

SHARING CLOTHES, SHARING A FUTURE

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It was 9pm on Monday in Brisbane, Australia and 6am on Sunday in the States. We had been traveling for two days already, so we were all excited to quickly get our bags and make our way to the luxurious "Airport Ascot Hotel" in order to take a warm shower, change clothes, and sleep before our flight to Papua New Guinea the next morning.

We made our way to baggage claim. We waited...and waited...and waited. Our bags didn't appear. We then made our way to the Baggage Services Desk to ask for help. The woman at the service desk explained that our bags were nowhere to be found. But we did not need to fear, she assured. We simply needed to write down a description of our bags. She would use this information to find them and get them on the next flight to Papua New Guinea. We trusted her, of course. Everyone knows that giving a description of your bags to someone at ten o'clock at night is a tried and true method for recovery of lost luggage in international travel.

After our stay at the Ascot Hotel, we all climbed back into our clothes of three days. We made our way back to the airport (where we bought some deodorant in the gift shop) and boarded a flight to Papua New Guinea. Upon arrival, we made our way to baggage claim, where we were assured that we would find our bags. We waited...and waited...and waited. No bags. We made our way to the baggage assistance desk. Our bags were nowhere to be found. BUT if we wrote down a description of our luggage and our lodging information on a sticky note, we would have our bags in no time. Knowing the stellar success rate of this method for baggage retrieval, we cheerfully complied. We then made our way to the Pacific Jewel, a cruise ship docked in the harbor of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

We were headed to the Pacific Jewel and to Papua New Guinea for the 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit. APEC began in 1989 as an informal meeting between 12 Asia-Pacific economies seeking to increase trade and collaboration in the region. Today, APEC consists of 21 Pacific-Rim economies who work together to create inclusive and sustainable growth. Each November, leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sector convene for the annual APEC CEO summit in a major city of an APEC economy.

In conjunction with the CEO summit, APEC hosts a "Voices of the Future" Program where youth delegates from each member economy come together to learn about each other's economies, discuss important issues, and draft a declaration expressing their shared values. This year, five Furman students were selected to represent the United States as youth delegates, and their trip was sponsored by the Richard W. Riley Institute at Furman, which has been involved with the APEC "Voices of the Future" Program since 2002.

Needless to say, all of the events at APEC require formal attire, and we showed up with nothing other than the smelly clothes on our back. Thankfully, though, some of our fellow delegates from Australia, New Zealand, and Chinese-Taipei offered us formal attire to borrow. I was even lent the "business boots" that are currently trending in Australia.

This situation serves as a unique analogy for what international collaboration could and should look like. The US delegates arrived at the conference, and we were honest about our shortcomings and flaws. Individuals from other countries were able to use their resources to help us solve our problem, and as a result, the entire APEC summit was better off (not only

would we have been embarrassed without business wear, but whoever was sitting beside us would have been quite upset due to the putrid smell of our clothes). If countries could truly come together with this desire to understand and help one another create the best world possible, international relations would be filled with more altruism and less avarice.

Unfortunately, this year's APEC conference was the most divisive to date. For the first time in history, the APEC economies could not agree on a joint statement, and the summit ended in disarray due to rising tensions between the US and China. For many, this is cause for severe disappointment. Yet the youth delegates from the United States have a different perspective. The APEC Youth Forum was filled with delegates who believed that empathy and collaboration are key to creating a shared future of global growth and prosperity. We learned from and were challenged by the diverse ideas and opinions of our newfound friends and colleagues. If this sentiment of compassion and empathy continues --the same sentiment that led delegates from around the world to share clothes with strangers--then there is hope that a world can exist where international leaders work together not simply to share clothes but to create a shared future where inclusion and prosperity are promised to all.