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Trevi Fountain, Rome.

Study-Abroad Programs

By Elizabeth M. Economou

Doran McBride, a junior at Seattle University, experienced some culture shock upon traveling overseas for the first time—to Mumbai, India—last summer. “At first, I was nervous. Virtually all aspects of life there were [different],” recalls McBride, who visited the city with 11 other SU students as part of his school’s three-week *Mass Media in Modern India* study-abroad course. But within days, McBride was thoroughly

enjoying many of the cultural differences, including the food—especially the delicious fresh naan and samosas. He was also engaged by the course’s fast-paced curriculum, which included lectures by Indian journalists, filmmakers, TV producers and academics, as well as tours of area media facilities and interactions with local college students.

“I learned a lot about global mass communications, including marketing strategies for populations with varying economic and cultural backgrounds,” says McBride, a strategic communications major. Reflecting on life after graduation, he says, “Hopefully, the fact that I studied abroad somewhere as exotic as Mumbai will show potential employers that I’m up for a challenge.”

For many students in the United States,

studying abroad has become an integral part of the college experience. According to a 2010 report published by the Institute of International Education, more than 260,300 American college students participated in study-abroad programs during the 2008–2009 school year—a number reflecting a significant increase from the prior decade. Programs of study in foreign countries—which are offered by a growing number of colleges, and span a few weeks to a semester or longer—are available in many different academic areas, ranging from architecture to comparative literature to urban design. In addition to expanding their worldviews, participants have opportunities to build valuable foreign-language and field-specific skills, while earning college credits.

Another benefit is that “studying abroad is a marketable experience in our contemporary world,” says Peter K. Moran, director of international programs and exchanges at the University of Washington in Seattle.

At the University of Washington, the options for studying abroad are vast, in locations as varied as Aarhus, Denmark, and Zhangzhou, China. One of the most popular places for UW students to enroll in a program is Rome, home of the University of Washington Rome Center, a scholarly facility near Piazza Navona that hosts undergraduate and graduate students studying a wide range of disciplines.

“We have literally hundreds of different opportunities—programs for those new to international experiences, and others that are far more immersive and long-term,” says Moran. He adds: “Studying abroad helps us understand that the U.S. is not the [entire] world. Our hosts and partners around the world have much to teach us.”

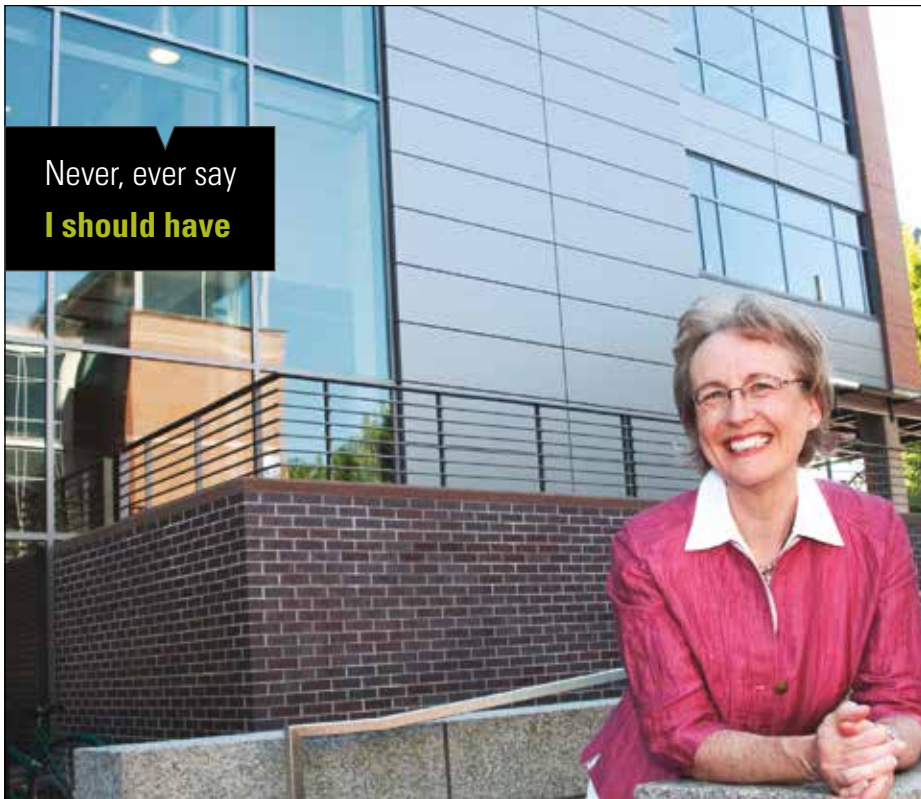
For Sarah Normandin, a senior at Oregon State University who is majoring in exercise and sports science, a semester spent at the University of Limerick in Ireland reinforced the life skill of making new friends and increased her confidence, knowing that she could live independently while away from her support system at home.

