

# BADGERS BEYOND ABROAD

alumni interview series

## Sarah Tolman

Italy

### Life After Study Abroad

After I studied abroad in Italy, I came back to UW to complete my senior year of college, knowing the whole time that my primary post-grad plan would be to get back abroad as soon as possible. I applied to the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program and was accepted to teach English in Germany at a public school for grades 5-12. Teaching English abroad was a very different experience than studying abroad. There was less hand-holding, I didn't have a community of other American students surrounding me, and I had less structure in my days and year as a whole. It was a challenging but important year for me, to figure out who I was and what I wanted to do with my degrees in German and Italian.

After that year, I came back to the U.S. and moved to Chicago, first working as an intern for a non-profit called WorldChicago, where I helped to facilitate professional and personal interactions for international leaders during official visits to Chicago through U.S. Department of State sponsored exchange programs. I also worked part-time at a bike tour shop, which was a fun way to interact with tourists who were visiting Chicago and going on bike tours!

Shortly after that I was offered a job with CCI Greenheart, a branch of a global non-profit, Greenheart International, which is where I still am working, two years later. Here I facilitate cultural exchange programs for international students from 15 different countries, who are coming to the U.S. to attend high school for one or more years on F-1 visas. I am also entering a graduate program at Loyola University Chicago this fall! I will be pursuing a Master's degree in Cultural and Educational Policy Studies, with a focus on International Education. I will continue with my position at CCI Greenheart and will be a part-time student at Loyola.

### Impact on Life, Goals & Career

Clearly, study abroad has impacted my life and career immensely. I lived in Germany as an 8th grader with my family, so when I went abroad during college, I already knew that I enjoyed learning about other cultures and languages. My year in Italy really solidified this passion and left me no doubt that I needed to find a career that related to languages, travel, and cultural exchange, in some way or another. The year in Italy helped me become fluent in Italian, my second foreign language, which is something I'm very proud of and something that boosts my resume as well. The program in Bologna requires all students to find their own apartments after they arrive. This experience was terrifying but also gave me so much confidence. After that I knew that I could move anywhere in the world and figure out a living situation all on my own! I gained the confidence to travel independently and put myself in new, exciting situations, even if they made me feel nervous or uncomfortable at first. I also made lifelong friends from all over the world with who I still am in close touch.

### Advice for Returning Students

When you first return from abroad, it will feel like you have changed so much and that everything will be incredibly different now that you're back. Surprisingly enough, when you get to campus, things will revert back to exactly how they were in no time, and sometimes it will be disconcerting how it feels like you barely ever left. My advice to you is to make sure you remember all of the things you've gained from your year abroad. Seek out other people who have also had life-changing experiences abroad, exchange stories with them, get inspired by them and help to inspire others to go abroad too! While it may feel like nothing on campus has changed, reflect on all of the ways that studying abroad has changed you and take those all into account as you complete your studies at UW and prepare for the real world ahead.

Interview from August 2016



Sarah as a study abroad student enjoying an espresso in the Giardini Margherita in Bologna.

**Take those adventures and challenges, the amazing times and the tough times, back to UW with you, and use them to make the rest of your college experience that much richer.**

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