted to do. However, my perspective about this dreadful component changed within 3 months due to the INTO course – EAP 508. We were initially taught on how to read, annotate and comment on a research paper and organize class discussions to understand everyone’s point of view. After which we were given the task to write our own review of literature in our discipline. The exposure I received from analyzing works of different authors helped me understand the path I need to take to perform an analysis in my discipline. Now I have learnt the best ways to look for sources and analyze sources to include them in my research. I realized that as a grad student this one of the most important skill every student should and contribute their work in future to the academia. I feel both the INTO courses are designed in a beautiful way for international students to get acculturated with the Western education.

I also had two courses from my discipline itself. In CS 530, I learnt a lot about the essential mathematics required to become a Computer Scientist. A lot of theories ranging from sets to probability were introduced to me which initially I had a hard time understanding. But my professor was very helpful to reiterate over the problems with me and make me understand. Above all this, I enjoyed my CS 531 class. The course involved a lot of coding component in C and I learnt a lot about systems programming, threads, inter-process communication and few more concepts of low-level programming.

Apart from academics, I picked up on very different skills that I doubt I would be able to do in my home country. I started to learn cooking first just as survival method, but as time passed by, I started doing a better job at it. I can now cook for me and my roommates. Also, I have learned to travel from one place to another on my own and getting to know around the Washington DC metropolitan area. These skills give me a more sense of independence and a proud feeling that I can live my life on my own.

In conclusion, the past three months at Mason have been the most unique and amazing experience of my life. Apart from developing academic skills such as communication, critical thinking, writing a research paper I also had the opportunity develop personal skills. Altogether, these skills acquired from my learning experiences at Mason and the INTO programs, are helping me reach my goal and fulfill my ambitions to become a good software engineer.