Noah Mergendahl
Sweden

Life After Study Abroad
After studying abroad in Umeå, Sweden for the 2008-2009 academic year, I spent two more years at UW-Madison before graduating with my bachelor’s degree in Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies in May of 2011. After graduating from the UW, I moved to the city of Wuhan in central China, to do a summer internship at one of China’s largest educational training institutes, New Oriental, Inc. Upon finishing my internship, I taught English full time at New Oriental for two years. At the moment, I am working as a foreign consultant for the same company, and I am still living in Wuhan. I’ve really fallen in love with life in China and East Asia as a whole!

Impact on Life, Goals & Career
Studying abroad in Sweden was honestly the best year of my life! 5 years on, I look back on it with extremely fond memories and heartwarming feelings. Overall, studying in Sweden affirmed my desire to become a truly “global citizen”, by learning new languages, exploring new cultures, and trying to better understand the different ways of life of people all over the world. In terms of my career, studying abroad sharpened my desire to work internationally upon graduating from UW-Madison, and seek the kinds of opportunities that simply weren’t available in my home country, the U.S. Lastly, getting a chance to study abroad while in college gave me a beautiful feeling of wanderlust that I carry with me to this day! This desire to move from place to place, to remain on the move, to me is a reflection of the nature of life itself. Studying abroad taught me that above all else!

A Favorite Memory from Abroad
My favorite memory from studying abroad in Sweden was taking a course in “Sami History” with a small group of fellow international students. To elaborate, the Sami people are the indigenous peoples of Scandinavia (i.e. Norway, Sweden and Finland). We had the amazing opportunity to venture to the northern Swedish countryside to take part in a traditional “reindeer herding” ceremony. We helped the Sami people to herd their reindeer and move them from one grazing pasture to another. Being able to work with such magnificent animals and learn about the way of life of an indigenous culture was very humbling!

Advice for Returning Students
The most important piece of advice I have for students returning from abroad is that “the journey doesn’t end there.” Studying abroad isn’t just an experience that stops when you got off your flight back to the United States, where you put it behind you and never think about it again. In fact it should be the start of an extended journey, a journey where you keep trying to figure out who you are, and what your place is in the world. I personally feel that a study abroad experience should be a “stepping stone” to other trips and experiences in other far-flung places and locales! That’s my view in any case!

Interview from March 2014

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