

*Describe your academic achievements (honors and/or degrees received, etc.) and discuss how this experience will further your pursuits (professional, academic, volunteer, etc.)*

While I was in Brazil, I studied applied linguistics at the University of Ceará. I was admitted as a special student, meaning that I couldn't receive a degree from their institution, yet I did excel academically and learned a great deal. I took classes on pragmatics, research on reading and literacy, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, teaching practicum, and Brazilian literature. I scored highly in one of the most difficult courses at the university; I received an A in my Research in Pragmatics class with linguistic professor Laura Tey. I also studied Portuguese at a language school where I received the highest grade possible in the highest level. I was the only foreign student in my classes and one of three at the university. This experience has influenced me in many ways. Professionally, it has reassured and confirmed my decision to be a language teacher. Academically, it has influenced me to further my study of linguistics and education. Volunteering in Brazil has shown me that we can make a difference and positively affect others.

*How has your experience changed your outlook on your host country and sponsor country? How have you contributed to The Rotary Foundation's mission of world understanding and peace?*

Initially I had a very positive outlook on my host country, and I still do, but I couldn't really explain what I liked so much about Brazil; it was just something I felt after being there for a week in 1999 and from talking to Brazilians. After being there I could be more specific in regards to what specifically affected my outlook. The people are the greatest part of Brazil, yet it takes a while to get to know people and make friends. Things take time, and you have to be patient. I had to make an effort to make friends and network, but most of the people that I had met had hearts of gold. Of course, like everywhere, there are people who are dishonest and have bad intentions; I was lucky enough only to meet a few of those people. I hold the Brazilian people in very high esteem. They are very communicative, humble, generous, helpful, insightful, and accepting. Brazil is definitely a country of extremes. The Brazilians that I grew close to were sincerely some of the kindest and caring people I have ever met in my life. When I think of them, I grow humble, and sincerely reevaluate what is important in life. I tried to contribute to the Rotary Foundation's mission of world peace and understanding by avoiding emotionally reasoning when criticized about the U.S. involvement in Iraq. I was constantly bombarded (not necessarily aggressively) by questions about my government and the assumed oppressive nature of the United States. I had to sincerely avoid all emotional reasoning to hear sometimes quite upsetting interpretations of my culture. I never reacted irrationally and many times after getting to know me, people explicitly have told me that I changed their negative perceptions of Americans.

I truly think very highly of my country and my people, and upon returning to the United States, I discovered many things that I appreciated about my country that I hadn't noticed before. I missed the U.S. a lot while I was gone but I was able to get accustomed to Brazilian life without too much difficulty. When I came back, I realized that Americans are misinterpreted a lot by their body language and facial expressions, but here there seems to be a great respect for human life and safety here in the U.S. I was very impressed by the respect Americans show for pedestrians and other drivers. I never thought I would hear myself say that, but I have found that Americans can truly be courteous and respectful. After witnessing another culture I find my country very fair and just. To a certain extent, there is equal opportunity for everyone, here.

*Give specific examples of how you served as an ambassador of goodwill. How did you make a difference in someone else's life? Was there a particular experience that changed your life?*

I served as an ambassador of goodwill by teaching English to working adults in the community near the University of Ceará. The university had a program in which residents of the city could take English classes at night. I taught an advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class for the entire period that I was in Fortaleza, Ceará. After I would finish my courses in the Applied Linguistics Department, I would go to the foreign language department to teach the English class. English is very important in the Northeast of Brazil. If someone can speak English well their life can drastically change. There are many language schools that offer English courses, but they are terribly expensive, and the instructors are not native English speakers. If a Brazilian can speak English, they are extremely marketable. I don't know if I could speak so boldly as to say I made a difference in someone's life. I could say that I made a difference in the way they think of people, especially Americans, but retrospectively I think I did make a difference in my high school students' life. I taught at one of the poorest public schools in the city. When people would learn where I worked, they would tell me directly that I was going to be murdered. They were very wrong. Their misconceptions of their own community led them to ostracize and isolate some very special people. The "favela" where I worked at was less dangerous than some of the prestigious communities that I had visited. The attendance, progress, and diligence of the high school students was exceptional and superseded that of my more economically and socially stable students at the university. I know they will always remember me, and they even told me so. There wasn't one particular experience that changed my life, but I can say that many experiences together changed my life.

