

# RAMAPO UNPACKED



SPECIAL EDITION | COVID-19

## ▶ INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION *in the time of COVID-19*

+

*reflections from*  
**ABROAD**





# RAMAPO Unpacked

SPECIAL EDITION

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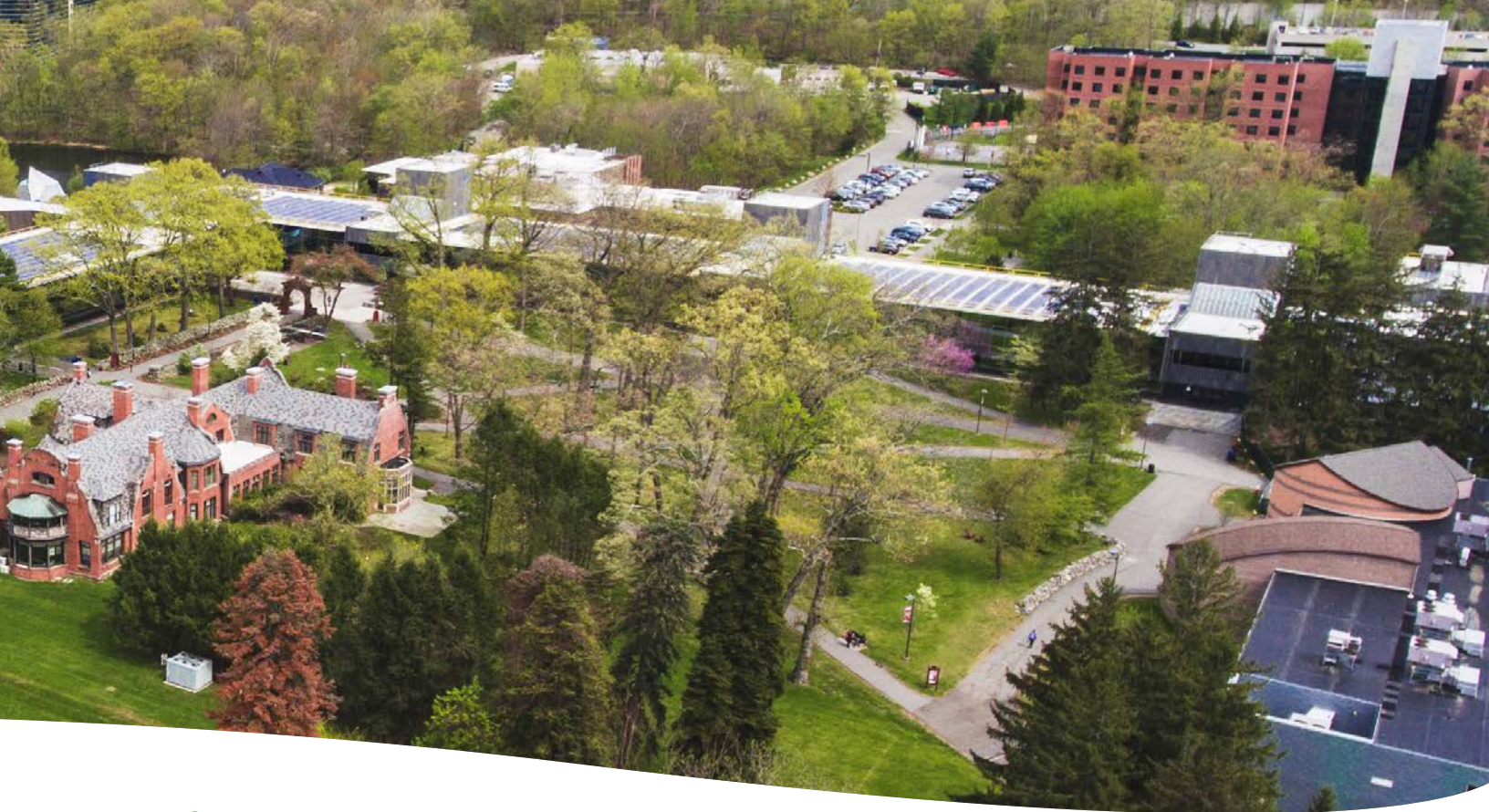
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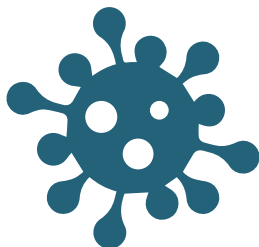
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# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION *in the time of* COVID-19

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by *BEN LEVY*

Director of International Education,  
Ramapo College



*You can't cross the sea by  
standing and staring at the water.*

— *Rabindranath Tagore*

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has impacted all corners of the globe and has forever changed our realities. The first impacts of the pandemic on Ramapo College were felt by study abroad participants. Given the expertise of Ramapo's international team with global risk management, they were able to provide both guidance to the College administration, as well as respond quickly and effectively to the situation. More than 20 students were studying abroad on spring semester programs at the time that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of State issued alerts to the public not to travel abroad. As a result, Ramapo's study abroad team worked with each student to facilitate their prompt return to the U.S. However, this was not only a travel logistics effort, but it was also necessary to ensure these students experienced academic continuity, limited financial loss, safe passage and where necessary, access to technological resources to maintain their coursework through a remote platform.

