Through my first-hand experiences on this study abroad, my understanding of progress has changed drastically and I have learned how factors such as water quality and renewable energy influence our hope for a sustainable future.

Before attending this maymester program, I had a very narrow-minded outlook on what the word progress meant. As a business major, I usually heard this word in phrases such as “economic progress” or “entrepreneurial progress”. However, because of the lessons I learned on this trip, I now know that progress means much more than growing a business no matter what the ecological consequences.

In the Canterbury Plains near Christchurch New Zealand, a recent increase in agriculture has led to the pollution of braided river systems throughout the region. Braided river systems are extremely rare and are found in only three places in the world. (Charteris) As a result, local Kiwis’s not only rely on these rivers for clean drinking water but also have a deep regard for the river systems and the flora and fauna that inhabit them. Without new legislation to protect braided rivers from pollutants, New Zealanders will lose their deep sense of pride for the quality of these waterways. Furthermore, issues of water quality need to be recognized on a global scale and should be made a priority for global leaders such as the United States and China. If the Western world begins to take the steps required to ensure a large supply of clean water for future generations, the rest of the world will follow and there will still be hope for a sustainable water supply.

Throughout Australia and New Zealand, steps are being taken to move away from fossil fuels and replace them with forms of renewable energy. This transition is most evident on Lady Elliot Island on the southernmost point of the Great Barrier Reef. Through attending the behind the scenes sustainability tour on Lady Elliot, I was exposed to some of the most technologically advanced forms of renewable energy from around the world. The power on Lady Elliot Island is up to eighty five percent solar with the rest being diesel generators. They employ a form of state of the art capacitors that use a variety of salts to store energy and last up to ten years. In addition, this eco-resort has its own desalination plant that supplies all the water used on the island. (Barry) The efforts of Peter Gash and the rest of the Lady Elliot staff should be an example for all of Australia and the Western World.

From my experiences on this study abroad, my perspective on what progress means has changed from a narrow-minded view to a much more global outlook. I now understand progress as global society moving in a positive direction by achieving goals that are set beforehand. However, many of the goals required to achieve progress on a global scale are not yet in place. If progress is not made to achieve worldwide water purity and renewable energy, the hope for a sustainable future is bleak.