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Semester Abroad at Avignon

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Linfield College: Study Abroad in France
Julie Hughes

In the Fall of 2007 I spent an amazing semester in Avignon, France. As I was pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Biology, I initially viewed my opportunity to study abroad as simply an enjoyable experience and a chance to see the world and a different culture. These goals were indeed achieved, but my French studies, including my semester abroad, have additionally had a much more profound effect on my life. When in a foreign land, relying upon and surrounded by a foreign tongue, the importance of communication becomes instantly clear. I honed skills of reading into the context of conversations and situations, and of finding creative ways to express myself with a limited vocabulary. These are skills that I continue to use in daily communication, even in English. My semester abroad was also an opportunity for me to rebuild myself, so to speak; so far from the friends, family, and even words of my “regular” life I had the chance to contemplate who I wanted to be, how I wanted to present myself (and my country) to others, and what was most important in my life. Again, what I gained from that one semester abroad has remained important to me, even four years later.

My knowledge of the French language continues to benefit me in unexpected ways. As a Biology major I went on to graduate school at the University of Idaho, where I obtained a Master’s degree in Biological Sciences. My advisor happened to be Belgian, and while she spoke perfect English I was able to connect to her through occasional French phrases or comparisons of French and English. She also invited several prominent scientists to the University for guest lectures, and they were pleased to be greeted in their own language.

Despite the fact that I pursued an M.S degree, my lifelong ambition has been to teach at the secondary level. While applying for science teaching jobs I was pleasantly surprised by the number of schools that viewed my knowledge of French as a major selling point in my application. I have now accepted a job as a middle school science teacher, and expect to be developing French courses to offer as an elective class in the next few years.

In short, my time studying French, both on campus, at home, and abroad, has had a lasting impact my communication skills in general, my character, and my career opportunities. I view my decision to study abroad during my time at Linfield College to be one of the best choices of my life. While the experience of studying abroad will be different for everyone, I highly encourage each student to seriously consider giving it a shot, to see what sort of doors will be opened for them.