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### Reflections on Erasmus+ Fellowship Study Abroad in Lublin, Poland

Chosen as one of two pioneers to head to Lublin on an Erasmus+ scholarship is a great honour, but spending time and meeting new people was an even greater honour. Lublin is a beautiful city although small compared to Boston; and KUL is a wonderful university. Arriving in Lublin, I was picked up from the airport and welcomed by my 'Guardian Angel'. A Guardian Angel is a Polish student in the university familiar with the Erasmus+ program who is assigned to an incoming Erasmus+ student to help with adapting and getting by in the city and country as a whole. Sometimes the guardian angels may not be so fluent in English, but can be understood. Choosing classes was not a problem, as I had chosen before arriving in the country and beginning my program.

All my classes were in English and had a few people, a good mix of Polish students and other Erasmus+ students. I am a psychology major, and so I took 5 psychology courses making a total of 30ECTS. The educational system in Poland and I believe in Europe as well, is very different from that of USA. In UMass Boston and other American colleges and universities, the maximum number of credits is 17credits or 18credits in other cases; but in KUL the maximum number is 30ECTS. With this number, you may end up taking as many as 12 or 13 classes as each class may be 3ECTS credits; luckily for me each class was 6ECTS. Well, I know this may

seem like a lot but you need to keep in mind the difference in educational systems; for me I felt it was a lot easier studying in KUL. Truth is, American universities are top notch and as such are quite difficult, meaning that if you are able to handle yourself pretty good in UMass Boston, partaking in Erasmus+ or possibly any other study abroad will be a breeze; the only problem might be having to attend many classes. The best part of the Erasmus+ program was the free Polish language course offered by KUL to the students, the course helps you get by verbally in the city as well as better understand the culture and living in Lublin.

Lublin is a student city, as more than half of the population is made up of students both international and local. There are many festivals that take place in the city, and it is always very wonderful to attend these as you meet other students and slowly ease yourself into the Polish society. Being in a new environment can be at times overwhelming, especially in the case of the locals. As a person of colour, easing into the society was not as easy or smooth. Knowing the country's history, I understood well before my arrival that the people might not be very welcoming and maybe a tad bit hostile; and as such I was not taken aback by moments of discomfort or awkwardness whilst walking the streets or boarding the bus. Meeting more Polish people, I learnt that for some, it was their first time seeing someone with a different skin colour and it was fascinating. At times, people would occasionally stop to take a selfie with me, or randomly take pictures of me; others approach me to ask about my nationality – a few trying to communicate in English. One thing I really admired by my fellow classmates and some of the locals is their need to know more about other countries, cultures and other people as a whole. I had a wonderful time in Lublin, I was able to travel to other Schengen states and I joined a volunteer group called Omnes Gentes; it is a volunteer group of foreigners. It was a splendid spending time with this volunteer group, as I met people from Ukraine, Taiwan, Estonia, Russia, Brazil and many other countries and we were able to achieve many things.

The Erasmus+ program is an amazing opportunity to experience a different educational system, culture and people. If you are looking for something spontaneous and looking to explore I would greatly encourage you to participate in this Fellowship program; and the provision of funds by the EU makes it even more promising and enticing. After being a part of the program, I can definitely brag of having a little knowledge of Polish. This program has also increased my ability to adapt to a new environment and any situation I may find myself. It has also promoted my independence skills greatly, my interpersonal skills and my communication skills. As a psychology major, this program has made me knowledgeable of styles and methods of psychology popular in Poland and has made me open to many perspectives. I highly recommend partaking in a study abroad before graduation, but specifically Erasmus+ Fellowship Study Abroad, as it is the first of its kind.

