

## **GLBL 1000**

Reflective Essay

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Before attending Thompson Rivers University, I believed I was fairly culturally aware and open-minded. I understood that culture, history, and place influenced tourism and events, but I often viewed experiences through a single perspective: my perspective. I often would only focus on how well an event or destination was organized, how enjoyable it was, and whether it met my expectations. While I always valued diversity, I did not always stop to question how my own position as a visitor affected what I noticed, or how tourism and events might impact the people and communities hosting them.

Because of my courses, the field school in Italy, and my professional experience, my attitude toward global learning has shifted. In my classes, I was constantly challenged to think critically and reflect on my experiences, which helped me see tourism and events as deeply connected to culture, power, history, and local values. This shift wasn't about material learnt, but about changing how I question, reflect, and approach experiences in global contexts.

The two-week field school in Montespertoli, Italy, really helped cement this change by forcing immersion in food and wine tourism, agritourism, and the sustainability of another culture. This experience also showed me how closely tourism is tied to local identity and everyday life. Visiting farms, wineries, and the small Tuscan communities made it clear that these experiences were not created solely for tourists, but were rooted in familial tradition, generational knowledge, and pride of place. For example, during our visit, we stayed at Castello Sonnino, and it became obvious that what we were experiencing as guests was deeply connected to the family's history and livelihood. This challenged my previous assumption that tourism development is always beneficial. In their case, they had adopted tourism in some ways by creating a program for educational visits and by adding the Enoteca (shop), which allowed visitors to stop by for tastings and tours. However, these changes were all on their terms, and Castello Sonnino embraced certain modern changes while keeping to its roots despite pressure

from outsiders to rebrand. From this experience, I began to see that while tourism can support local communities, it can also create pressure or risk losing authenticity if it is not approached thoughtfully and respectfully.

One of the most reflective parts of this experience was my Give Back Project, a website journal that I wrote and updated daily throughout the field school. Writing every day forced me to reflect in real time instead of only looking back after the trip ended. It forced me to really think back on my day, what I observed, and how I interpreted it. This daily reflection pushed me beyond basic observations and helped me think more carefully about how local cultures and experiences should be represented and experienced.

My position as a Guest Experience Specialist with Rocky Mountaineer also played a major role in shifting my global attitude. Working with guests from many different cultural and national backgrounds showed me that expectations around communication, service, and problem-solving are not universal. For example, I noticed that some guests valued frequent conversation and reassurance, while others preferred efficiency and minimal interaction. What felt polite or professional to one guest did not always translate the same way to another, and while we were taught this, I also experienced it and learned to adjust based on my audience. This challenged my earlier belief about what good service looks like and reinforced the importance of adaptability, listening, and cultural awareness in global tourism environments.

In addition, my ongoing involvement with the Out Here Ski and Snowboard Club has contributed to my global learning in a less formal but equally meaningful way. I don't view this involvement as volunteer work, but rather something I do out of passion for bringing skiers and snowboarders together. Through leadership roles within the club, I have become more aware of how access, inclusion, and belonging shape participation in recreational spaces. I have learned that even informal environments can unintentionally exclude people through intimidation, and that thoughtful planning and communication are necessary to create welcoming and inclusive communities.

This shift in global attitude is important because it has changed how I approach tourism, events, and leadership roles. I no longer see myself as just an organizer. Instead, I recognize that my attitudes influence how experiences are created, how stories are shared, and how people feel

included or excluded. Understanding that tourism and events are never culturally neutral has made me more aware and responsible in how I engage in global contexts.

In the future, this learning will continue to shape me academically and professionally. In the short term, I plan to continue developing my reflective practice and intercultural awareness through coursework, leadership opportunities, and hands-on experiences. In the long term, I hope to pursue a career in sports tourism where I can help create experiences that are culturally respectful, inclusive, and sustainable. My global learning has shown me that meaningful tourism is not just about logistics or enjoyment, but about understanding context, respecting culture, and being willing to question my own assumptions.

Overall, my global competency development has been shaped by a change in attitude rather than a single moment or experience. Through immersion and engagement, I have learned to approach global experiences with greater awareness, empathy, and intention. This mindset will continue to guide how I learn, lead, and participate in global and cultural spaces in the future.