*“International education programs generally manage significant risks first by working to understand them and then by fielding strategies to reduce the likelihood of occurrence and to mitigate potential consequences.”*

— *Bill Frederick*

*[Lodestone International Blog](#), May 13, 2020*

With the pandemic having its origins in China, the College had to modify its Spring Break Business program to China. At that time, there was no indication that the pandemic would spread beyond China's borders, but the program was moved to London as a precaution. Unfortunately, the virus traveled along with its hosts to cross the invisible borders of a country, resulting in the decision to cancel all Spring Break and May travel programs, as well as all summer programs scheduled weeks later. This impacted nearly 50 students with study abroad plans. However, in the

midst of the challenges and uncertainties that come with a global pandemic, the vast majority of students who had intended to study abroad in 2020 maintain the desire and intend to study abroad in 2021.

***“The pandemic has alerted us to the fact that we live in a borderless world in which our well-being depends on global cooperation. At the same time, we are self-isolating and practicing social distancing from each other; our personal borders start at our front door. That will change our orientation to the world going forward, shifting our conception of borders and our understanding of each other, the world and ourselves.”***

— Brian Whalen,  
[IHE](#), April 14, 2020

Through the resilience of students and faculty, some creative solutions were offered. The academic courses associated with Ramapo’s programs to Portugal ([Addressing Substance Use: Policies & Treatments](#)) and China ([International Business Experience](#)) utilized Ramapo’s strong partnerships in these respective countries to deliver the courses through remote instruction and the integration of speakers from the host countries. The social experiences were unavailable; however, students were able to meet their degree requirements.

***“International education has been successfully adapting to a changing world since its beginning. The evolution of information and communication technologies has allowed us to do things that were once unimaginable and to adapt to the increasing pace of change in the hazard landscape over the past 25 years.”***

— Bill Frederick  
[Lodestone International Blog](#), May 13, 2020

International Students are some of the most impacted, with many of them unable to return

to their home countries due to widespread border closures. Given the limitations these students face as a result of their immigration status, international students are unable to seek available employment outside the scope of their immigration regulations. While the U.S. government worked to find financial strategies to support the U.S. economy through the provision of a Stimulus Payment and funds available through the CARES Act, international students do not have access to either of these resources. In addition to the many ways Ramapo College has already stepped up in support, efforts continue to identify and make accessible financial relief for these students.

Ramapo College continued to keep its residential doors open to international students and other students who had no alternative housing solutions. In collaboration with Sodexo, Ramapo’s food service vendor, a modified meal pick-up service was quickly developed to support students on the meal plan. Ramapo’s Health Services provided regular communication to these students, additional support for anyone testing positive or in self-quarantine, including the provision of individual health kits (including a thermometer). The exemptions continued when Ramapo announced that it would extend their access to on-campus residential facilities to these students at a 50 percent discount to normal rates, including those who technically graduate in May. This is a remarkable effort on the part of the College to support these students who have no alternative, and something that most other institutions have not offered.

As New Jersey continues to be hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries in the world who experienced it earlier, are beginning to re-open and life is beginning a new normal. We are hoping that study abroad may be a viable option for many Ramapo students in the near future.

For more resources, visit [Global Travel Resources](#).

## Brandon Blumer

[Kansai Gaidai University](#)

Osaka, Japan

Spring 2020 - Fall 2020



Kimonos with friends in Arashiyama



Dotonbori



Sakura in Kyoto

## MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

I have made some of the most meaningful connections of my life. I still find myself in awe of the beauty of this country and the kindness of the people I meet. When COVID-19 began to peak, it was surreal to see the halls of my dorm continually packed with suitcases of students returning home. As one of the few who chose to stay, I have been keeping busy with online classes and cooking with friends. I am hopeful to sit quietly on trains once again as I wait for the world's healing to begin!



