

Luci Moore  
CIEE Jennifer Ritzmann Scholarship Essay  
Tropical Ecology & Conservation  
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“Hmm, I like the rough bark of that tree, and look at the strange shape of these cones!”

This is a typical sort of comment I will randomly share while walking along with a friend, enjoying a pleasant rainy day or just lost in thought. I have always had an intense interest in all variety of subjects and don't know where to place myself when people try to judge whether I am a “science or English person.” One thing I can say is that I am absolutely fascinated with life and how things work, why things are the way they are and what that means in the greater context, whether in a functional or even more philosophical sense. Thus, biology, being the study of life, is a fitting subject for where I have defined my academic interests by declaring it my major.

For a long time I assumed that everyone had a sort of innate interest and notice of their environment, taking note of the types of trees and plants and animals around and what everything is actually *doing* all the time. But not long ago my friend said it was “interesting” that I liked biology and asked me why. It really is a difficult question to answer, but basically I responded that it is an excellent sort of system through which I can do my best to appreciate and understand the amazing world we live in. Along with this, plants, animals, and everything inside and in between are just so cool! My friend responded that she just didn't think about things like that at all. Through the comments of my friends and family, I've come to notice just how much I do pay attention to my surroundings and environment and how this shapes who I am. Perhaps much of this can be explained by my Alaskan origin. I grew up with what I consider a rather intimate but complicated relationship with nature, a wonderful but powerful and at times dangerous force. I have always been surprised that people describe Alaska as beautiful. Though it certainly is, it a wild, vast, dangerous sort of beauty that is not as easy to appreciate at first as perhaps a tropical paradise (which of course holds its own challenges for the people who actually live in those environments). Thus I am enraptured by natural systems, but also possess an engrained sense of realism that allows me to question further with a sense of skepticism while simultaneously appreciating what I observe.

My combined sense of realism and enchanted appreciation makes me very driven and ambitious. I always seek to gain as much out of my time as possible and never be idle. I want everything I do to be important somehow to the greater context of shaping who I am and the

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knowledge that I have. This is why travelling has become essential for me. Not only does travel to foreign countries truly open my eyes to the diversity, beauty, and difficulty of the world, but it forces me to learn so much about myself as an outcome of being put in completely different situations. By throwing myself against obstacles of different shapes and sizes, my mind learns to bounce back in new ways and I am strengthened. Thus I feel that study abroad would be the ultimate way for me to use my time wisely to heighten my learning experience in college.

Beyond filling the many holes in my knowledge, there is something incredibly valuable to be gained from the study of other cultures and ecosystems. Each culture has a unique set of values and ideas by which they live, and understanding these ideals and the products of such societies helps to diffuse ethnocentrism and cultivate an appreciation for how all cultures function. I hold natural systems in the same light and believe that understanding ecosystems and the detailed systems and organisms they encompass is vital for a greater understanding of how humans fit into this world and what effects the human race has. Through this understanding I hope for us to be more sensitive of our actions and take steps to remediate the harms, whether consciously or not, we have done to the Earth.

I am captivated by the diversity of plants and animals in Costa Rica as well as the culture and language of Costa Rican people. I know I have so much to learn from this country, from both the people and the land. I am prepared and excited to become a dedicated student of the cloud forest, my host family, and unforeseen challenges that happen my way. In my own small way, I want to learn as much as possible so that I can proceed to "save the world," which in a sense is possible if we all work to learn more about ourselves through cross-cultural understanding as well as the environment we live in through scientific study.