

This trip to Storuman, Sweden through *Free Range* was a very new experience for me. It was the first time a professor has given me so much control over an academic project along with its associated funding. Because of that, I feel like it helped me to better appreciate what I was going to research, as well as helped to get the most out of my trip in both academic and life experience.

The application process was fairly simple, and Paul Peters was very helpful in guiding my ideas in the right direction. There weren't many limitations in the research areas that we could use in our applications, as long as we stayed within the broader themes that *Free Range* had already established and had students working under. I really liked this as it didn't pigeonhole any ideas that I wanted to explore which in the end made me more invested in my topic. I wasn't awarded funded for the proposal idea that I used in my initial application, which at first disheartened me as I had already started doing background research into that topic, but the situation ended up being okay as I was paired with a similar eHealth project that I could use to look into other interests.

Going into the trip I was very unsure of what to expect, and honestly a little frustrated at that. Before getting to Sweden I had done very little research, spoke with one other eHealth member only once very briefly, and still hadn't finalized where myself and the other Carleton undergraduates would be staying in Storuman. I'm a very detail-oriented person, and honestly pride myself on that, so I felt very nervous and unprepared. I wish I would have had more details of what to expect and what I should prepare on my end than the few emails I had and the brief overview from the acceptance letter I got welcoming me into *Free Range*. That being said, I also

chastise myself for not investing more time into preliminary research or reaching out to other eHealth team members. I figured that I would devote my time in Sweden to doing that work and ended up just procrastinated working on my project before our departure all together.

The idea of “dirt research” initially threw me off, so I didn’t think I needed that much time to integrate myself into Swedish culture. I’ve found that when traveling to places in the past I’ve realized that seeing so many photos and reading about countries back home prevents that awestruck feeling when you see it in person; so I believed there wouldn’t be anything different about experiencing rural Swedish social or political landscapes as opposed to just reading about them in Ottawa. I learned that I was wrong very quickly, and found myself talking with people more and doing online research less. The things that people were saying weren’t revolutionary or anything like that but talking to people all the time almost made the facts more real to me. And the amazing thing was the more I talked to people on this trip, the more comfortable I found myself being able to connect with new people, asking more important questions and their personal opinions, which I know I wouldn’t have been so brave to do in the past. It shocked me to learn that most people are very honest and open about things, and usually are just as intrigued about your story as you are of theirs. I asked the personal opinions of almost everyone I came across, including the AirBnB woman we rented off of in Umeå and my neighbours in the dorms in Storuman. I’ve done lab-work before and I think I would take this type of research over sitting in a lab any day. I would have to say the most that I took away from my trip to Sweden was in fact some of these conversations that I had with people that I met.

With hindsight, I am both happy and upset about our time in Umeå. It was an odd mixture of not exactly knowing who you were travelling with, even with it being only the Carleton

undergraduates, as well as not exactly knowing what was in Umeå. As well, unfortunately Dr. Dean Carson's talk was cancelled for one of our days in Umeå, and much of our other days weren't jam packed with planned events. Looking back, I wish that we had rented a car in order to explore the towns surrounding where we were staying. But with saying that, our days in Umeå really brought our smaller Carleton group much closer together. Even though I've been in class with the others since our second year, Umeå allowed us to hangout and get to know one another outside of classroom settings surrounded by assignments and exams. It was really comforting having them as close friends before getting to Storuman, where we didn't know what to expect but all worked through it together. I now consider them close friends of mine because of our time spent together.

Of the planned events that we did have in Umeå, much of them were spent at Umeå University with some of the professors in the Global Epidemiology Department. Meeting them first before going to Storuman was a great introduction to the current status of healthcare and politics in Sweden. It made me feel more comfortable going into the conference at Storuman having a basic picture of Sweden; they even covered how the country was divided in terms of provinces and judicial systems which I found helpful later on in my readings. Talking with these professors did really shine a light on the difficulties of putting any research into practices because of the various social and political barriers that first have to be overcome. It really frustrated me hearing them explain why some of their findings, although very significant, may never be used because of this. But it did also have the effect of motivating me to hopefully one day try and change that. I especially liked the fact that all their findings are reported to potential interested

government groups on a regular basis just to add to the officials' radars of what the current research findings are. I could see this as being useful for any research institution in the world.