Clockwise:

1. DY Concert en el Coliseo
2. La Sanse- Calle Fortaleza, Viejo San Juan
3. Cara del Indio



## Karina V. Cortes

[National Student Exchange](#) -

Inter American University of Puerto Rico, San German

San German, Puerto Rico

Fall 2019 - Spring 2020

## NSE Puerto Rican Experience

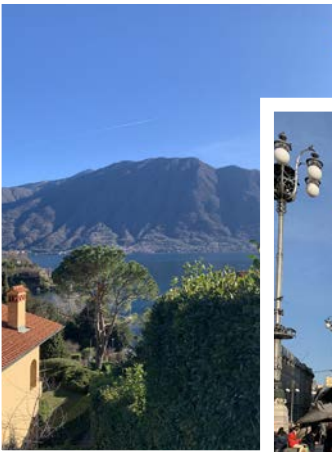
This has been one of the most amazing, unforgettable, and scary experiences of a lifetime. My experience has been different not only because I was in such a free-living happy environment, but because I was still abroad when the global pandemic hit. Studying in Puerto Rico has taught me so much about myself and its culture. The case of COVID-19 that caused the country to take measures against the virus happened to be from someone that attended an event where I was working (Día Nacional de la Salsa). Despite the pandemic and earthquakes, Puerto Ricans continue to be hopeful and happy people, making this experience unforgettable.

## Heba Hamdan

[Universita Cattolica del Sacro Cuore](#)

Milan, Italy

Spring 2020



1. Venice and Ice Cream
2. Lake Como
3. Feeding pigeons in front of Cathedral

## MEMORABLE YEAR

The year 2020 has been one of the most memorable years for me yet. Not only have I achieved one of my greatest goals, which was studying abroad, but I have survived the Coronavirus outbreak while being in Milan, Italy. I was truly excited to start my semester abroad, although things didn't go according to plan and my time in Italy came to an abrupt end. However, I created the best experiences in my life while I was there, meeting new people, experiencing a different culture, and getting a taste of excitement of the international student life, all thanks to the help of the study abroad staff at Ramapo.



Clockwise

1. Piazzale Michelangelo: Best Views of Florence
2. St. Marks Square, Venice
3. Bradenburg Gate with Ramapo alumnus Jaime

## Sela Stazzone

[Studio Arts Center International \(SACI\)](#)

Florence, Italy

Spring 2020

## Live like *the locals*

Studying abroad in Italy was a humbling cultural experience. I had the opportunity to live like the locals, learn their culture and meet so many people during my brief time there. While my time in Italy was shorter than expected, I made amazing forever friends. I also was able to explore a number of cities in Italy and an additional five countries with Ramapo alumnus Jaime Velazquez for Spring Break. Florence, Italy became my home away from home and I look forward to future adventures abroad.

## Samantha Mistretta

### [Arcadia in Rome](#)

Rome, Italy

Spring 2020

## Grateful

Studying in Rome was an experience I will never forget. Walking past the Colosseum every day and enjoying gelato in front of the Trevi Fountain are things I will always cherish. I am grateful for the experiences I had, as well as the ones I continued to have back in the U.S. The professors and staff from my host institution made the transition to online learning easy and enjoyable. They were able to keep the Italian culture alive through Zoom meetings and shared the abroad experience as best as possible through the screen. Although it wasn't the semester abroad I was expecting, it was still a great one.



- Clockwise
1. A view from the base of the Colosseum
  2. The Trevi Fountain
  3. Gelato next to the Trevi Fountain
  4. Terrazza Les Estoiles Atlante Hotels Rooftop terrace overlooking Saint Peter's Basilica



- Clockwise
1. When I visited London! This is me in front of the London Bridge.
  2. The John Lennon Wall in Prague.
  3. One of many homemade gnocchi dishes I had in Rome.



## Julia Carr

### [John Cabot University](#)

Rome, Italy

Spring 2020

## Other Plans

My experience studying abroad was not at all what I anticipated. I studied at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. I ate lots of pasta, drank dozens of cappuccinos and visited historical landmarks. During my short time in Italy, I also was able to travel to three beautiful cities, Prague, Budapest and London. I met some amazing friends during my time in Europe and shared memories with them that will last a lifetime. COVID-19 had other plans for Spring 2020 abroad students, but this experience really did change me. I returned from Italy another person, one with an open mind and appreciation of the world around me. During my time in quarantine, I always remind myself that Europe is not going anywhere and I am going back as soon as it is safe!



# Students Impacted by COVID-19: *the stats*

## Ramapo Students Impacted by Study Abroad Program Cancellations & Campus Closures

**22**  
Spring  
Semester

**45**  
Spring Break  
(Faculty-Led)

**23**  
May  
(Faculty-Led)

**44**  
Summer  
(Faculty-Led & Partner)

TOTAL = **134** / **64%** have deferred to 2021

## Ramapo International Students & Scholars Impacted by COVID-19

*\* As of the time of publication*

Of the **87 full-time, degree-seeking international students**, 62 were living on campus

- » Countries are: Nepal, Bulgaria, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, Honduras, Ghana, Burma, and Belgium
- » Nepal's border is currently closed until June 14, and no international flights until June 30.

