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In Support of a Semester Abroad

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In Support of a Semester Abroad

Whitney Schubert

I remember walking through the Jardin de Luxembourg with a baguette in one hand and a round of Camembert in the other, taking alternating bites out of each as I strolled. Today, this seems extravagant and glutinous, but in 1999 I chocked it up to “experiential living”. Needless to say, I returned to Linfield with a larger appreciation of the French language and culture, AND a larger pants size! Kidding aside, my experiences abroad enriched me personally and heavily influenced my career path.

Because I grew up in Oregon (within a few hours of campus), I had never spent an extended period of time away from my family. By the time I studied abroad, I had developed a Linfield family too. Four months in a new, unfamiliar and *foreign* place required me to step farther outside of my comfort zone than I ever had before. It is in this space – a space of newness and transition – that you really learn things about yourself. It became clear to me that the only way to truly learn a language is to be shameless, to not be afraid of making mistakes. I took risks, experimented with the language, and even made up words! Over time, I progressed and eventually my personality began to come through in communication. You don’t feel like yourself when you can’t express your thoughts and emotions. It was so liberating when I no longer felt trapped and I could really be myself.

A city like Paris can be daunting, overwhelming and exhausting. I was pleased to learn that this small town girl can hang in the big city! I actually drew energy from the city, rather than it sucking energy from me. I took it all in – museums, cafés, live music, dancing and endless walks discovering what was around the next corner. I suppose I reflected on my time in Paris when I debated the decision to leave Oregon and move to New York City.

After nearly a decade working in the Oregon wine industry in various roles, I accepted a position as the French Brand Manager for Polaner Selections, a New York wine importer/distributor. I manage our portfolio of French wines and have the pleasure of serving as the main point of contact for over 80 French wineries. I travel to France one to two times a year to walk through the vineyards and taste the current vintage in cellars. It is possible that in any given day, I send more emails in French than I do in English. I am confident with the language and I strive to continue improving upon my skills.

I am grateful for all of the doors that have opened for me as a result of my semester abroad. I crave travel, new experiences and that feeling you get when you truly connect with someone in another language. I would strongly encourage anyone to take advantage of the opportunity to spend time studying and living abroad. *Allez!*

