China Through The Eyes of Visiting Students

Internships have always been an integral part of a student’s academic experience at the American University in Cairo (AUC) because it allows them to get a better understanding of the corporate world that they are bound to meet after graduating. With Internationalization being one of AUC’s key focus areas, International internships have started to become more prominent on the university’s career website. The objective is to have students get exposed to more regional and global opportunities in order to develop themselves personally and professionally in intercultural environments.

Students tend to go for international internships as they seek challenging situations within a global experience that teach them important skills that they wouldn’t acquire in a classroom. Merna Amr Aboutaleb, a Business Senior student, stayed in China for a month as part of her internship at Guangxi Wairen Cultural Development Agency. She was looking forward to visiting an Asian country for as long as she could remember because she thought that Asian cultures are unique in their own charming ways. She was mostly tasked with teaching English to Chinese adults and supervising children in summer camps. She mentioned “I felt that my stay allowed me to discover new aspects of myself like patience and creativity.” These qualities shined when she found herself coming up with different approaches to effectively deliver teaching material to students who didn’t know any other language besides Chinese. Merna felt that she had learnt a lot out of the experience, adding “I realized that communication doesn’t just have to be through language and that bonding with others knows no boundaries.” She enforced this by recounting how she was able to befriend the children at the summer camp by the end of the first day even if she didn’t understand what they were saying most of the time.

Another benefit of these internships is that they urge students to explore new environments that are different than what they know. Mariam Serag, a Business Junior student who also went to the same internship in China, talked about how part of the thrilling challenge was to adjust to the Chinese way of living. She understood how crucial it was to have a translator application on her phone in order to communicate with Chinese citizens since it was rare to find English speakers in the streets. Nevertheless, she got into contact with a Chinese professor who taught her some simple Chinese phrases to get by with everyday conversations and she was given a Chinese name that she’d use during her stay. She also got the chance to spread some of the Egyptian culture during her stay when she gave a presentation with her colleagues about Egypt to the center’s international club. Mariam said “I was astonished when I found people excitedly approaching me for more information about my country,” she noticed that they were interested to know more and some of them even expressed an interest in visiting the country sometime soon.

As a matter of fact, the university’s focus on internationalization allowed both participants to go beyond the scope of their academics and learn valuable life lessons that could only be taught through being exposed to diverse situations. They urged all students to apply for international internships so that they’d learn how to adapt to and integrate into other cultures, especially since the world is embracing globalization at full speed. Nevertheless, International Internships were not limited to visits to China, but also to the USA and looking forward to diverse the collaboration with more countries in the region and globally.