For Spring 2020, Ramapo College welcomed **4 international exchange students**. While they all were able to return to their home countries and continue participating in their courses remotely, some of them were required to quarantine at their port of entry for two weeks.

For 2019-2020, Ramapo College welcomed **3 Fulbright Language Teaching Assistants**. As a result of border closures in their countries, they were unable to return to their home countries. They remained providing instruction remotely for students enrolled in their language courses while waiting to return home.

Due to the global closures of US Embassies and Consulates, new international students to Ramapo College, set to begin in Fall 2020, have been unable to secure their student visas.

## Impact on U.S. Student Travelers \*

*\* According to [studentuniverse.com](https://studentuniverse.com) - as of April 23, 2020*

**79%** of student travel have had travel plans cancelled or delayed during the pandemic



**64.5%** of impacted students still plan to take their trip within the next year

**43%** of students have travel plans in the next 6 months that are *not yet cancelled*

**70%** of those students are *extremely concerned* that their travel plans will be impacted by the virus

## International Students in Spring 2020

*\* According to IIE's 2nd Snapshot Survey - as of April 16, 2020*

Institutions reported that more than **251,000 international students** were on their campuses in spring 2020. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, **18,551 international students have left**. **92% of international students** from these institutions have remained in the United States, whether on campus or in another location.

# PORTUGAL...ALMOST

by COLLEEN GALLAGHER, MSW (2020)



International education is a privilege, and in some ways it's also a responsibility. This is the lens that shaped my decision to study abroad through Ramapo's International Program. As a graduate student in the Master of Social Work program at Ramapo College, and as an adult student who feels passionate about beginning a third career in life, I consider myself a life-long learner. When I first enrolled at Ramapo in 2017 (I'm a part-time student and full-time teacher), I tucked away the notion of a study abroad experience, earmarking it for my last semester. Who knew what was in store for all of us in the Spring semester of 2020.

The idea that I belong to a global culture, that we all are interconnected, interdependent (which certainly has become very clear with the advent of COVID-19) - is what prompts a sense of duty to be "part of" something larger. I view the international program as just such an opportunity, to be a part of this "something larger" and to discover meaningful connections. What was important to me was learning not only about the specific content of my academic course, which examines Portugal's model

addressing the "opioid crisis," but learning about the culture, the people, customs, landscape and faceted inner and outer terrains of Portugal as well. I suppose what motivates most of my searching is curiosity - genuine curiosity and interest in knowledge that is experiential and includes cultures, people, social systems, mind-body health and humanistic principles. This experiential learning abroad course is what I thought awaited me in March 2020 as I prepared to travel to Lisbon with my fellow social workers.

By the end of February 2020, I sensed that the trip might be cancelled, but secretly hoped (as perhaps many of us did) that Wuhan, China would resolve the Coronavirus, that Italy would eradicate the illness, and that all would be well with the world.

Throughout quarantine, Ramapo College and the Roukema Center have been both responsive and supportive. All of us have had to be, really. What strikes me in this responsiveness is the discovery of my own and the school's capacity to adapt. Professor Stephanie Sarabia, who oversees the course, adapted the experiential learning we had planned to encounter in Portugal into a hybrid six-week course that was conducted virtually.

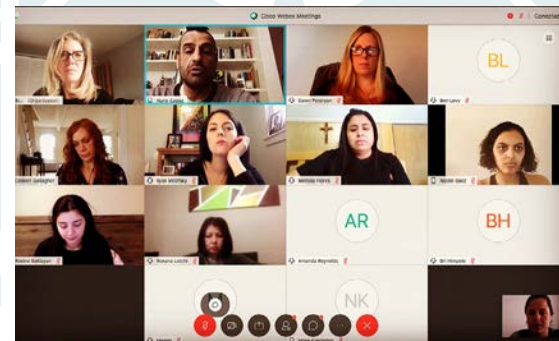
Although I missed coastal Portugal, Fado, "black pudding and pineapple," cafes and espresso, trolley cars and walking on cobblestone streets - I got a taste of the country by studying its policies and programs which are inextricably intertwined with the country's national identity and cultural attributes. A highlight of our "almost"

Portugal experience was a live online session with Nuno Capaz, a key official in the Portuguese "Dissuasion Commission," which proved to be an online version of what we would have experienced had we been there.

For some, there might be a feeling of disconnect in this new normal of COVID-19 as we continue on with our education or prepare to graduate. However, there is also an opportunity to recognize our global interdependence as we share common challenges through international community efforts and find solutions in dealing with the global pandemic. That's why I feel it is a responsibility and certainly a privilege and an honor to have participated -imperfectly- in Ramapo's Study Abroad program. Looking ahead, I'm keeping it in my back pocket again- the possibility of traveling to Portugal as a Ramapo alumna.



