Grant Helps Broaden Perspectives

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Fulbright winner Alexis Lien ‘05 is spending the 2005-2006 academic year teaching, studying and conducting research in Austria.

Schröne Grüße aus Wien! Greetings from Vienna, Austria – the land of Mozart, Freud, Wiener Schnitzel and The Sound of Music? The weather outside has dropped below freezing (yet again), and I have retreated to one of the countless coffee houses to warm myself with a signature Viennese latte, the Wiener Melange. This activity has proven to be a favorite pastime of mine since arriving in Austria. Although there is some truth to the long-held stereotypes about Austria, there is definitely more to this small country, nested in the heart of Europe, than coffee and classical music. Vienna is not only a metropolis that maintains a small-town feel, but also a diverse cultural capital with an amazing emphasis on music and art.

My grant consists of three parts: 1) teaching English part-time in an Austrian high school, 2) studying at the University of Vienna and 3) pursuing an independent research project. Through small-scale diplomatic efforts, I have been able to see the impact of establishing personal relationships in broadening people’s perspectives about other nations and cultures.

I have enjoyed the teaching aspect of my grant immensely. Through teaching my students about America, I have come to more critically understand, and also appreciate, my own country. In a lesson covering the recent citywide election in Vienna, I was forced to examine and explain fundamental theoretical aspects of the American political system, and offer this as a contrast to the Austrian system. In turn, my students began to more critically examine the system to which they are accustomed.

Between attending and teaching classes, I am also conducting an independent research project on the political representation of Turkish immigrant women in Vienna. In addition to utilizing the enormous collection at the Austrian National Library, I have been discussing my research with Sieglinde Rosenberger, a political science professor at the University of Vienna who has agreed to serve as my mentor for this project. I am also building contacts with women’s groups in Vienna that will be invaluable to my research.

My experiences at Linfield were essential in preparing me for this experience. First, the emphasis Linfield places on studying abroad helped me to be confident about spending an entire year abroad. During my four years at Linfield, I spent a semester in Vienna, a semester in Washington, D.C., and a January Term in Russia. All of these experiences helped spark my interest in exploring new cultures and spurred me on to apply for post-graduate opportunities abroad. Also, the research opportunities I had with Dawn Nowacki, Linfield associate professor of political science, prepared me to undertake a large-scale independent research project.

I am thankful for everyone at Linfield who assisted me with the Fulbright application process. All of the experiences helped spark my interest in exploring new cultures and restored my passion for teaching. While teaching at a high school and studying at the University of Vienna, I am researching the political and social position of Turkish immigrant women. I have sought to influence my students while studying in Vienna as a sophomore through Linfield’s study abroad program.

Festival brings music, restoration

“When we bought the house in 2003, villagers asked us when we were going to bring music to the town,” said Timmons, who along with Frémaux has worked extensively in France over the years. That was all it took. Last summer Timmons and Frémaux launched the Festival d’Herbilly, a music festival to be held annually to raise money for the church restoration. The festival is sponsored by the city of Mer and the Association de Saint Aignan. Timmons and Laura Klagherz, a violinist from Colgate University, performed at the first fund raising concert in July. Blüthner Pianos of Leipzig, Germany, provided a grand piano free of charge.

For the first time in the villagers’ memory, music filled the church.

“It’s something to see an ancient church in this countryside setting,” said Timmons. “Each time I walk up the heavily worn stone steps of the church, I realize that someone from the 12th century once walked up these same steps.”

The festival will host the Linfield Summer Piano Institute, a four-day immersion for pianists previously held in Newport. Linfield hopes to include Linfield students in the institute, and future festivals will feature a variety of international artists.

The Festival d’Herbilly has served as a catalyst for a physical restoration, but it also symbolizes a partnership among the French, German and American cultures, Timmons said.

“This international group has come together, not only to restore a 12th century tower, but in celebration of music and culture in this rural region,” Timmons said.

Alexis Lien ’05, shown here at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, is spending the academic year in Austria.

In addition to teaching at a high school and studying at the University of Vienna, Lien is researching the political and social position of Turkish immigrant women. She has had her focus while studying in Vienna as a sophomore through Linfield’s study abroad program.

St. Aignan Church, located in Herby in central France, was built in the 12th century, around the same time as the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.