

BADGERS BEYOND ABROAD

alumni interview series

Devin Walker

Canada, England, South Africa

Life After Study Abroad

After completing my programs in Quebec, London, and Cape Town, I worked at a non-profit in Los Angeles for three years called POSSE. While there were opportunities to move up the career ladder in that organization, which I loved working for, the travel bug wouldn't let me do it. I moved to Korea to teach English for a year, which was an incredible experience. After saving some money, I backpacked Southeast Asia by myself for three months. This was a goal I set years earlier and turned out to be one of the most memorable journeys of my life. I then moved back to Korea for a few months while applying to graduate school. After being admitted to the University of Texas at Austin, I was offered a Graduate Assistant position where I had the opportunity to manage the Division of Diversity and Engagements study abroad initiatives. I have been at UT for four years now, currently working on my PhD in Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education. I still manage the study abroad programs and also teach a course in the College of Education titled, Socio-Cultural Influences on Learning.

Impact on Life, Goals & Career

My experiences abroad ultimately helped me have the confidence to live the life I wanted to live rather than live the life that is easiest or expected of me. It was a tough decision to leave an organization that wanted to promote me but I knew that it would be hard to reach my goal of backpacking Southeast Asia if I took the position. In reflection, it was the best decision I ever made. Being abroad taught me to believe in myself and my goals, and to actualize them. I learned that if I could make my way through countries, not speaking their language or understanding the depths of their culture, I could accomplish whatever I set my mind to here in America. In addition, it was my abroad experiences that positioned me for the GA position at UT which has ultimately provided me the platform to do what I love. To say to yourself, "I want to go to the other side of the world," and then actually make it happen, is an incredible confidence-building experience that has carried over in all other aspects of my life.

Advice for Returning Students

Returning home can be challenging for some - it was for me as I became frustrated with unearned privileges we have in America that often times negatively impact the living standards of people around the world. I would encourage students to own their experiences abroad and the lessons they learned about life and humanity. It is easy to come back to America and fall back into the dominant culture and push aside the lessons learned abroad. Instead, it is on us to share those experiences with our friends, family and community to encourage all people to travel the globe and learn to see the life through other peoples eyes. I truly believe that when we travel and share authentic experiences with people abroad, it changes us, and we start to see the world at large, as our community. We start to think about how our actions and inaction impact people across the globe. This is a step in bringing true peace and understanding to this place we call home, mother earth.

Interview from April 2017



Devin staring out over the sea at the top of Lion's Head in South Africa, 2006.

I will never forget the moment I reached the top of the mountain because that is when I finally had the space to reflect on the fact that I set a goal of going to Africa years ago, when I was a teenager, and I actually made it happen. In that moment, I decided I wanted to help other students, specifically students of color, travel the world and have similar experiences.

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