Josh Fellman

Israel

Life After Study Abroad

Upon the completion of my semester in Haifa in June 2012, I returned to Madison and graduated the following May with a B.A. in International Studies and Political Science. Like many others from UW (perhaps surprisingly), I moved to Washington DC in the hopes of landing a job in the nation’s capital. After roughly 9 months of interning with a policy research non-profit and on Capital Hill, I began working as a contractor at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) for the Department of State in early 2014. After nearly two years at FSI, I left to work for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor in the East Asia and Pacific Affairs office at State.

Impact on Life, Goals & Career

I purposefully selected the program in Haifa because it allowed me to take courses on the history of nuclear weapons proliferation, ethnic conflicts, and conflict resolution. These classes were rigorous and very pertinent to current regional events. Gaining an international/non-American perspective of these very important issues helped me realize that I will always have more to learn, and I wanted to find a job that would help me continue to do so. Working for the intelligence community seemed like a pretty outrageous goal (not impossible, just extremely difficult), so I settled on targeting jobs at the State Department. It certainly took awhile, but I eventually got here! I have no doubt that my cultural awareness and broader perspective/world-view that I gained during my time abroad helped me get this job with State.

Advice for Returning Students

I have two pieces of advice, with a caveat that this advice has been influenced by my personal experiences and observations.

First, for those that either began studying or continued studying a language while abroad, make sure to keep up with it! Do not let your language skills attrit. Foreign language proficiency is very attractive to employers, and can open many doors for you (especially in Washington DC!).

Secondly, for those of you that came back from studying abroad and really caught the travel bug, save up some money and see more of the world before you begin your career. Resist the very American mentality that after you graduate you either get a job in your field to begin your career, or further your education (unless you can do those in another country - best of both worlds!). Make the decision to travel easier on yourself, and do it before you have too many commitments. Ignore the voice that says “traveling will only set you back in the end,” because that voice is wrong. You know from your trip abroad that traveling enriches you in more ways than you can count. Get back out there and do it again, because the option to do so won’t be so easy a few short years later - I can promise you that!

Interview from September 2015