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Senior Project Proposal

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Where should you study abroad?

I first started thinking about studying abroad at the end of my sophomore year. However, I couldn’t find many Yalies who had traveled abroad during the previous school year. It was even harder to find students I could relate to. For example, most of the students had studied abroad during the summer, not during a semester. I dismissed the idea until, luckily, at the beginning of my junior year a classmate who I had recently met, mentioned that she had been abroad. She answered all my questions and encouraged me to go through all of the steps necessary to apply and consequently spend a semester studying in Madrid.

Thinking about studying abroad can be daunting if you don’t know anyone who has done it before. It can be overwhelming and confusing trying to find answers to your questions online. Some questions have too many responses: What city? What program? What time of year? Some are specific to Yale: Is it ok to leave Yale for a semester? Will I still graduate on time with my specific major? I want to make sure that neither a lack of information or and tremendous amount of information is the reason someone doesn’t study abroad. Thus, I want to organize study abroad data in a visually appealing and dynamic website, that can be tailored to a specific university like Yale, to encourage more students to study abroad.

First, I decided what data I felt was important to display. I wanted it to be a
mix of public and university specific data in order to show a robust image of studying abroad. I started by looking at Yale’s study abroad website to see what information they had. I found information on current and past students that had studied abroad. However, it was in two separate places and in Excel spreadsheets, which makes it even more challenging for students to interpret the facts. On the other hand, these excel spreadsheets provide perfect data for me to visually display on a website, where I can also include a list of all study abroad programs Yale accepts for credit.

In addition to the specific Yale information, I also want to incorporate general perceptions of the cities the programs are located as well. While Yale’s study abroad website includes student feedback about the diverse programs, it’s hard to picture any city from words alone. In addition, there weren’t enough students’ impressions for each city, giving the reader a biased opinion. I feel that social media is the best place to get the most diverse opinions about a city and many posts include pictures. Visually seeing what a city looks like helps students picture themselves there and can help them narrow down what city they’d like best. Since most posts include a location tag, I could sort them by cities. In addition, I can also sort them or filter some out by certain words or hashtags to get more specific photos, like #studyabroad. In summary, I want to include information of students who have been abroad, a list of Yale approved study abroad programs, and photos of each city from social media.

Since most of the data has a location component, I want to plot the data on a flat map of the world. Thus, I’d also need the coordinates for the outline of every
country. In addition, I’ll use a JavaScript library like D3.js to bind the data to the map. The density of information for each city can be distinguished either by color like in a choropleth or different sizes of a predetermined shape.

However, all of the information gathered won’t apply to every person or at every stage of planning to study abroad. Thus, in order to avoid the information from becoming overwhelming, there could be a filtering system allowing the amount of information displayed at once to be adaptable to its viewer. For example, there could be university specific filters such as previous students’ majors and global filters such as population of city.

I will begin by displaying a map of the world. Then, I’ll plot all of Yale’s programs on the map. The next part will include visualizing Yale students’ data in a way that shows the popularity of each city. After, I will concentrate on public data and pull photos from social media for each city. Lastly, I will add features in order to make the results personalized and relevant for each student. By creating an engaging website to display study abroad data, I want to encourage Yale students to study abroad. I want to give them the tools so they can picture themselves living happily in international cities and empower them by seeing similar students who have successfully made cities around the globe places they call home.