

Cover Sheet

Title of Essay: *One World, Many Voices: Learning Across Borders*

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One World, Many Voices: Learning Across Borders

I was born and raised in Nepal, a lower-middle-income country often described as “third world” in the United States. My world was small but familiar—handwritten notes, ballpoint pens, exams on paper, and conversations in classrooms that felt safe and predictable. I never imagined that one day I would cross oceans to sit in a classroom at the Rollins School of Public Health, surrounded by students from across the globe. For someone who had never left my home country, stepping into this new world felt like stepping into another life.

I thought I had prepared myself. I practiced English, imagined how classes would run, and promised to embrace cultural differences. But reality rarely matches imagination. I still remember my first class: sitting in the back row, listening to my peers speak so quickly, their sentences dotted with slang I had never heard. I wanted to raise my hand and contribute, but the words I had rehearsed in my head suddenly felt too heavy to release. That day, I walked out in silence, wondering if my voice even belonged here.

The classroom wasn’t the only place that felt foreign. At night, I sat in front of my laptop staring at Canvas, unsure where to click. Back home, assignments were neatly written in notebooks and handed in person; here, they floated in a digital space I couldn’t navigate. I remember one night refreshing the page again and again, afraid I had missed a deadline. Frustrated, I almost gave up—but slowly, I learned. That struggle opened my eyes to the power of technology in education, and also to the reality that millions of students around the world are excluded from this “digital classroom.”

The hardest challenge, however, was loneliness. I watched others blend easily into groups—domestic students bonding over familiar jokes, international students finding comfort with peers from the same countries. I searched for Nepali classmates, but there were none. Each day I felt myself sinking deeper into isolation. One evening, alone in my room, I broke down in tears, asking myself if I had made a mistake leaving home. That moment shifted when I attended the ISSS welcome reception. I can still picture the room: voices in dozens of accents, people laughing nervously, others standing as unsure as I felt. For the first time, I realized I was not alone—many of us were navigating the same unspoken struggles.

Over time, the pieces began to come together. I made friends—both international and domestic—who now sit with me in the library to discuss assignments and help me navigate life in the U.S. I learned that small talk, once so uncomfortable, is actually a bridge to deeper trust. Coursework is still demanding, but I feel stronger and more confident. This year, I was honored to be selected for the Emory International Council 2025–2026 cohort. The same student who once sat silent in the back row now has the opportunity to speak for others.

My journey is more than personal—it mirrors a larger truth. Inequalities in education are real. Language, technology, and cultural barriers silence countless students before their voices are heard. If I, with resources and support, found these challenges daunting, I can only imagine how much harder it is for those without the same opportunities. Globally minded education must do more than bring students together; it must ensure that every voice has the chance to rise.

My voice is just one among many, but I hope it sets a benchmark for others from underprivileged countries. I want to serve as a liaison, channeling the voices of international students who might otherwise feel unseen. *One World, Many Voices* is not just a theme—it is a responsibility. If my

story can make even one student feel less alone, or inspire one institution to open its doors wider, then my voice has done its part in building a compassionate and inclusive future. Because every voice deserves to be heard, and I am determined that mine will also carry the voices of others who cannot yet speak for themselves.