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## Linfield College: Study Abroad in Austria

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## Linfield College: Study Abroad in Austria

Keith Welch

As I look back on my college career and reflect on the decisions that shaped it, one stands out: the decision to study abroad in Vienna, Austria. I made this choice during my sophomore year, a time when I lacked both focus and direction. At that time, studying abroad seemed to be a chance to experience something out of the ordinary, something exciting and new. I never imagined that my experience in Vienna would end up shaping my life goals.

That decision to go to Vienna for a semester was the most important of my college career. As I had hoped, it was exciting and out of the ordinary. It was also a tremendous learning experience during which my German proficiency improved significantly and I learned about Austrian society and culture. The most meaningful aspect of my study abroad experience, however, was what I learned about myself. I discovered my career passion, gained trust in myself to overcome challenging situations, and developed a more open world view by questioning many of my long-held beliefs.

At first, the most intriguing prospect of studying abroad was the opportunity to travel, see new places, and meet new people. I soon found that it is much more than that. The opportunity to learn about the history, politics and culture of a place while living in and personally experiencing that same place is a unique advantage of studying abroad. For example, many of our classes in Vienna were not in a classroom but rather at museums, churches, or other historically significant locations. Also, whenever I learned a new word or term in German, I could go out and use it that same day. Finally, experiences such as eating dinner with my host family or visiting an Austrian winery gave me deep personal insight into another culture, which I found to be exciting and enlightening. Ultimately through these personal experiences I not only gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience, but also enjoyed every step of the way.

While studying abroad in Vienna I not only learned more about Austrian culture and society, but also about myself. Helping to teach English to children at a school in Vienna showed me that I can overcome the challenges inherent in teaching English to diverse groups. I emerged from that tutoring experience with a passion for working directly with international populations and a much clearer career goal than I had going in. Most important, I emerged with practical experience that will help me to achieve my career goal of working directly with immigrant and refugee populations. Tutoring Austrian students is just one of the many experiences I had while

in Vienna that helped prepare me for my career and my life.

So what does my study abroad experience mean to me? It is an unforgettable experience during which I traveled to places I had only seen in movies and made friendships that will last a lifetime. It is also an enlightening experience during which I learned the value of an open mind. Above all else, it is an experience that not only helped me to become who I am today but also has shaped the person I strive to become.