Note: I prefer typing to writing so I chose instead to type out my journal but I plan on hand writing my reflective essay to give it a more personal touch

Day 1 (Thursday night):

The excitement for leaving was at an all time high as the time neared when I was leaving for the AMAZON (Still too surreal at this point to wrap my head around it). I barely slept this morning/night before we left because I was too anxious to leave so the exhaustion hit me when we landed in Brazil. The plane ride was long but it ended up working out really well because I was able to have a whole row to myself on the international flight so I slept like a baby. The views were incredible and it was so awesome being able to see both the sunrise and sunset on two separate continents. My first thought when we left the van and climbed onto the boat for the first time was "I JUST CROSSED A PLANK ON THE AMAZON RIVER"… honestly how many people can say they’ve done that; it was such an extraordinary feeling. The first Brazilian food and drink I tried were amazing; the drink was the Brazilian national drink: capoeira (need to double check spelling) and I don’t know what the food was but it was just as good. As we introduced ourselves to the crew, Jodi mentioned that I have a slight southern drawl which I was unaware of but hey at least the crew remembered my name!! I was glad to be on the Amazon and even happier when Junior said we could go to bed because then we could actually start doing the really cool stuff.

\*looking back on day 1 and all the classes prior to our departure everyone turned out to be so different than what I expected from class except Jeff because well Jeff is Jeff but its an incredible opportunity to travel alongside them and I don’t think there could ever be a better mix of kids who all get along so well its truly a wonderful thing. Plus all the weird things we've found out about each other like Devin, JR, and I all went to rival schools and live within 20 minutes of each other\*

Day 2 (Friday):  
I don’t even know how to begin to describe day 2… it feels like I'm living in a dream in this faraway beautiful land with an incredibly high humidity. For some odd reason, I keep thinking I'm in a real life Jurassic Park; honestly not entirely sure why but I'll go with it. The Amazon is different than what I expected it's so much vaster and less foresty than I thought it would be but it has by far surpassed anything I could even dream of. The morning trip was filled with seeing lots of diversity which is apparently uncommon but I'm not complaining because I saw a squirrel monkey, two sloths, and more insanely beautiful and diverse birds than I even knew existed. My camera wasn’t working and I was not in the mood to mess with it so instead of seeing everything through a lens I lived in the moment and I am honestly so glad that my camera didn’t work. I still can take wonderful photos on my phone but after traveling to two countries previously and always having my face shoved into my camera it was an incredible experience to just be able to take it all in without worrying about trying to get my camera in the right settings and such. We came back for breakfast around 10ish I think and as always the food was delicious and didn’t disappoint (my love for scrambled eggs became even stronger which I didn’t think was possible). Then we had free time: for awhile I sat in the sun and waved to everyone to passed by then the sun got a little too hot so that meant it was time for dominos and VERONICA AND I BEAT JR AND JR BY COMING BACK FROM AN 85 POINT DEFICIT TO WIN BY 15 so obviously after that I retired from the game of dominos because who can actually ever beat that kind of game. Then it was euchre time; Veronica and I won but then proceeded to lose to JR and Luke; the next game involved JR, Veronica, and me trying to teach Ming how to play. The game was the funniest game I've ever played and Ming won the game by having a lay down loner like talk about beginner’s luck lol.

Fishing was up next. I didn’t have a clue as to what to expect from piranha fishing but it turned out to be a blast. We had to try a few different spots before we found a place where the fish were biting. The people on the opposite side of the canoe from me kept getting lots of catfish but for the longest time we couldn’t get a piranha. On my side was me, Jodi, and Jeff so obviously a competition ensued as to who could get the piranha which kept taking our bait first. Apparently, I earned myself a reputation of being savage from Erin as I threatened to cut Jodi's line and after the fish would take either Jodi or Jeff's bait I would immediately throw my line in the same spot. Jodi ended up catching it first but I followed suit with an even bigger piranha. We had to leave before Jeff caught a fish because if we had waited we might all have aged 10 years before it happened. On the way back to the boat, we saw the most incredible sunset which was the perfect ending to a fun-filled fishing trip with the addition of a fish jumping into the canoe.

