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My dream to study abroad arose from an eagerness to have a unique cultural experience in an exotic country. Feeling a sense of euphoria while contemplating the idea of spending an entire semester exploring a new place; it was easy to avoid the realities of such an experience. After being accepted into the CIEE Tropical Ecology and Conservation program in Costa Rica and living with exchange students from all over the world, I have carefully reevaluated its demands and offerings. The strife and jubilation of my new exchange student friends has exposed me to an additional set of objectives and understandings to carry with me to Costa Rica. Academically, I will take advantage of the special resources offered by the program. These include the faculty, diverse student body, field-based courses, independent research project, and the Cloud Forest and other various Costa Rican nature preserves. The unique fauna will expose me to ecological interactions that could not be witnessed or understood in my home country. This added knowledge will allow for a deeper appreciation of biology and conservation to aid in future professional developments. Collaborating with faculty and students will provide networking experiences to learn about academic and career opportunities. Therefore, I realize that it is not only important to embed myself into the culture of the country, but also to form relationships and work closely with those participating in the program. Additionally, I plan to extend the independent research project into my academic career at my home institution that will compare tropical and temperate ecosystems in order to receive an Honors degree in Biology.

The study abroad experience provides an outlet to satisfy several professional and personal goals. From this experience I can realize my strengths and weaknesses as a student, leader, and friend in order to develop stronger interpersonal skills required by the various roles. I will develop a greater level of independence that can serve many career and personal developments. I hope to expand my Spanish speaking skills with the local community and obtain a new perspective of Latin American life especially things like music, dance, food, politics, religion, the economy, and their relationships with people and the environment. While learning about a new culture is of vital importance, I think studying abroad allows a person to isolate his or herself from the pressures of their homeland in order to reconsider their life plans and self-identity. Therefore, from this experience I hope to gain a clearer picture of my goals in order to be true to myself through the effort I will put in to achieving them.

My previous coursework and internship experience have been satisfying, but not completely fulfilling. I have been able to demonstrate passion for conservation through my involvement with the GLISTEN- Great Lakes Innovative Stewardship Through Education Networks- program by promoting sustainability of the Great Lakes through education of the community and undergraduates by making research readily available to those parties through collaborations of academic institutions and community based organizations. It is my dream to continue to advocate protection and restoration of local and international natural treasures and important resources. However, in order to have a understanding of the environmental issues that face the world, I require more exposure of other ecosystems and the challenges associated with them; something that can be provided by my experience in Costa Rica.

Such a dynamic experience with the listed above outcomes is not free. Because I am required to pay my home institution's tuition, I will exhaust all of my financial aid. Remaining of my financial responsibility is the room and board and other additional expenses of the program. Due to my absence at Case Western Reserve University for the duration of the program, I will not be eligible for work study, which in the past I have used as a source of income to cover some of these added costs at my primary academic institution. I am applying for the Jennifer Ritzman Scholarship to help alleviate some of the financial pressures of studying abroad. This scholarship is also very personal to me because the father of Jennifer Ritzman is a faculty member in the Biology Department at Case Western Reserve University and I would be honored to receive this award and represent both his family and our academic institution.