Lisboa, Portugal



Virtual Guest Lecture & Discussion with Mr. Nuno Capaz, Director of the Dissuasion Commission of the Ministry of Health of Portugal

More details on the program can be found [here](#).

# THE VIRTUALLY GLOBAL CLASSROOM: what constitutes “going/being there” in a COVID world

by Professor RUMA SEN

In what seemed like barely enough time to catch our breath mid-semester (spring break), we the faculty had to convert our courses to remote teaching for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester. For one of my courses, 'Intercultural Communication (COMM 234)', it was fairly seamless as it is offered online during the summer sessions. However, for my course titled 'Global Indian Culture and Media (COMM 357)', it meant a whole host of alterations! This course was originally scheduled to include interactions with Ramapo study abroad students to India during the spring break, followed by sustained virtual meetings with students from a college in New Delhi, in addition to trips to Jackson Heights, NY, for a food and culture based experiential component. The students in this course were also supposed to develop campaigns designed to raise awareness about contemporary critical issues in India, and bring these campaigns to the Ramapo campus.

Instead, this is what the students experienced through the alternative delivery format:

1. Viewing media online (via streaming platforms) followed by facilitated discussions in virtual classrooms and zoom breakout sessions.
2. Meet online with journalists and scholars from India, whom they could learn from through extensive interviews (see image), in addition to reading articles authored by them and watching related media content. These personal accounts and lived experiences were in no way meant to substitute their first-hand experiences, but they provided a more nuanced understanding of material they learned from texts and visual materials.
3. The campaigns which the students eventually developed had to be exclusively online. However, the content was richer and better informed as students were able to devote additional time to conducting the research, and connect with people online regardless of location. With everyone being homebound (India was also under lockdown) many sources responded, and gave their time generously.

The primary lesson learned: Learning is situational and contextual.

The shared experience of the global pandemic allowed students to compare the experiences in India and the US simultaneously. Students engaged in a lot of reflections about what qualifies as a first world nation and what it means to be living in a developing economy. Students commented regularly on how the global discourse is becoming increasingly inescapable for students in the US.

So, how can on-campus curriculum continue to evolve and be more inclusion of global content and experiences? What the remote learning response to the pandemic has highlighted is that we have many more opportunities to connect students with the world through the technological tools we have access to, and our global networks. Now more than ever, it is an imperative that students gain a better understanding of the world, geographic literacy, compassion, contextualizing their personal and professional places in the world and communication with diverse peoples. It is our responsibility as educators to be more innovative in our design and delivery of student learning experiences to better prepare more engaged, globally-minded citizens.



New Delhi, India | Photo Credit Ben Levy



Taj Mahal at Sunrise, Agra, India | Photo Credit Ben Levy



Diggi Bazar, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India | Photo Credit Ben Levy



Students interviewing an Indian Journalist

Counterclockwise from top left:

RCNJ students Francesca Depalo and Dana Wehmann, Assistant Editor Op-Ed @ thequint.com Ms. Indira Basu, and RCNJ Professor Ruma Sen

# ADAPTABILITY FOR ACADEMIC CONTINUITY:

by BEN LEVY, Director of International Education, Ramapo College



For more than 10 years, Ramapo College has delivered unique and transformative international experiences for undergraduate and graduate students to China. Professor of International Business Huiping Li utilizes her professional and personal networks and the support of Ramapo's Roukema Center for International Education to have facilitated a deep academic and rich cultural experience for more than 150 undergraduate and 150 graduate participants. The undergraduate course – China: Business Immersion Experience - Culture, Business & Economics (IBUS 322) – includes Chinese and foreign company visits in Beijing and Shanghai, discussions with CEOs and business leaders, and visits and observations to economic hubs such as local markets. To provide cultural context to the Chinese business environment, students share meals with business leaders to better understand business etiquette, visit historical and contemporary cultural sites, and interact with their student peers at Shanghai Normal University. Students who previously participated in the program have returned to China to start businesses and engage in career opportunities, and have expressed how their experiences on the China study abroad program have also served to competitively position them for jobs based in the U.S.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which originated in Wuhan, China, a decision was made that the China Business study abroad program could not be offered for Spring Break 2020. However, through the commitment of Professor Li, the adaptability of program participants and Ramapo's strong global network, the College quickly modified the program to be offered over Spring Break with a focus on Brexit and based

in London. The program was intended to provide participants with parallel experiences. As the COVID-19 pandemic crossed national borders, it became clear that offering a global mobility experience anywhere in the world would no longer be possible. Given the degree requirements for most participants, Professor Li modified her course syllabus into an online course titled '21st Century Business Environment in China.' This course introduces students to fundamental aspects of the business environment and culture in China, offering a comprehensive overview of the economic and political environment in China, as well as an introduction to Chinese government, society and culture. The goal of the course is to allow students to learn and observe how China's recent economic and political history has shaped its society and current business environment for domestic and foreign firms; and how foreign companies can navigate the opportunities and challenges posed by this difficult environment, especially in Chinese service and technology-intensive industries.

