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The first thing I ask a student applying to the Institute for Cultural Ecology is what is more important to them: the internship topic or the location. In this golden age of global travel, some of us have the enviable burden of too many choices.

Often times, the ideal intern abroad program may not be in the ideal location. For example, I had a student named Miranda just out of High School. Her first choice for an intern abroad location was Thailand; her first choice for program was communication internships in general and media internships in particular. Specifically, Miranda was fascinated by television internships and we gave her the option of a satellite television station in New York City or, working in Thailand with a smaller, more localized station geared to tourists. Miranda had to make a choice: go with the resume builder and high profile media internship in New York or learn a new culture and enjoy tropical weather in Thailand and at a smaller market television internship.

As a nineteen-year-old with her life ahead of her, I gave her the following advice and ultimately left the decision to her. In support of communication internships in New York, I reminded her that she had a long life ahead and would certainly get to Thailand if that was her dream location. So, the location is always there, while the window to intern abroad can be limited. Second, I told her that she should consider this an investment in her future. New York media internships would not only look stronger on her resume but would also allow her to make connections with people in the industry that could be influential in landing work in the future. Finally, I asked her to consider where she would gain the most job skills. As far as television internships go, the New York station was state of the art, and she would be introduced to equipment and techniques otherwise not available in a smaller market.

For Thailand, I appealed to her emotional side. First, I suggested the simple act of following her heart. If her heart told her that Thailand is where she wants to be, then not following that could lead to regret. Second, there were a host of communication and cultural skills available doing an intern abroad program that cannot otherwise be gained in your native country. Third, the opportunity to immerse oneself in a foreign language at such a young age can pay dividends for the future and is the essence of communication internships.

Ultimately Amanda weighed both choices and followed her heart. She went back to her original goal and inspiration: to intern abroad and immerse herself in a foreign culture. Eighty-five degree weather vs. a New York winter helped make the decision easy for her as well. She never looked back and came back inspired by her television internship and determined to take on the world.

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