*How would you describe Rotary to friends, colleagues, and family? How would you describe the Ambassadorial Scholarship?*

I would describe Rotary as an organization consisting mostly of professionals in business, government, and education who truly want to make the world a better place by taking action. What I truly like about Rotary is that they are very active and take important steps to address real problems. I would say Rotary is an honest and genuine organization that promotes fairness and selflessness. I would say that Rotary is an international organization that has similar goals throughout the world, but each club definitely has their own personality. I would explain to them that the Ambassadorial Scholarship as an amazing program that has goals that are truly beneficial to everyone involved. It is a scholarship in which you request to go to a country where you haven't been to before and you present ways in which you could make efforts to improve a situation. It could be based on health, literacy, poverty, etc. Rotary International will provide the scholar with the funds needed to execute their tasks in that country. It is truly the most amazing scholarship in the world. It is truly incredible.

*What advice or information would you provide to future scholars about living abroad as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar, cultural differences, representing Rotary, and your sponsor and host Rotary Clubs?*

Learn about your country, but avoid information that generalizes or attempts to make broad references about the people. Many times travel books and guides make assumptions about cultures from a trip of a few days or weeks, most of the time their opinions are based on tourist sites they visit and their cultural reference point. It is important to gradually disconnect from your cultural point of views and to not explicitly make contrasts of your culture and the host culture. It is impossible to completely remove yourself from your experiences and culture, but I believe that is important to find a neutral position in which you can be positive and helpful without judging or blaming culture. Think outside the box when it comes to what is normal or expected. Go with the flow and think of the positive strengths that the culture offers and how those strengths can be used as a tool to improve the situation of the people ( in your project) you are working with. Learn from everyone. Everyone has something to offer, and you will be surprised about the extent someone will go to help you; do the same for them. Studying in a foreign country may be a lot different than here. Adjust your style to the setting. Sometimes educational systems abroad may seem disorganized or lacking structure, but your education is not just your classes and the content, but all the processes involved. Classes may start much later than scheduled, and you may not have books. Some things you do not have control of, and you may have to adjust to a much slower pace than you are used to. Don't get frustrated or make cultural generalizations about specific incidents. For example, if you are mugged, it is important to understand that everyone in your host country is not a criminal; that could happen anywhere. It is important not to stereotype. Patience is important. Friendship and positive important interaction may take time. Take the first step, and show people that you are a friendly person who thinks highly of their people and culture. Show them you have interest in their language by making an effort to speak well in their language; this is a way to show respect for their

culture. Avoid presenting stereotypes of your own culture; many of the people you meet will never come to the U.S. Let them learn how Americans are by your selflessness and kindness. Actions speak louder than words. Don't be offended by stereotypes of Americans. American films may be the only view of Americans that your host culture has seen. You may explain that the U.S. is a giant place made up of people from all over the world, and sometimes each city or state seems like a different country. Don't compare their country to other countries you have visited. It could be offensive and perpetuate the stereotype of Americans as people who make broad generalizations. This is especially true in Latin America.

In regards to Rotary in your host country, your host counselor is probably a very busy person with limited time. You may have to be very persistent in regards to obtaining information about clubs and meeting times. It is helpful to meet people at clubs that can also help you. Don't get frustrated or feel offended if people don't seem like they are paying attention at the Rotary Club meetings. Do your best and don't let individual personalities get in the way of your goals and projects. Remember everyone is human and has problems. Give people the benefit of the doubt and a second chance. People have bad days; that doesn't mean that they are insensitive or unkind. Sometimes it may take a couple of meetings for people to get used to you, and remember that laughter is the best medicine. Show them that you are human and we all share this human experience. Emphasize your city and sponsor club. The U.S. is so big and so diverse that talking about what you know and have experienced is more valuable. Thank them for this opportunity and express your interest in volunteering in their projects.

*How will you continue to stay involved in Rotary? Would you become a member of Rotary or Rotaract, recommend candidates for the scholarship, and participate in orientations?*

I will stay involved in Rotary by doing speaking about my experience, giving advice to future scholars, and hopefully in the future becoming a Rotarian. I would be ecstatic about participating in orientations and recommending candidates for the scholarship.

Thank You, Rotary!! God Bless You!!