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Linfield College: Study Abroad in France

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I graduated with a degree in French and Biology from Linfield College in 2006. I had always considered French to be my “fun” major, the one that allowed me to travel, meet new people and work on personal growth. Biology was my “serious” major, the one that would get me a good job and help make me more competitive in a tight market. In retrospect, however, my French degree has probably earned me more money, jobs, opportunities and enjoyment than my science degree – although both have been important to my personal and professional growth.

I work at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle as a Clinical Research Coordinator for University of Washington Medicine. I am in a positive, idea-driven environment, surrounded by intelligent and open-minded people, and I enjoy the work I do very much. On the surface it may seem like my biology degree is solely responsible for getting me here, but the connections and experience I’ve gained living and working in French speaking countries have helped tremendously with my ability to navigate the job market. The scientific community is very international these days, especially in large teaching hospitals and research centers, and my multilingualism and global awareness have helped me build important connections. For example, I was able to move into my current position from an administrative one because the Principal Investigator of the lymphoma study for which I work is European and was impressed with my French language skills. Sometimes even if fluency in French isn’t a job requirement it can be that extra little bit that sets you apart from others.

Just as important, living in France and other French-speaking countries has affected my personal life, the way I live, and the small choices I make every day. In addition to studying abroad in Paris during college I also went to Tunisia on a Fulbright grant and worked as an au pair in the French Alps after college. Living abroad, especially in the Alps, taught me so much about the kind of global citizen I want to be and is where I learned to grow organic vegetables, keep bees and chickens, cook from scratch, do laundry using less energy, and commute by bike and public transportation. These are small things, but they are so important to learn as the world’s population grows and our need to decrease our impact heightens.

Finally, I have gotten so much *enjoyment* out of living and studying abroad that I would say it’s even worth it for its own sake! There are so many beautiful things to see in France and I have such good memories of hiking and gathering walnuts in the Alps, sea kayaking and sailing off the coast of Marseille, wandering through the streets of Paris, meeting old and young winemakers in Beaune, riding bikes through fields of sunflowers in the Languedoc, and eating dinner in an old château in Bordeaux, that even if studying abroad hadn’t gotten me anywhere else, I still would have done it.

Studying abroad added a great deal of dimension to my life. So many of my current friendships and pastimes had their origins in France, I still read and watch movies in French, and I am even continuing my education in French by going back to school to get a scientific translation certificate. Because I chose to study French as well as biology in school, I feel that I have a special niche within my research institution, and I am often asked to mediate interactions with researchers abroad. It is exciting to have access to another country and another way of thinking, and employers will always see it as an asset. I made sacrifices to study for a full year in Paris, but now, almost eight years later, I can say with certainty that they were worth it and that they paid off.

