Teaching English in Cambodia
Edited by Emily Pritchard

Johannah Kohorst, a HHP, Pre-Physical Therapy Senior interned with Sovann Komar Children's Village in Phnom Penh, Cambodia during Spring Semester. “Teaching at Sovann Komar has been wildly unexpected, terrifying, difficult, rewarding, amazing, invaluable, and has given me the confidence to enter any new situation knowing that everything will work out.”

What was your primary responsibility during your internship?

“I did not know what I would be doing when I took on the internship. I ended up receiving an entire English class because the teacher left earlier than expected on maternity leave. I taught English every afternoon and assisted with other English classes in the morning. I also taught physical education on Fridays. It is a crazy different culture from the US. It is much more relaxed. I really enjoyed teaching even though that wasn't what I expected I'd be doing.”

Why did you decide to take this internship?

“I really liked the flexibility aspect of it. I wanted to dive into another culture not really knowing what was going to happen and deal with whatever came my way. I didn't know what I would be doing, but I knew it would be very different and I liked that.”

How did you get connected with this opportunity?

“I knew about IE3 through a campus representative. I had started to apply for another IE3 internship but it fell through. My roommate went to South Africa on an IE3 internship and absolutely loved it. They seemed like the most reputable and trustworthy organization, so I spoke with out on campus IE3 advisor, Kevin Hood, and he walked me through everything.”

What was the most rewarding part of this experience?

“The most rewarding part of this experience has absolutely been taking on the English class and bonding with them. It was hard at first. I had to work to get through the language barrier and learn names.”
But I love my little class so much. I have taught English speaking children before, but teaching foreign kids is such a wildly different and rewarding experience in its own right. It forces you out of your comfort zone, and makes you culturally aware and sensitive. It was a wonderful learning experience.

**What has been your favorite part? Has anything exciting or surprising happened?**

“My favorite part was discovering the culture here. So many exciting and surprising things happen on a daily basis. Learning to bargain with a tuk tuk driver was and always is exciting. Getting an English class I didn't expect was exciting. Getting dengue fever was exciting, surprising, and really painful. Not having a plan to get back from Thailand was crazy exciting! Everything that has happened here has been so different that there's no way it wasn't surprising and exciting. Even walking to the market was exciting.”

**How has your participation in this AE experience impacted your life as a student and as a person in general?**

“It has made me much more aware of other cultures. I have not previously traveled much at all, so this was a very shocking first experience. I feel like because I jumped in and handled everything here as best I could, I am much more confident and aware of myself. I feel as though I can enter any new situation and do my best. It's a very empowering feeling. It has also reaffirmed my desire to work with children in my career.”

**What challenges have you overcome during this experience?**

“I was absolutely terrified on my way to the airport to get here. I had no idea what it would be like not only in the workplace, but Cambodia in general. I really had to calm myself down a lot. There were also challenges when I arrived, such as meeting people, discovering the city, learning how to get places, learning enough of the language to communicate simply. Everything I overcame contributed hugely to my experience because it made me work for everything I did. After I did something that scared me, it didn't seem so bad. I was stiff and terrified when I first arrived, but slowly loosened up and learned to roll with things that I didn't expect.”

**What advice would you give other students considering similar opportunities?**

“I would say do it, absolutely. It is scary. It is lonely at times. But it is so unbelievably worth it. The things you learn about yourself and another culture are invaluable. I feel so much better for having done this.”

**Has this experience reaffirmed or changed your career goals?**

“This experience has definitely reaffirmed my career goals, or at least working with children. I don't know if I want to teach necessarily, but I would consider teaching abroad again. This experience has given me the travel bug. That is something that has changed the timeline of my life. I definitely want to travel more.”
Anything else?

“I really don’t want people to be scared to do something like this. So I want to emphasize that it is scary and it can be lonely, but the pros so totally outweigh the cons of the entire experience. You WILL learn so much about yourself and come out a better person.”