



I always desired to travel to different parts of the world and meet with people of different cultures. My wishes came true on January 1st, 2015 when I made my first international travel to the United States.

I am an electronics engineering student from Pakistan Air Force-Karachi Institute of Economics & Technology University. In 2013, I applied to the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program. Soon I learned I was awarded a fully funded scholarship to study at Western Kentucky University. So I stepped out of my comfort zone and said goodbye to my friends and family leaving the people, culture and country I love.

Imagine having to adjust to a new culture while taking full credit college courses in a language that is not your own. Because I love to learn I chose a variety of different

courses at WKU and embraced many new activities. I realized from my interactions with professors and other students that the educational system of the U.S. is quite different than Pakistan.

In addition to a full course load I participated in a lot of activities. I attended a basketball match. WKU students and faculty are all very proud of their great athletes. While at the game the sound was deafening at times, with all attending shouting, "Go tops! Go tops!" in unison. The

roaring sound of all those shouts made my heart pound, but it also made me proud to be a Hilltopper.

The times I spent walking alone around the campus are memories I carry with me. I loved the peaceful environment, the beautiful buildings, and landscaping. Walking on campus gave me time to reflect on the experiences here at WKU. I came here as a stranger, but slowly fell in love with WKU and its people.

This year will be called the year of "first times" in my diary. I took self-defense classes which I loved. I lived in a dorm. I saw snow fall. I traveled to five different cities of the U.S. during spring break, which was tiring but fun. I experienced the Easter holiday. Some of my favorite memories are coloring Easter eggs and hunting for them in my professor's home. I became

a child again as two of my friends and I poked around my teacher's apartment looking for colored eggs the "Easter Bunny" mischievously hid the night before.

It was different to see the degree of freedom of speech that people enjoy here, and it can be seen in everything - the educational system, relationships, dressing and government. I found people to be more expressive of their feelings here. Because of these extreme differences I did suffer a few days from homesickness. These days were difficult, but I knew that many college students have this feeling, too.

My time in the U.S. was full of new experiences and cultural moments that showed me the stark difference between our two cultures. But wisely stated these moments are actually "not better or worse, good or bad; they are simply different." Therefore I embraced each moment taking in all that I could.

Most of the people I met were very kind and welcoming; I made friends of a lifetime. I faced a few people who saw my religious observation or culture as a challenge and decided to be dismissive or offensive to me. But I chose to accept these moments as part of my journey.

When I look back on this time I spent at Western Kentucky University as a Hilltopper, I will proudly tell myself, "Kainat, you did it!" I am forever changed for the better because of the challenges I faced and the friends I made while on my own for a semester in the United States at Western Kentucky University.