The idea of bringing people of different background and of different life experiences together to meet and to ultimately just talk about common interests and exchange knowledge with no specific itinerary has never really dawned on me as a learning opportunity. I've attended academic conferences and hosted discussion panels in the past, but often they've been planned down to the minute or at least been organized to cover certain specific content. The worth of going on a 14-day trip across the world with only a handful of expected meetings to attend sort of baffled me. However, I am very happy with the people that I met through *Free Range* in Sweden. Each person was slightly unique in their views and arguments, and even on their interests and wants. Connecting to them in person, rather than over skype or email, brought on a whole new dimension to our meeting. I think the students from other countries melded in quite well with the friend group of Carleton students that got closer through our time in Umeå before getting to Storuman.

I now know if I were to have the opportunity to do this again, I would aim to have most of my online/database searches done so as to have more time in Sweden to interact with the locals and to explore. This would also allow me to better contribute to many of the conversations that we had during the workshops in Storuman. I found myself intrigued by many of the discussions that the members of *Free Range* had, but not able to really contribute anything of worth to the conversations. Those that were further into their projects, and the team leaders with a life time of experience, had much more to elaborate and criticize than I did. However, never once did anyone make myself or the other undergraduates feel incompetent or ashamed

of not being able to contribute much. Everyone there was really invested in helping us better understand and appreciate topics, and I was very grateful for that.

The team leaders were incredible. At first I was very hesitant to approach any of them because of their wisdom and years of experience, but even by the end of day one of the conference I think I had a personal conversation with each of them. I appreciated that they treated me as a colleague instead of as a student and were equally as interested in learning about my topic and what I had to say about it. The idea of learning with humility was brought up time and time again, and I fully agree with each of them that that way of approaching research is the only way to truly advance and create a multidisciplinary approach to anything in life.

One of the leaders, Sharon, especially motivated me. I was very frustrated one day with my topic when I came to the realization that my idea was broad enough to be a PhD thesis and too much of a task for me to take on at the moment, and I didn't know where to go from there. Sharon laid it out very simply for me and suggested I just take a small portion of that idea and run with that, while emphasizing researching something that entices me to want to make better. When I said I didn't know if my interests lined up with the objectives of *Free Range*, she denied that and better explained the overall idea of *Free Range* and how almost everything contributed to something. She described that there's no need to try and please anyone with what I write, and that *Free Range* didn't have any two people researching the same thing, and didn't want that anyways. She said to "know your interests, find your gap, pick your lens, and fill it with your own contribution". A very simple idea but a powerful one in research. I can't thank Sharon enough for calming down my frustrations and helping keep my priorities in check.

The content of the workshops themselves were not ground-breaking for me. I believe the Canadian post-secondary education system is very academically inclined, whereas most European education systems are more practical in nature, so many of the topics we covered have been ingrained in us since first year. However, I know that many of the others we met from Austria found the workshops to be quite helpful, such as what exactly is the format of an academic paper have to include, as they hadn't been exposed to classes on that before.

I took a lot away from their trip. More than anything, it forced me to become more independent. I wish I could have done a few things differently, and I wish I took more of an initiative beforehand to get myself up to speed on topics, but I believe I walked away more invested in my topic than I had been before I left. It has me excited to dive deep into my topic. Luckily a few of the other Carleton undergraduates and I decided to extend our trip into Iceland for a few days, an experience I am eternally grateful worked at the end of our time in Sweden. I am happy to report that even as we were touring to beautiful waterfalls and even horseback riding on lava fields, we kept up many of the topics of conversation that we had in Storuman, which was surprising to me as usually topics are quickly dropped during the schoolyear once a class is over and done with. I am also very happy with the people that I met through *Free Range*, both from my school and the other participating schools. I truly hope to keep in touch with them in the future. I will forever thank *Free Range* for this trip.