Next was the night trip after dinner, Kaitlin and I decided we would start rocking the pants tucked into socks with sandals look in Clifton to make the trend happen there but no matter how ridiculous we looked we were venturing down a river in Brazil in the dark. Our guide, Educarlos, literally grabbed a caiman out of the water… like right out the water. Personally, I've decided to acquire this skill so I can put "caiman wrangler" on my resume. I touched the caiman and then proceeded to cheese really hard in the picture where Erin is holding it. Seeing birds at night was a unique experience in itself because they don’t move as much so when the light is shining on them I got to see many brightly colored birds. As we kept getting further away from the boat, I realized I had to pee… not a thing you want to experience in the middle of the river at night. As I tried to hold it in, we got to see a sloth and a snake. The snake was hanging in the tree and everyone kept wishing it wouldn’t fall onto the canoes. Our guide threw a leaf at Jeff and he almost fell out of the canoe; it might've been the funniest thing if I hadn't had to pee so badly. I had to make the canoe I was in turn around early but luckily for me we got to see something that we would've missed if we had not come back. As we meandered back, a fish jumped out the water (second one today!!) and hit me in the chest which scared me to death but for some unknown reason I didn’t even pee myself from being scared. The thing we saw that no other group did was a 3 meter adult caiman in the water; it was so large and menacing with its eyes peeking out but awesome at the same time. We turned back around after I did my business and met up with the other groups to find out that we didn’t miss seeing anything.

Day 3 (Saturday):

**Update:** I am now known as being the original fish finder due to my ability to attract jumping fish.

Woke up bright and early this morning, went canoeing and saw so many crazy beautiful things. I can't believe this many different species of animals exist; it's absolutely mind blowing. The views were gorgeous and its so exciting now because I am finally starting to be able to distinguish different bird species by myself which is something I never thought I would be able to do let alone actually be interested in birds. I was sitting next to Debbie and we both saw a large caiman splash into the water to submerge and it freaked her out so much she almost sat on my lap. I got to hold a dragon fly during the canoe trip and watch as Steve tried to catch butterflies that were far away while he would miss the ones flying right above his head. I also saw the scarab beetles that pollinate the Lily flowers and the entire process is pretty amazing and the flower is absolutely beautiful. I held the lily pad as well and the thing was way bigger than I thought it would be. Back on the boat, I got crushed in a few games of Euchre (I've never played so poorly in my life). We passed a huge cruise ship (Iberostar) which has flat screen TVs and a pool on the roof. We were actually able to walk on land for some time as we were going to see a village where the enchanted forest was. But first, we saw a rubber tree and a cacao tree; the rubber sap is so neat it comes out as liquid but when Jr rubbed it on my hand it turned into what people know rubber looks like. I've decided I want to live in the village and that I'm going to withdraw from school and just move down here and live off the land. My parents would probably disown me… its so incredibly difficult to imagine the water being so high but the houses which are already on a hill and on 6 foot stilts had water marks that were a good foot into the house. Cindy later told us that the villagers put the stuff they wanted to keep dry on the middle of the tall bridge. I was a little concerned because we were simply traipsing through the village, gawking at these people and their properties but apparently they are used to it (doesn’t entirely reassure me). Up next was the journey to the enchanted forest.

The enchanted forest was apparently still accessible even in the low water according to the villagers. We were in for quite the experience. As we walked downhill to the canoes, I fell (of course) but then we boarded and began our adventure. Trying to go back and describe everything is almost impossible but the best way I can sum it up is like we were on The Jungle Cruise ride in Disney World and the "captains" are jokingly saying we have to get out of here but in reality we really did need to get out of there. We were able to see a rare caiman (dwarf) thanks to JR and it was terrifying but apparently not for Ming as she stroked its head lol. The water was incredibly shallow so Jeff and I had to keep helping push the canoe when it got stuck and assist in paddling for the ride. It was absolutely gorgeous on the way there with the branches forming over like an archway but we would be going fast and constantly having to duck. At one point, Jeff and I almost had a panic attack because we heard this animal noise that was coming from our right but it was so dark underneath the branches we couldn’t see what it was and of course we were stuck right next to it so we pushed as hard as we could to get away from it. It was so much fun and finally we got to the lake where we could all go swimming. Since the adventure had taken so long everyone had to pee and there was an intense discussion once in the water as to whether it was safe for the guys to go pee because of the fish that flies up the stream. To my surprise, the water was so warm and not very deep. Luke and Mick were throwing mud at each other because what else do college aged honors students do when mud is available and it was hilarious plus as a bonus Joe got everything on video. As it started approaching nightfall, we needed to head back and we were all hoping there would be another way to go back but there wasn’t so Jungle Cruise here we come again! The ride back was much worse; the mosquitoes were horrible, all 3 boats kept getting stuck, and Jeff and I were doing a lot of manual work (had to work both sides of the obliques). At one point we heard a scream, to find out it was Devin because a huge fish jumped into their boat which got passed around until someone dropped it in our canoe which injured it so we threw it back. Then it got dark and we were all trying to avoid the branches and bats and mosquito bites but with no avail. I got smacked a few times with some leaves and branches and I think we all came out with a few more mosquito bites than we wanted. Once we were at the part where the village was we had an incredible view of a Great Potoo and also of fireworks. THEN of course as we neared the big boat a fish jumped into the canoe but at this point we were all so tired and hungry and cranky that we didn’t care at all and as Jeff put it "you got yourself in the boat, I can't help you because it's your own fault you have to get yourself out".

