

Study and Go Abroad Fairs

Editorial #2:

Commerce Student: Studying Abroad Expanded My Professional Network

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TalentEgg.ca

Shivani Mukerji had always wanted to study abroad, but she was told it's too expensive to complete an entire degree outside of your home country – those international student fees can be killer!

She didn't let that stop her, though: "Studying abroad for just one semester was the next best thing," she says.

The University of British Columbia commerce student, originally from nearby Langley, B.C., decided to study abroad to get out of her comfort zone. "I wanted to go somewhere where I had no friends and didn't speak the language very well, and come out of it confident that I can get by and have fun anywhere!"

So, she chose to attend HEC Paris in Jouy-en-Josas, France, about 30 km outside of Paris, from September 2011 through January 2012.

Keep reading our Q&A with Shivani to learn more about her experience abroad!



Q. How did you figure out where to go and what school to attend?

A. I took French immersion, but wasn't too confident in my French language skills, so I wanted to go to France to become properly bilingual. I've also always loved the European lifestyle – work to live and not live to work – so I wanted to learn more about it up close. The school I chose was also the best business school in Europe, so I knew I would benefit from the education there and have great opportunities to expand my professional network.

Q. Did you do anything to prepare before your trip?

A. I practiced my French by watching movies, listening to music and taking courses. I also did a lot of research into prices for food and transportation, which was really useful. Since I didn't have a car during my time abroad, I got very familiar with the public transit systems in different European cities, too.

Q. Where did you stay while you were in France?

A. I lived on campus at HEC Paris while I was studying abroad. Living on campus is always amazing because you are never too far from your friends or your classes, and there is always something to do.

Q. Did you experience any “culture shock” or homesickness when you arrived?

A. When I first arrived in France, I was sure I would never get homesick because I was having so much fun! But living in a foreign country is very different from being a visitor, and the reality of starting a bank account, paying rent and sorting out a student visa are pretty difficult when you don't speak the language or know the bureaucratic culture of a country. That's about when I started missing the efficiency of Canada. But I overcame that once I realized that every place has good aspects and bad – both my home country and other countries.

Q. How is university life different in Canada than it is abroad?

A. There are so many differences between the educational system in Canada and Europe! And within Europe, too, each country is very different. At HEC Paris, lectures were 3 hours long once a week, and the semester was split into 2 half semesters. There was a lot more lecturing

and much less participation, and more emphasis on the final exam than here at UBC. Lecturers in France are also more likely to be industry professionals rather than researchers, as at UBC.

Q. What was your most memorable experience while you were abroad?

A. I loved having the chance to be in Paris every weekend. There is so much to the city that you couldn't possibly see as a tourist in a couple of days, and I really enjoyed being able to find my favourite areas to shop, or my favourite bookstores or cafes. I felt like I made Paris 'my own,' in a way.

Q. Would you recommend studying abroad to other students?

A. I think studying abroad should be mandatory for every undergrad! I learned so much more in 4 months abroad than I ever have in 4 months at home. Small things that make a huge difference when you go abroad, such as what to say to shopkeepers when you enter, how to type on non-QWERTY keyboards, how governments and corporations work in other countries: it's an information overload that gives you an edge over the next candidate when applying to multi-national corporations!

Q. What advice do you have for other students who are considering studying abroad?

A. To absolutely go study abroad! After meeting so many students who have studied abroad, every single one of them (including myself) says that they had the time of their lives, that they wish they could have stayed longer, and that the experience has changed them for the better. There's no better way to learn more about yourself and the world than to study abroad!

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