Badgers Beyond Abroad

alumni interview series

Rachel Friedlander-Holm
Nepal

Life After Study Abroad
Since completing my study abroad in Kathmandu, Nepal in fall 2010 (on the SIT Development & Social Change program through IAP), I graduated and moved back home to St. Paul, Minnesota. It took a few months of internships and waiting tables to get a real job. I was relieved when I got a great job working at the Governor’s office in Minnesota. This first job only lasted about 5 months but I learned a lot about working in state government and a large bureaucratic office. I had studied political science at Wisconsin and government in Nepal and found that I was able to overlook many of the cons in my job because I still felt that our government processes worked and were in place for a reason. For the next two years I worked in state government and in the federal government for Senator Al Franken. I loved my jobs but always had a nagging feeling that I wanted to move out of the Midwest and try something new. This big change happened almost a year ago when I moved to San Francisco and took a job on the Google Glass team. I have not looked back since the move and am so happy I did it!

Impact on Life, Goals & Career
My time in Nepal gave me a deep appreciation for all that I have in my life. I still carry this appreciation with me and if I feel it start to slip away, I try to do something that renews this feeling. My time in Nepal also taught me that we are all humans, all with similar desires, annoyances and grievances - despite the difference in culture, language, location, social status, etc. This is probably the best lesson I learned, it has kept me humble to this day. In terms of my career and goals, I have a deep desire to help people. Nepal showed me the large inequalities in the world; I would like to work towards making the world a better place. This is such a vague statement and I am still navigating the road to figure it out.

A Favorite Memory from Abroad
When I studied abroad, I was in Nepal over two large holidays, Dasain and Tihar. For one of the holidays I traveled with my host family to their extended family’s houses. We must have visited 3-4 different houses that day. Each household fed us, prayed with us and for and gave us gifts. I felt completely accepted by this group of people and will never forget that feeling of acceptance.

Advice for Returning Students
My advice is plain and easy. Do not forget what you learned about yourself and the world. Carry this with you and spread the knowledge. We are a very lucky and privileged group of people, do not forget this sentiment.

Interview from March 2014

Rachel with her best friend in San Francisco.