Day 4 (Sunday):

We got to sleep in today since the morning adventure was to watch the wedding of the waters before we went into Manaus. The meeting was beautiful and fascinating; it was incredible to see how patches of one of the waters would go to the other side and they wouldn’t mix at all. The city was an awesome jaunt. The colors were so bright and beautiful and the city was very busy for a Sunday. I can't wait to show my family the gifts I got them. The fish market was kind of disgusting but it was interesting to see how many types of fish live in the rivers near Manaus. Seeing the architecture that was made by Eiffel was cool too and it differed so much from the other types of architecture; it was a nice juxtaposition. Junior's daughter was the cutest thing in the world and she loved my hair since it was in a braid and it was amazing to see how far American movies get because she had an Elsa braid headband. The church was beautiful and so intricately designed, it was such a unique experience to see a church on Palm Sunday in a different country which is primarily Catholic and being Catholic helped a lot and it was cool to compare that church to the church I belong to.

The next trip was to see the pink river dolphins at the last open place to swim with them because of restrictions being placed for the dolphins’ safety. It was rainy and not a lot of dolphins showed but we were still able to watch them feed from 2 feet in front of us and one even touched my foot when we were swimming with them which was kind of a terrifying feeling because you couldn’t see your feet so it could’ve been an anaconda lol.

Later that night, we went on a night cruise. We saw so many different species. I got to hold a boa which was the highlight of that night and I saw the biggest toad I've ever seen in my life. There was also a lot of birds that we saw and it's almost easier to see them at night since the spotlight is shining right on them instead of having to search for them with your own eyes in the daylight.

Day 5 (Monday):

We woke up and went on a morning canoe trip. I was promoted to first mate (lol) and sat in the front and helped paddle when necessary. We saw the a toucan for the first time along with a lot of parrots and its amazing how beautifully colored all the birds down here are. On the way back from the trip, we got poured on by rain and I had to bring out the Mickey Mouse poncho for the first time which made me happy.

The next adventure was to the village. The health center was shocking to see at first but at least the government sends someone in to check on people and how the babies are growing. The houses are so different than any house in the United States as was the school building. Up next, was the soccer match and since Veronica and I are crippled we couldn’t play so we sat on the side and watched. The cute matriarch of the village sat by us and we shared her ginger popsicle with her which was such an awesome thing because we don't speak each other's languages and they don't have much yet she still shared with Ron and I. Luckily for us, we were able to play with the pet Capuchin monkey until it got traumatized by people who wouldn’t leave it alone. Then, it got electrocuted and I watched it fall to the ground and not move so obviously since I thought I just watched a monkey die I started sobbing and it was so ridiculous that Jeff and I broke into laughter. The soccer game ended and then it was off to the river to swim and cool off. The village children and the crew joined us. We played some rounds of chicken and then Veronica and I had a mud fight with Emerson and Educarlos. Up next, was jumping off the boat by ourselves and then with the village children. The cutest little girls would hold my hand and we would jump off together. Then the older boys thought it would be funny to push us in so that started a little war in which Emerson and Educarlos joined in by pushing us off from the doorway. I felt like a little kid again and it was the most amazing experience of the trip so far for me. I could actually imagine myself living like that and it was something that surprised myself. I realized I didn't need all the technology and other stuff to be happy and have genuine fun.

We then went to a place where Junior's father originally went and learned that there aren't any mosquitoes. I learned some traditional Brazilian recipes as well as some interesting facts about their culture. As it got dark out, a pink-toed tarantula came out and I got to hold the tarantula!!! I love spiders so that was one experience I was really looking forward too. Then we had dinner and got to try the typical Brazilian BBQ which was absolutely delicious but very different from our BBQ. We went on a night walk into the rainforest after the rain stopped and it was my first time walking into the forest and it was truly spectacular; I loved every minute of it and I couldn’t believe I was actually fulfilling a childhood dream of mine. The perfect ending to the perfect night was being able to sleep in the hammocks under the shelter and listen to the sounds of the rainforest as I drifted off.

Day 6 (Tuesday):

We got to sleep in a little today and had an even longer resting period as we waited for the rain to go away so we could go hiking in the rainforest. The hike was absolutely amazing and even better than I could imagine. I saw so many different types of vegetation but the orchids and bromeliads were my favorite because of all the colors they had. After the hike, we got a lot of time to rest so four of us went up to the top deck and napped which was my first nap of the trip and it was much needed. I woke up and got prepared as we entered the area where all the parrots/birds were. I saw so many beautiful birds so close by and then it ended with the most breathtaking sunset of the trip thus far. The sunset was contrasted by the full moon which appeared on the other side of the boat. Truly nature at its most beautiful.

