

Education Abroad Returnees of the Month April 2018

Jane Wilkinson

4th year Global Security and Justice and German Studies major
Kent State Geneva, Switzerland, Spring 2017



Most interesting class and why? Did you take classes in connection to your major or electives?

I took a class called “Human Rights in Film” that depicted the process and aftermath of various genocides around the world. The class was interesting because I am not a film major in the least, but I was able to use my education abroad experience to explore my interest in cinema. The class engaged not only my background in Security and Justice, but also my interest in the arts and humanities.

I also took classes on global development and human rights, but I also had the chance to explore new topical areas, such as film and statistics. Without my time abroad, I might not have had the academic freedom to explore these topics.

How was education abroad different than anticipated?

While I did engage with students from around the world, I think my most notable connections were made with students from other parts of the United States. I met kids from California, Boston, Ohio, and other places that I otherwise would have never met. They came from all sorts of different socioeconomic and academic backgrounds, which expanded my horizons in ways I wasn’t expecting. I came to understand different parts of the US not just from the perspective of other cultures, but from other Americans.

Number one way the experience contributed to your growth

My program had an internship component at the United Nations Offices in Geneva (UNOG). I had my own access badge and everything! During this time, I was often the only American at various informal discussions, and had the chance to provide my input on what America’s policies were, where the country was headed, and what my interpretation of the 2016 election was. Despite being easily the youngest person there, I was a de-facto representative of American ideals and policies (even if just in an informal setting). This was a great experience because I want to become a diplomat, and I had the chance to not only observe the world’s leading diplomats in action, but also to help inform their view of the United States.

Favorite local hangout, and why?

The main train station in Geneva is called Garre Cornavin, and it's in the heart of the city. There are many stores and restaurants in the station and around it. Some of the fanciest places in Geneva, which is a pretty fancy place by default, are located nearby. In addition, if you want to go anywhere at all (even the airport) you have to go through Garre Cornavin. I loved it because it was a place of transition: every time I went to the station I was going to do something exciting, whether it was heading somewhere for a weekend trip or trying a new restaurant.

**Most interesting/delicious cuisine tried**

I was in Switzerland so I don't think I can say anything except fondue. It is, 100%, as good as you think it is. However, I tried raclette as well, which is also super good and a must-have. Raclette is basically a heated wheel of cheese that gets cut off onto some potatoes, meats, etc. It's basically cheese on top of whatever thing you want, which is just as good as you think it is. The Swiss are a simple people and understand that cheese on top of anything is a recipe for success.

Most meaningful experience abroad

We had the chance to ski in the Matterhorn, despite the fact that I have never skied in my life. All of the Swiss students with us took so much time to make sure we were all safe and knew what we were doing (even if their version of teaching more involved taking us on a super difficult slope and letting gravity and fear of death teach us how to ski). It was so beautiful and the people were so kind and understanding. We went into town in the evening and spent time at a local bar, where we were invited to a spa the next day (I was walking 90 degrees bent over, so that was a necessity). I just can't imagine having an experience even close to that if I had stayed at UVA.

Sum up the experience in three words:

Changed my perspective



Anything else to add?

Studying abroad isn't just a time to run around and take amazing pictures. Even if that is part of what you're doing (which is totally okay) you are developing skills that might not get developed if you stay in the United States. I learned how to problem solve (as in, come up with an alternate way home or be stuck in Prague without a hotel for a week), I learned how to be patient with people from different cultures and backgrounds, I learned how to budget, and I learned how to be an adult. When you're abroad you don't have your parents, you don't have an RA, and you don't have a lot of the structures that we have in the US that set us up for success. Education abroad helps you become an autonomous, mature

human better than anything else. I highly recommend it. There are so many stories I would not get to tell if I had not gone, so many things that I will never forget that I had the chance to do because I went.



INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES OFFICE

educationabroad.virginia.edu