It was important for Professor Li that students have access to virtual content that provides them the best alternative to an in-person experience in China. The course included virtual components of the Chinese business environment, including: Coronavirus and its implications to China and global supply, governmental structure, political system and elections, food culture, IT in China, manufacturing, mega projects, one-child policy, human rights, and the middle class in China. The course met weekly via Webex to discuss the topics and answer students' questions. Students were required to interview a Chinese classmate, professor, business executive or someone who has visited China, as well as complete

# The Story of the 2020 China International Business Immersion Study Abroad Program



a research program to survey and analyze the business environment for US companies in China and their operational challenges. Through participant discussions and reflections on these topics, students were able to better understand the complexities and opportunities of the business environment in China.

As is important with all business environments, it is critical to have an operational reality that is flexible and adaptable to mitigate any substantial challenges. Ramapo College's study abroad program to China demonstrated such resiliency. Through Ramapo College's deep global network, Professor Li's commitment to global business education as well as the patience, communication and adaptability of the participants, a new opportunity was created and experienced with this virtual course on the 21st Century Business Environment of China. Professor Li reflects "Coronavirus can temporarily stop us from traveling, but it cannot stop Ramapo College students from seeing the world...traveling to China virtually can be a fun, educational and eye-opening experience!"

“Overall it was a good experience. Even though we did not get to fly to China (hopefully I will have the possibility in the future) I have learned a great deal in the class. Professor Li was very understanding and helpful throughout the whole process and I feel that I have learned a lot about China and its culture. I will definitely be prepared for when, one day, I finally get to see it with my own eyes.”

*ANNA SCARPIS '21*

“With the unfortunate circumstances of not being able to travel to China, the revised course that Professor Li taught was very informative and fun. I learned many new topics about China, such as the Chinese culture, Chinese relations with western countries, political changes in China, and the country's economy. I appreciate all the efforts done to make this class a success, thanks to Benjamin Levy, Professor Li and the Roukema Center.”

*ALVARO PENA-DIAZ '20*

To APPLY or access more program details, click [here](#).

# Class of 2020 International Students *final reflections*



## VICTOR GEORGIEV

Bulgaria  
Information Technology Management

The highlights of my college life were the supportive and kind-hearted friends I made as well as the opportunity to intern in New York City.



## OPRAH MUYAMBO

Democratic Republic of Congo  
MS Accounting

Enjoy your college experience and build relationships as much as you can.



## MARKONI ACHARYA

Nepal  
Engineering Physics (Math Minor)

I enjoyed in actively getting involved on-campus and making new friends with people from different backgrounds.



## BIBHASH MULMI

Nepal  
Computer Science (Math Minor)

I plan to work as a Software Developer and then maybe go back to college for a Masters degree.



## JIJEEBISHA BHATTARAI

Nepal  
Business Administration  
(Math & Accounting Minor)

When previous seniors told me "four years will pass by in the blink of an eye," I brushed it off. When the years actually did fly by, I wish it was possible to go back and live it all again. My advice now is to enjoy it while it lasts.



## SALIL MAHARJAN

Nepal  
Computer Science

The highlight of my college career was my study abroad semester in Athens, Greece and then being quarantined during the remainder of my senior year.

# Class of 2020 International Students *final reflections*



**THIT HEIN**

Myanmar

Information Technology Management

My advice for students would be to take fun electives. I really enjoyed my astronomy class.



**BOLD-ERDENE GANKHUYAG**

Mongolia

Information Technology Management

Highlight: Exploring new places and traveling around the United States. Advice: Don't hold yourself back, do what it is you want to do and you won't have any regrets.



**ABHASH PANTA**

Nepal

Computer Science (Math Minor)

Highlight: Working for the Center for Student Success and developing cool automating software.



**AMISH REGMI**

Nepal

Computer Science (Math Minor)

After I graduate, I will be working for IBM as a Software Engineer. My advice to students is to go on spontaneous trips and try out new experiences.



**ASHMIN BHANDARI**

Nepal

Computer Science

Much of my intangible growth took place during my time at Ramapo and that is what I will remember most.



**MARINE UYTTEHOVE**

Belgium

Psychology (Second Major: Communication Arts, Minor: Neuroscience)

Never forget where you come from. Remembering your culture...You are unique that you are an international student. You have much to bring to the American culture and it to you.



## FULBRIGHT, KOREA

+ *Corona*

by CHRISTINA DWYER '19

When I graduated from Ramapo this time last year, I only had about two months until I started my teaching journey in South Korea as a Fulbright Scholar. Every day felt like a dream.

