

Bowdoin's ComApp question: Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.

Coming home, chilled to the bone and exhausted with an empty stomach, I didn't bother to rush to the kitchen as usual but dropped my head against the window, listlessly. It didn't help. That mocking snicker still haunted me, distorting itself into grating shriek, driving my mind and body into the irresistible dark hole of nonentity.

The very first meeting of Young Enterprise program was not what I imagined. Thirteen British and one Vietnamese students from five colleges in Croydon gathered to found a real company. With the helpful guide from two advisers, we discussed about its legal name and feasible products for this coming Christmas sale. Everything went smoothly except that I didn't find an expected self-confident girl of mine. Those gazing baffled eyes seemed like scorching beam of laser surrounding me. They supplemented with knitting eyebrows to inform me how little the audience made out of my five minute speech for the position of admissions officer. The well-prepared effort of giving a fluent and persuasive presentation suddenly ended in smoke. Was it because of my accent, my gesture or my outlook? The cultural intimidation thought to be defeated after one year studying abroad suddenly resurged and uncontrollably overwhelmed my body. 'It's just a little bit nervous', I tried to soothe myself. It didn't help though.

Things worsened when I indistinctly stammered for the explanation of the company's names that I proposed. Just merely 'SNC stands for soap and candle, our products' and 'Heaven scent because of the smell', not 'the names sound melodious, easy to memorise and seem

slightly mysterious’ or those kinds which clarify their advantages and make me more convincing. My mind went blank with thousands of ‘what’ and ‘pardon’. Unreasonable snicker, shrug of shoulders and hardly discernible headshakes irritated me and drained the last drop of my confidence. I began to feel like a fish out of water more than ever. Instead of excitedly heading towards the promising vast ocean to mix with the whole shoal my lonely fish hid in a stagnant pool, guarding itself from the insecure relationship with new peers. Until the water evaporated, there laid one fish with its security but ignorant of accordance and share of life.

Experienced this self-frustrated situation, I ultimately grasped the profound meaning of cultural shock. It is not just the language barrier that gives me the title of foreigner. My gesture, my behaviour, my characteristics all serve as crucial criteria for the judgement. The feeling of being weird and considered as weird was so disturbing and formidable that not for a few times I wished I were someone else. The desperation for being British blindly headed me to every personality and behaviour ‘modification’ regardless of its inappropriateness to my unchangeable Vietnamese physical character and embedded Vietnamese style of living. For instance, inducing myself to adopt a new hobby of rap, not a taste of mine though, was given a try to get an idea of what songs my friends were discussing.

Attempts of radical self changing to adapt to new environment could have gone on and on if it had not been for Mua Lac, a Vietnamese short story I accidentally came up. ‘Every person is beautiful for being unique’, the exclamation of the main character to defend for her eccentricity impressed me so deeply that I started to appreciate my cultural differences, my uniqueness. It ingrains in the genes of mine, develops with my own character and blooms

with the ultimate mental activities, perception and ideas. Especially in interpersonal contact, I realize what helps me from being the other's duplicate is individual awareness and identity.

In retrospect, I am glad that I didn't let the wind of new culture sweep me by like anonymous leaves. While enjoying entirely the breath of fresh air that wind brings, I still stand firm to assert myself as a Vietnamese. This precious perception has strengthened my confidence, self-esteem and endlessly supplied me with arduous enthusiasm for the mutual understanding of different cultures. I make the most of all the opportunities to expose myself to the new culture such as relaxing at nightclubs with my English friends, going to the awarding ceremony of my host family's children and even attending the funeral of their relatives. The constrained habit of rap and that kind was a thing to be forgotten since it doesn't suit my Vietnamese taste. The progress of understanding is not only receiving but sharing as well. The most memorable example of this is my participation in International Evening of my college. How proud I am to wear Ao Dai, my traditional costume to perform in the fan dance and how pleased to receive compliments for authentic Vietnamese foods, they still live vividly in my mind.

At the moment, my colleagues know me not only as an amiable and friendly admissions officer but also a Vietnamese girl who is always keen on representing Vietnam landscape postcard and telling Vietnam fairy tales. This time it really helps.