

Study Abroad Story – Skye Schoedel

Hi! My name is Skye Schoedel. I am a senior at Valparaiso University, double majoring in marketing and French language and literature. And I studied abroad in La Rochelle, France in the fall of 2017.

So I think one of the biggest things that my perspective changed on going abroad and then coming back was the way that I look at different cultures and different parts of the world. People talk a lot about the privilege of being American and I never really saw it to the full extent before I went abroad. Being abroad made me realize just how lucky we are to have an American passport and to be able to travel freely almost anywhere we want to go in the world. To have English as our first language... so many people around the world who are struggling to learn English as their second or third language. We have complete confidence, obviously, speaking English which is clearly the most spoken language in the world, and that's a huge blessing that a lot of times I think we sometimes forget to take into consideration.

Specifically, when I was abroad, I became friends with a ton of people, and I think something that was really cool is that they were all from different backgrounds. So, it's not like I was with people who were just American or hanging out with people who were just French the whole time. Rather, I had friends that were German, I had friends that were Swedish, I had Egyptian friends, I had Spanish friends, Dutch, British, Korean. The list can keep going. I think the biggest thing that I got out of that was when we're in America and you have someone come with their culture, you kind of Americanize your culture a bit. -Yes, you still have your cultural ideals at home, but in public, people aren't as open and willing to share those ideals because they are contrary to our culture. And although we are a melting pot, I think a lot of it gets lost in the mix. So being over in France, it was really, really cool to be able to see people come directly from their culture and directly from that background and have a full, authentic experience with so many cultures and backgrounds.

It made me really, really aware of just how different we all are, but also how similar we are. And I think it's really important to go out and to learn about other cultures other than your own and to get out and dive into those deeper issues like racism and discrimination. To look at "why are we acting this way?", "why are we saying these things?" I think there is so much beneath it that I didn't really grasp until I went abroad.

Coming back, my perspective has changed a lot. I think I'm definitely less judgemental when it comes to meeting new people in general. I would say, through that, I've really pushed myself to get more involved with social justice issues and with dealing with diversity on campus and things along those lines. I'm really trying to strive to go to workshops on microaggressions and on how do we deal with an issue that happened in class, things along those lines. Just seeing how it's really important at Valpo and everywhere, because we are so privileged to be American, number one, but also number two, most of us are white in the United States. I think that's another that we just take for granted, is that white supremacy issue. I think it's really important that I've really taken the different cultures and backgrounds of everyone that I've met. From so many different colors of skin and so many different places around the world, and I love them all equally. I think it's really important to look at that and see now how I've brought that back to Valpo and how I'm striving to push for more diversity on campus and to push for more inclusivity on campus and for more of a welcoming community for anyone. And yeah... I would say that's pretty much how I've grown from that experience.