

BADGERS BEYOND ABROAD

alumni interview series

Sarah Payen

France

Life After Study Abroad

In just 6 months' time studying abroad in Aix-en-Provence, I felt innately attached to France's culture, landscapes and the provencal charm. I knew I had to get back to France again soon! Just a few months after graduation, I traveled to Troyes, in the northeast part of France, through the Teaching Assistant Program. I taught primarily spoken English to small groups in a middle and high school, and was fortunate to meet some very interesting teachers and fellow participants in the Assistant Program from all over the globe. The following year, in 2009, I returned stateside where I began a Masters in French and a Teaching Assistantship at the University of Illinois-Chicago. I completed the second year of my Masters in Paris, through UIC's MICEFA exchange program with the Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle Paris III. From 2011-2014, I lived in Troyes again, as a newlywed with my French husband, teaching English as a lecturer at the University of Reims and in a high school. I also became a new mother to our little ones. From 2014 to just a few months ago, we decided to move our family back to Wisconsin for a while, to the Milwaukee area, where I taught French at a private middle and high school. And now, currently, we are back in Troyes, France, for what will most likely be a permanent stay.

Impact on Life, Goals & Career

My study abroad experience revealed to me a lot about myself and my passion for French language and culture. It invigorated me to continue my language studies and has given me a profound appreciation for this alluring country, which I now call a second home. Continuing my French studies in graduate school went hand-in-hand with teaching as a TA, and I was thrilled to be able to try out the role. I gained confidence as an instructor and collected new strategies and ideas with each of the following years teaching. My goal for the near future is to prepare and take the French national teaching exam for English teachers; each of my French and English grammar and literature classes at UW will have played a vital part in preparing me for the translation, interpretation and analysis of texts in both languages for this rigorous exam.

Finally, something that is very important to me is that a few of my closest friends today are UW alum with whom I studied abroad in France or whom I had visited in nearby countries!

Advice for Returning Students

My advice for returning students is to make the most of your final year(s) at UW, even though you may really miss the place where you studied abroad. I felt like such a changed person after study abroad, and I was worried about reintegration and the disillusionment of returning to a more "normal" life after all of the new experiences and travel. I couldn't help but think about how much I wanted to plan the next trip back to France! Reverse culture shock and nostalgia for the other culture are both definitely normal, and I think that it is completely healthy and important to allow yourself time to reflect and readapt gradually. Then, really put in the effort to soak up the new experiences in the now.

Enjoy learning, cherish your time with friends, make the most of game days and campus life and live in the moment. These are really, truly some of the best moments of your life! With retrospect, I realize even more just how valuable and memorable each year at UW was for me and how much of a lasting impact my experiences, contact with educators and time with friends have had on the person who I am today. Even 4000+ miles away, I am always proud to tell people that I am a Wisconsin alum!

Interview from November 2016



Sarah with her family at the Wisconsin State Capitol.

I undoubtedly owe thanks to my study abroad experience in France for giving me a greater sense of self-awareness and perspective, as well as an appreciation of different cultural values and traditions. I have enjoyed witnessing the importance of family and tradition here, and we are blending our traditions in the franco-american education we are providing for our own children.

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