Program: Antarctica: Human Impacts on a Fragile Environment
Location: Antarctica
Rank: Graduate
Major: Environmental Economics

“I chose the Antarctica study abroad program for a variety of reasons that made it specifically exciting and interesting. First of all, it was the first opportunity I had ever seen to step foot on The White Continent, and I anticipate it may be one of the only ones I come across. The uniqueness of this trip inspired me to go somewhere that so few people will. I also was inspired by a high school teacher in an environmental philosophy course with the story of Ernest Shackleton, a Heroic Age explorer whose leadership on the tumultuous Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition made him larger than life and his story has stuck with me since.

As a sustainability-minded student, I was inspired by the environmental focus of this program and wanted to see what unique experience and knowledge of Antarctica I could gain from the course and the trip that would better prepare me to work in the sustainability arena.
I think study abroad is an invaluable part of someone's college experience. Removing yourself from America allows for reflection on the way our society works, and helps students critically analyze our systems by removing themselves and diving into another culture. One reason I found this study abroad so compelling is that, unlike other trips that take someone to another culture that they can learn from and contrast with her/his experience at home, this trip attempts to rip someone out of the whole global system by taking them to the only continent to never support human society. This plays well into the sustainability focus of the program by facilitating reflection on human environmental impacts at a species level, by separating the group from all signs of civilization and surrounding them with the epitome of wilderness. Antarctica holds such a capacity to inspire awe from the size of its mountains, glaciers, and icebergs, but also reminds us of how fragile the natural world is as the continent reacts to modern climate change.

My favorite memory from my study abroad experience is kayaking in the waters around the various islands and inlets that we explored off of the Antarctic Peninsula. Kayaking allowed me to see the most wildlife, geology, and ice on our excursions and I felt that I was interacting with the continent in a deeper way for it. Pardon the run-on, but occasionally we would paddle silently through water that looked black in contrast with the white of the land, dodging floating ice and admiring the few blues and blacks of the landscape, all while listening to the continent’s enormous silence, like astronauts in space, which was only broken up by booms of distant glaciers calving or calls from skua flying overhead. That experience is one I will cherish for the rest of my life, and is one that inspires me to protect the environment we still have."