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Linfield College: Study Abroad in France

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Studying abroad in France had a significant impact on my life; personally, socially, academically, and professionally. I'm still in touch with my host family, I've had the opportunity to visit them in France twice since living there in 2003-04, and they even made a trip to the U.S. to attend my wedding. I am in frequent contact with several of my fellow study abroad students and highly value these relationships.

Upon graduating from Linfield I taught high school French for two years. After taking my students on a summer trip to France, I realized I preferred helping students travel to other countries to learn about the culture and language by immersion rather than teaching in the foreign language classroom. I became a study abroad coordinator for AHA International, advising students before, during and after the study abroad experience. I became very passionate about international education while working at AHA International and decided to pursue a master's degree at Portland State University to better serve students and advance my career. I took advantage of the opportunity to study abroad through PSU for a 3 week service-learning and cultural engagement course in India, even though it extended my program an extra year. I believe that study abroad is one of the most powerful ways to learn and I crave these kinds of experiences because each time I travel to a new place, I discover something new about myself and the global society we live in.

Beyond influencing my career path and academic pursuits, my time in France was a life changing experience which altered my perspective and broadened my worldview. I became more self-aware and realized for the first time that growing up in an American culture had influenced me without my knowledge of it. It was only in leaving the U.S. that I learned the difference between the American notion of individuality and French/European mindset of collectivity. I thought I was such an independent young woman, traveling on my own, but then I learned that independence and self-reliance were not necessarily qualities to be desired. Instead I learned the French *joie de vivre*, and the notion of interdependence- we are all in this life together, we need each other, and accepting help from others makes life just that much easier.

Studying abroad has also given me greater compassion and the ability to empathize with someone who has felt like an outsider. I spoke French with an American accent and the minute I opened my mouth, everyone knew I was not from there, I was a foreigner, and there are assumptions and judgments associated with being American. I learned to check my own assumptions and judgments in my interactions with people from different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These skills serve me well in my current role as a Career Center Coordinator at Chemeketa Community College, where I encounter non-native speakers of English daily. Studying abroad was such a valuable experience in my life that I consider myself an advocate of study/travel abroad, and promote interacting with international populations, learning languages and experiencing other cultures to anyone who will listen!

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Linfield class of 2005

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