

Havana, Cuba

Sara Matlock



Program: Cuba: Complexity, Community, and Change,

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Major: Political Science

Earning the Community Engagement Badge:



Walking into Cuba, I had a lot of built-up uncertainties on my mind. Rhetoric surrounding the country has remained firmly negative in the United States over the past half-century or so. I had no idea what it meant to be visiting a "communist" country or the kind of response we would get as Americans visiting a place which has been widely crippled by our economic sanctions. Walking away from the experience, I think

the state of "communism" is just as personally diverse and nebulous as the state of "democracy". Everyone has their own vision of what politics looks like in their life. Travelling through Cuba with a lense of community engagement allowed me to gain an understanding of culture in Havana. We visited and worked with advocacy organizations ranging in issue areas from women's' rights to American artistic expression. Every person we met, though intimately impacted by the US embargo, was enthusiastically welcoming and excited to teach us about their unique and vibrant community. We started the trip out by visiting historic sites and museums in Cuba. We stood four feet away from the pieces of the US plane shot down in 1962. We looked at artwork created by Latin American revolutionaries. Yet nothing made Cuban history more tangible than learning to dance salsa—a mix of Spanish music, jazz melodies, and African beats—or giving kitchen knives to our host and having them tell us that they wouldn't have been able to buy them locally. Immersing into Cuba through intentional community engagement was the best choice I could have made for my learning abroad experience. When I think back to it now, I feel a holistic sense of color, history, and community.

Transferable Skills:



My learning abroad experience was a whirlwind. I feel like I am still reeling from the experience a bit, trying to wrap my head around the richness and color of a culture I loved the moment I met it. If there is one thing I have held on to with certainty, it is a radically different understanding of just how impactful American foreign policy can be around the globe. The US Embargo against Cuba is a daily staple for the

people I met in Havana. Most houses use cardboard as door mats because they have access to nothing else. The streets are filled with 1960s brands of European and Russian made cars. The Embargo touches average, everyday people more than anyone else, and for this reason seems extremely unfair. After my learning abroad experience, I am motivated to consider with more depth the implications of the policies my government chooses to enforce.



“When I think back to Cuba, my first impression is color. Never have I experienced a place with so much diversity in music, architecture, people, or history. My learning abroad experience taught me to see the world in more shades.”