Never did I anticipate that one year later, I would be teaching about 500 students online, half of whom I've never even met.

Beginning on April 12, the U.S. State Department's Fulbright program was suspended internationally. I was contacted over email that I had been granted alumni status prematurely, and the only way to stay teaching in Korea until my original end date was to work out a personal agreement with my school, which luckily, I did. Out of just 100 first, second and third year renewing ETAs, only about 20 of us currently remain in Korea. We are one of the rare countries in Fulbright where there are still grantees on site.

My time in South Korea has been everything I dreamed it would be, and more. I could fill pages and pages of all the beautiful moments I've shared with my host family, students, coworkers and new friends. However, I'm going to mainly focus on how COVID-19 has impacted my stay here, from a non-teaching perspective.

South Korea was one of the first countries to have a sizable outbreak outside of China. However, even when the number of cases was in the single digits here, citizens were urged to wear masks and to sanitize their hands before entering businesses. Around early to mid-February I went to visit America for a week and had to go through Gimpo airport, which was almost completely empty. Korea had maybe about 20 cases at that point.

On three separate occasions before departing on the America-bound plane, I was approached by PPE-clad airport staff asking whether or not I had traveled through China. My passport was double-and triple-checked. I remember groaning and thinking how going through Immigration in the USA was going to take an unusually long time. I was completely shocked when I arrived in JFK and no one, not even the border agents and TSA, was wearing masks. Even more shocking is that I was never asked where I had travelled from. There wasn't infrared temperature screening. I learned that a month later, when my fellow Fulbrighters arrived in American airports, these measures were still not in place. None of them were asked where they travelled from, despite South Korea adding hundreds of new cases per day at the time. That time in February was one of the first times I realized that I was most likely going to be much better off staying in Korea, rather than America.

Before COVID-19 hit the western world, Koreans were living in a widespread epidemic with its roots from a controversial religious cult called the Shincheonji. Korea never really ran short on resources, but there was a brief mask shortage for several weeks. Almost immediately, the Korean government developed a birthday-based lottery system where a person could pick up two masks per week at their local pharmacy, guaranteed for everyone. South Korea already has universal healthcare, but for those who were not covered under Korea's national health plan (like me), testing and treatment was free if you tested positive. This country never shut down or restricted travel, although they recommended that people stay inside and avoid travel for quite a long



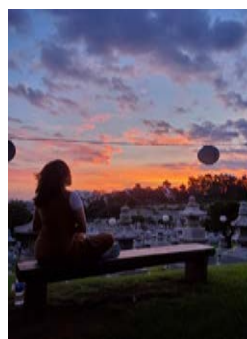
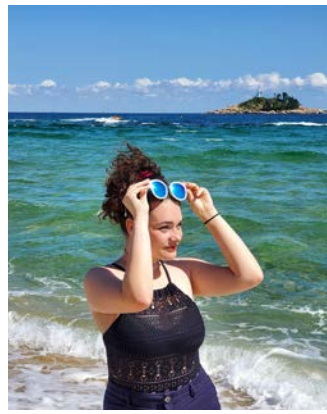
time. And most people did. For those who could not work, the government required all businesses to pay their employees at least 70 percent of their salary. Korea's collectivist culture combined with experience from the SARS and MERS outbreak made the country one of the best places to be in the entire world at the moment, according to a U.S. embassy diplomat who had a Zoom call with Fulbrighters in late March. Anytime there was a new case near me, I would get an emergency alert text which outlined the entire travel history of that patient. Those who were in contact could get tested the same day and usually receive their results within two days. There had never been anything close to a shortage of tests here, and they even created incentives for foreigners, particularly undocumented ones, to get tested. Although times are currently bleak worldwide, staying in Korea in the midst of a pandemic has truly opened my eyes for the better. Seeing a country band together and work so cohesively has enforced for me a genuine admiration and feeling of awe. What has made me even more happy is seeing Korea get positive international recognition for its efforts, especially when you consider the neighbor to the north usually gets more screen time on American television. I am really proud of my second home here.

It's quite a downer that I can't really travel and see Korea in the months leading up to my departure, but there are some silver linings. Because my host brothers haven't been going to school, we've bonded really closely. Going on neighborhood walks after dinner has become a nightly ritual for my youngest host brother and me. He likes to take me to all the secret playgrounds in the area (there are many among the apartment complexes). The boys also like to have movie nights in my room where we turn off lights, turn on the string lights, and pile up on my bed to watch Netflix on my laptop. My host mom usually gives us apple juice and dried squid as a snack during these nights. I've also forayed into starting K-dramas with them at their request, where they are more than happy to explain the meaning of different Korean vocabulary words. If there were no virus, they would be at school all day and then cram schoolwork all night. But there is always the looming threat that one of us will take the virus home and infect the others. Just in case, my host family and I made a contingency plan on what will happen if one of us gets sick. Thankfully, we have all been healthy and happy. Although I'm upset that my Fulbright adventure was interrupted, I wouldn't want to be in any other country during COVID-19.

