

24 December 2015

I've known Dr. Lisa Feder since the Summer of 2015, at which time I was a student on a field school in Belgrade, Serbia. Allow me to begin by saying that the program and time I spent working with Dr. Feder was one of the most memorable and impactful study abroad programs of my undergraduate degree. The city was our classroom and Dr. Feder was one of our guides, available for questions whenever needed, pointing us in certain directions when we felt especially overwhelmed, but ultimately allowing us to explore the city according to our own interests.

One area of particular importance to me was Dr. Feder's introduction of meditation/reflection into a daily routine as part of ethnographic fieldwork. So much of research and classroom studies are focused on production, and there can be an enormous amount of stress that grows from this. By leading us through such reflective exercises Dr. Feder demonstrated that it was ok to take time for yourself; in fact, this could be the most beneficial part of one's day. By taking time to meditate on a day's work, in as simple or complex a manner as I felt comfortable with, and clearing the mind it allowed me to attack things fresh. Since returning to school this has been an invaluable tool, one that I continue to employ now on a regular basis.

Another aspect to Dr. Feder's approach to teaching was in her encouragement for us as students to take risk. This is something that I find to be lacking in the formalized setting of a typical university classroom, by its very nature, since a student's academic future hinges on GPAs producing something guidable over the course of a term. Dr. Feder's unwavering support meant that this controlled freedom not only helped in building the confidence I had in my own abilities to perform fieldwork in the future, but also gave me the courage to take risks in my writing and research. I am convinced that Dr. Feder's encouragement has helped me transition from being a good student to one capable of performing serious academic research.

Finally, the pace at which Dr. Feder introduced concepts to us and the exercises we were given each day was perhaps the most influential for me. She was patient with us all, choosing to concentrate on single senses in the beginning and looking for ways to weave them together later on. As a musician I've always paid particular attention to sound, but this has often come at the expense of other sensory experiences. Being taught to bring the senses that I would normally background to the forefront illuminated so much more about the city than I would have otherwise uncovered. We may have viewed a single note at a time, but they eventually all combined to form a symphonic picture of place.

I strongly believe that Dr. Feder's contemplative approach to studying abroad is one that many, if not all students would benefit from. Much of what Dr. Feder introduced to me in Belgrade has followed me home. Not only has it impacted my academic pursuits, but it also reopened my eyes to my own city.

Craig Farkash
University of Alberta