Up next was another short night right in the canoes. It started off with seeing a giant tree rat with its baby which was spectacular on its own but then I saw two spectacled owls getting ready to have a brawl over the tree which J.R. decided to name the birds after the famous UFC fighters: Manny and Pacquio. I couldn’t imagine seeing anything else on the night ride but then we happened upon a baby slot. I GOT TO HOLD A BABY SLOTH… My mind is still blown and can't really comprehend what I did but nonetheless it was incredible.

Day 7 (Wednesday):

The day started off pretty late since we were heading to a place where the traveling to it would take up most of the day. On the canoe ride there, I saw so many beautiful birds; my favorite was the Scarlet Macaws. They are so beautiful and they're always the picturesque bird someone thinks of when they think of the Amazon Rainforest so it was truly memorable being able to see them clearly in their habitat. We stopped after awhile at a place where you can find a fish that swims upstream to mate like Salmon as well as Cardinal Tetras. The one mating fish were so abundant that we could actually catch the fish with our own bare hands. I'm proud to say that I accomplished this and it gave me some hope that if I became stranded ever I might be able to survive. Right after we got back in the boats, we saw Giant River Otters which was another fantastic sight and quite the show as we were able to see four of them and listen to them talk and guard their territory.

We then continued to the "waterfall" where we would be having lunch and be able to spend all day in the water basically. It was a blast and so much fun except everyone was getting fried because of how hot it was and the lack of sunscreen. The rapids were a blast to swim in and lunch was delicious and it was awesome being able to eat the fish that we had caught with our own bare hands. One thing I'll take away from this trip is that I might not die right away if I got stranded or lost somewhere. On the way back to the boat we saw a vast number of butterflies all together flying around and it was beautiful. We learned that butterflies are attracted to poop and Kaitlin made the funny comment that if Disney made a movie involving poop it would have the butterflies flying around like we were watching.

Day 8 (Thursday):

We woke up at 4:30 in the morning…. It was awful but worthwhile because the canoe ride was a lot of fun since we were able to hear Howler monkeys as well as see different bird species than the previous days. It was a long canoe ride though and the stomach problems everyone had been having were starting to hit me and it made for a slightly unpleasant trip back. After lunch and showering, we had a choice to go fishing again or go bat hunting.

We then went to a place where we could snorkel and we saw two uncommon sting rays which was an incredible find and kind of frightening because we were swimming right next to them

I chose bat hunting because why not have the opportunity to add bat hunting abilities to my resume. A lot of card and domino games were played and I'm proud to say that I contributed to JR's 14-0 winning streak. Then it was time for bat hunting.

First thing that happened was that as soon as we stepped on to land, cows came charging at us so naturally we all hid behind Junior but then they stopped and realized they only came running because they wanted food. Up next, was adventuring to the forest and setting up the nets. We had full gear on and loaded on the bug spray which still didn't really keep the mosquitoes away. The nets were more complicated to set up than I expected but it was fun plus we all had a machete class and I got an A+ (but it helped that I had used one before). Mickey and I went way deeper into the jungle to set up a third bat net and we got to cut our own poles and set it up ourselves which was unique but the mosquitoes were miserable and my stomach was not feeling well so I went outside and joined JR, Rajiv, and Veronica. We had the most bizarre but interesting conversation that ranged from Star Wars to conspiracy theories. The stars were absolutely breathtaking; I've never seen so many stars so bright. We ended up catching 5 bats and one of those was a pretty uncommon one. I went to bed early that night because I still didn’t feel well and needed my rest.

Day 9 (Friday):

We went on a morning canoe/hiking adventure. We saw a pretty bird through the scope and there were a lot of mosquitoes but the trees were beautiful and so large. We went to Novo Airao and it was the hottest day of the trip. I bought a lot of beautiful wooden handicrafts and I got some soft serve which helped cool me off and then Ron and I took a picture with a dinosaur because we had to prove Rajiv wrong that only North Americans believe in dinosaurs.

We traveled for a bit and then we had a dance party. To cool off, I walked out from underneath the shelter to look up to the sky and see all the stars which just added to the most amazing night of the trip. We learned to dance like Brazilians and I failed miserably. The guys were so cool and actually danced with us which is so uncommon for guys. Besides Luke falling on his face, the handkerchief dance was pretty spectacular and I was amazed by how many people could do it. We had a blast and its hard to describe the party because it was just so wonderful. The best part was when we were listening to the song that goes "throw your hands up and shout" and at the part where you're supposed to get quieter everyone except the crew got quieter because they didn't know what the song was saying and it was hilarious.