“I learned a lot about myself and how I tick, and how to manage stress,” says Normandin, who will graduate next month. “It’s so easy to get consumed with day-to-day tasks, but while in Ireland, I learned to be more appreciative of the people who surrounded me.”

A self-proclaimed “homebody,” Chase Yeakel, a junior at Washington State University in Pullman, says deciding to spend a semester in Barcelona, Spain, was precisely the push she needed to step outside her comfort zone. “Even though it’s hard being away from friends and family, studying abroad is definitely worth it.”

Along with teaching students about themselves, study-abroad programs teach

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Tips for Students

- Plan ahead. Let your academic adviser know you're interested in studying abroad, even if you aren't sure where you want to go. In general, students should start thinking about studying abroad as freshmen, says Moran from the UW. "Ideally, students will apply nine months before they plan to go."
- Do your research. Spend time learning about the many different programs available, such as field-study opportunities, in which students split their time between classroom-based learning and hands-on learning; language-immersion programs; and global internships. Attend information sessions at your college to learn about eligibility requirements, such as application deadlines (which vary), class standing, minimum GPA and language proficiency.
- Be prepared. It can be helpful to take foreign-language classes or courses on your region of interest before you depart.
- Keep an open mind. "Be flexible," says OSU's Normandin. "Go into the experience without a huge to-do list." —E.E.

them about other cultures. According to Robin Craggs, education abroad director at Seattle University, "a growing body of national research documents that studying abroad benefits the individual and society by developing globally minded students."

More than 500 Seattle University students study abroad in 45 countries annually, says Craggs. She notes that more than half the school's current study-abroad participants chose to visit "nontraditional" destinations, such as Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In fact, SU's latest offering is a semester-long exchange program with Sogang University, a Jesuit school in Seoul, South Korea.

While some programs focus on language acquisition or cultural studies, others are suitable for scientific field study or internships coupled with academics.

For Anyisia Dumont, a senior at the UW

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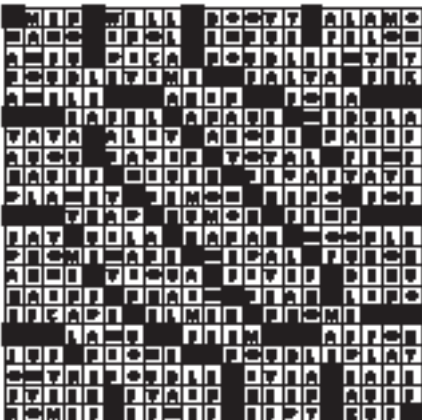
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majoring in classics and history, signing up for a multidisciplinary study-abroad program in Tel Dor, Israel, which emphasized excavating ancient ruins, was a dream come true. Workdays began at 4 A.M. and ended around 1:30 P.M., followed by lectures on archaeology, and pottery seminars.

Dumont returned home with an understanding that “archaeology is like history in action. You get to experience and relate to the past in a physical and tangible way.”

For all students, studying abroad requires a sense of adventure, together with what Moran refers to as “practical maturity.” This is especially true when traveling to a developing nation, as did Lynsey McGarry, a senior at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. Last spring, McGarry and 15 of her classmates, plus two professors and a teacher’s assistant, went to Zambezi, Zambia, in sub-Saharan Africa, for the Gonzaga-in-Zambezi program, a leadership and service project. No stranger to travel—having visited Ecuador, Egypt, Spain and Nepal, along with previously studying abroad in Florence—McGarry saw her visit to Zambia as an opportunity to experience yet another culture, while also helping others.

Of the many relationships she formed while teaching English to sixth- and seventh-graders, one in particular stands out—her friendship with a boy whom she met on her way to a spot near the Zambezi River to view the sunset. “Each day, we would share things that happened to us, and I would practice multiplication with him in the sand or wave to him on my way to the school,” she says.

Beyond building treasured memories during her time in Zambia, McGarry—who will soon graduate with a degree in finance and international business—says her experience there has had a profound influence on her future plans.

“[Studying abroad] strengthened my passion for service work and my insatiable desire to learn more about the world’s people and customs,” she says. 🏠

Elizabeth M. Economou writes from Seattle.

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