

Taylor Block

Taylor's essay

My name is Taylor and I possess cultural biases. Like an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, the first step to recovery lies in admitting the problem. Writing this feels almost freeing, and the past six months in London have taught me that to acknowledge one's biases is to admit not only the humanity in us all but a desire to evolve.

In 2012, I studied for a semester at the University of the Arts, London. My experience abroad began my penchant for English culture (or what I assumed it to be). I loved the pub scene, afternoon tea, dry English humour, and escalator etiquette. When I decided to go back to school for my master's, looking to London's universities was an easy and obvious choice.



While the qualities I loved about London still exist, the city that greeted me was a divergent from the one I remembered. At first glance, it felt like déjà vu. Once again, I'm a student living in student housing, granted a temporary student visa. I'm an inhabitant of a flat that will soon belong to someone else. As I write this from my bed, I know that someone new will occupy this space, eager and ready to make their own mark on this city and very bedroom. While I'm one of many to join Cass Business School each year, I know I'm far from a statistic or a stereotype. My story, the stamp I will make on the city, and the imprint it will leave on me are entirely unique. This is my un-stereotypical Cass story.

I remember the first day of induction distinctly. We sat in the auditorium as an administrator took a poll of the room based on nationality. "Raise of hands for those from India? Russia? China?" Dozens of hands shot up each time. In contrast, only a few were raised for England. Being from the United States, I knew I would be a minority in my program. I had not anticipated that the English would be too and I would be interacting with far more expats than perhaps I had anticipated.

I was born and raised in Los Angeles and hail from New York—two cities that are considered cultural melting pots and known for their diversity. I was raised with an inclusive attitude and consider myself to be liberally minded. Cass Business School put these values to the test. To live in a city surrounded by a multitude of different cultures is one thing. You live together, but still apart, inhabiting your own communities. However, to immerse yourself in an environment such as Cass, where you're forced to interact with dozens of nationalities, is admittedly, a culture shock. I now understand that coexisting is the bare minimum we all can do in the name of cultural inclusion. Coexistence is just a matter of practicing tolerance - existing at the same time, in the same place as others. While everyone seems to be touting tolerance in today's divisive global climate, tolerance is not nearly enough. If we break down what it means to tolerate someone or something it's to "allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (something that one dislikes or disagrees with) without interference". Is that *really* the best we can do?

I think not. To truly create an environment of inclusion, we have to do so much more than tolerate one another. We have to *need* one another. Cass has locked into this concept. Our program is structured so that we work in groups with people from every corner of the globe. From day one, we need one another. Nearly every grade we receive for the year is dependent upon inclusive and collaborative group work. At a minimum, our success at Cass depends on it. At best, we'll build relationships with people we may not naturally gravitate towards. This has pushed me out of my comfort zone and unveiled biases I didn't think I had. Teamwork can be challenging but teamwork across six different cultures raises the stakes. I've learned to lean in to this discomfort, practice patience, and be more self-aware. I recognise how my own cultural or personal habits could be perceived by others. Americans are often stereotyped as loud and arrogant. And so, I practice listening and humility.

This is no easy exercise but it's an invaluable one, for reasons far beyond a master's degree. While I came to London eager to absorb what I believed to be the culture, I now understand my stereotyped vision was short-sighted. What makes London special is not the afternoon tea or English accents. It's the dozens of other immigrant cultures that are welcomed into the city, just like me. Through Cass and its international student body, I've been reintroduced London. Like seeing an old friend after many years, the city is both the same and entirely changed from how I knew it six years ago. My new relationship with London consists of learning a new language, trying fantastic foreign food, and falling in love with a German. I couldn't be happier to say London has not lived up to my expectations.