Learn more about the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program [here](#).

Top-Left-Clockwise:

1. At the beach in Sokcho, South Korea
2. At the American Ambassador's residence
3. Listening to the Buddhist Monks in Eumsong, South Korea
4. The Annual Jinju Lantern Festival
5. At the Fulbright School Placement Ceremony
6. Wearing Hanbok
7. An early morning hike near Andong, South Korea
8. Sunrise at a temple in Eumsong, South Korea
9. Portrait of my host family



## Roberta Berlingò

Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA)

Instructor of Italian

## From an Italian FLTA at Ramapo

**Tell me, how do you cope with a pandemic outbreak while you are on a fantastic grant?**

First, you need to stay healthy. An ocean apart, I keep myself busy cooking Italian (but not only) dishes with my mum (and many other relatives) supervising my work through my phone's screen. Before that, a yoga session is a good stretch.

Second, my work is my passion. Doing research for class is fun and transitioning from face-to-face to online learning has been an interesting experiment. As a teacher, you never stop learning and I kept learning about how to learn: lots of interesting academic webinars but who said that teachers cannot have fun? This is me with members of the amazing AATI (American Association of Italian Teachers) singing Bella Ciao during Liberation Day.

Third, social interactions. I am blessed with many amazing friends, some of them I met here at Ramapo. I can talk to them more after our busy frantic world has slowed down and I never miss a chance to say to them how much I love them. We have fun, sing together and even celebrated "graduation" day!



Professor Roberta Berlingò



Clockwise:

1. Italian cooking / 2. Roberta with members of the AATI / 3. Zoom calls with friends

## Sarra Safhi

Fulbright Foreign Language  
Teaching Assistant (FLTA)

Instructor of Arabic

“This is the first time I’ve been away from my country,” said Safhi, who is teaching Arabic at the College. “It’s such a very different language, the characters and the pronunciation, but the students are enjoying it,” she said. “And I’m enjoying teaching them.” Safhi has been a teacher of English and Arabic art history in her native city of Marrakech for seven years. She is pursuing an advanced degree in comparative linguistics at the university in Rabat, Morocco. Asked why she chose to apply for the Fulbright scholarship, Safhi said, “I thought it would be an eye-opening experience to see firsthand American life and culture. When you spend time in another place, you’re not just a passive learner, it becomes part of you. This will surely help my career as a teacher when I return home to Morocco.”



Professor Sarra Safhi

## Yu-Chien Hsieh

Fulbright Foreign Language  
Teaching Assistant (FLTA)

Instructor of Mandarin Chinese

Hsieh, who visited Alaska and cities along the United States West Coast several years ago, prefers to go by her “Americanized name of Yolanda.” She is teaching Mandarin Chinese to the Ramapo students. Like Safhi, she realizes her students are starting from scratch with the characters and slight nuance differences in pronunciation of the Chinese language. But she said because she is a teacher of elementary school children in Taiwan, she can approach her college-aged students in a similar fashion. “The children I teach at home are as young as six years old. They are learning the very basics, so I use the same technique here. So far, it’s working. They are understanding the tones and getting the ‘feeling’ for the sounds.”

Professor Yu-Chien Hsieh



# PARTING *words*

## REMEMBER THAT *you are not* ALONE

In this unprecedented time as travel restrictions and health advisories enacted worldwide may have affected your ability to leave or to remain in the country, it is reassuring to remember that we all are part of the Ramapo College's strong, capable and caring community. As challenging and uncertain as life may be now, remember that you are not alone. Remind yourself that people next door and around the globe are going through the same feelings of isolation and loneliness and that we will survive this storm together. I would like to thank you all for trusting us as we are constantly thinking of you and stand with you during this global health crisis. Roadrunners are resilient, and as a community, we will always stay positive and lift each other up. Be safe and as always, take care of yourself and each other!

— Izumi and Raj

from International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS)

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## STAY *engaged* AND STAY TUNED

We are so proud of our study abroad students for not only taking the opportunity to study abroad but for showing flexibility and adaptability, all while continuing to remain positive about their experience. The Roukema Center for International Education (RCIE) team remain optimistic about the future of international education. While for the present, most study abroad programs remain remote experiences, we are planning for 2021 and we are committed to supporting Ramapo Roadrunners who wish to travel globally to experience new cultures, learn or hone language skills, gain access to new courses, network in a global workplace, and continue to grow into active, mindful, global citizens. Until then, stay engaged and stay tuned.

— Kate

from the Roukema Center for International Education (RCIE)

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