

Student Reflections

"I spent my junior year abroad in Belgium, and it was by far the greatest, most mind-opening, growth-filled experience of my life thus far. At first, I was nervous about the prospect of being off campus for an entire year, but in retrospect I believe that to truly immerse yourself in another country's culture -- to really feel "at home" -- a year is the only way to go.

I studied at the Katholieke Universiteit of Leuven; Leuven can best be described as a fairy-tale town, a place where bikes are more prevalent than cars, the smell of freshly-baked baguettes wafts down every cobblestone street and international students abound. (There are approximately 80,000 students from around the world who come to study at the university.) Because Leuven is located in the north of Belgium and Belgium is a country separated by language barriers, I had the opportunity to take Dutch classes and become fluent in the dialect. By the end of the year, I could make easy conversation with townspeople -- the butcher, the baker, the Godiva chocolate maker -- and feel like a local.

Perhaps the amazing aspect of living smack in the middle of Europe for the year was the chance to travel to so many places. I juggled three jobs the summer before, so that I could take advantage of this rare opportunity. I visited 13 countries in all, including France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, England, Ireland, Scotland, Greece, Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic. Traveling at such a young age really makes you grow up, really allows you to see the world through such different eyes. The people I met, the conversations I had and the middle ground I was able to find with these people all of whom seemed, at least initially, so different from me, was truly mind-blowing. I feel so blessed to be able to have had this opportunity to venture out into the world and learn so much about the history, politics, art and culture of another country, and I would strongly, **STRONGLY** urge any college student lucky enough to be in the position to study abroad to go for it. Because at the end of the day, my study abroad experience was the true education I got in college.

One final note: If you do think you want to study abroad (and I hope you do!), save your core classes for your junior year. They are easily transferable."

- Grace from Nashville, TN

"I guess I did my semester abroad in Ireland because I wanted to get in touch with my roots; both of my grandparents were from County Galway, so it just made sense to study at the National University of Ireland, Galway. It was cool to be living where they lived when they were about my age.

It's a stereotype, but maybe it's a true stereotype that everyone in Ireland is so friendly. I lived in a dorm with three Irish students and we became really

good friends. They showed me around town and made me feel so comfortable. We got so close actually that I used to go home on the weekends with one of them and have dinner with his family. It was really nice to feel at home in a foreign country.

My favorite part of living in Ireland was traveling throughout the country. It is so scenic and beautiful there -- another stereotype, but it really is that green. And I'm not going to lie: the Guinness really is that good too.

Ireland is a great place to study abroad. The town of Galway is so much fun and the program at the university was really great, especially for taking core classes, like in politics and philosophy. I miss it so much, thinking about it now. I would go back in a second."

- Brian from New London, CT