

Name: Stephanie Milligan

Home institution: University of Ottawa

International CO-OP destination (city, country): Arras, France

Travel dates: August 13–December 16, 2010

Work term (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.): Third

Program: History

1. Why were you interested in an international work term?

I decided to look for an international work term because I wanted a change of scenery from Ottawa and a chance to travel. When I found out there was an opportunity to go abroad for a government job, I jumped at it.

2. How did you fund the travel costs and other expenses for the term?

The government paid \$600 plus the cost of the flight, and I used my savings for the rest.

3. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your CO-OP position? Was it a difficult process? What advice do you have for other students?

My main strategy is to always keep my options open. With that in mind, I made sure not to opt out of the placement process through the COOP Navigator, and at the same time I continued looking for jobs. I knew it would be a long shot to land my first choice of jobs, so I made sure to apply to as many as possible, since it's a competitive program. My advice to other students? Never assume that you have the job and always continue searching. Don't put all your eggs in one basket!

4. When conducting your job search, did you find that many of the jobs available were in specific sectors (such as corporate, non-profit, government, etc.)? Where, or how, would you suggest other students focus their search?

I didn't find that many of the jobs were available in specific sectors. I found my job through one of the CO-OP Office e-mails, and had tried applying before, but it wasn't until this work term that I got the opportunity to work for the government in France. The fact that it was a paid job was a bonus! I'd suggest that students always broaden their search and look into other jobs, even volunteer positions and internships.

5. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare to the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money? Where did you find savings or discounts to reduce your expenses?

I did save money during this work opportunity! Although the exchange rate was favourable, I was actually paid in Canadian dollars while I was in Europe. Also, the government gave us an allowance of \$24/day on top of our salary; I used half of that money to pay for rent and still saved some.

6. How did you find accommodations and how much rent should students expect to pay in (city or country)?

There are two houses available for the guides, and they each accommodate seven people, so it was definitely a bit packed in there! However, rent was cheap at only \$230 a month. And we were close enough to the university that we had back-up accommodations if we needed them.

7. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome?

I think the biggest cultural barrier I had to overcome was language. It was such a shock because the French is so different between Canada and France! The dialect is totally different, and some of the words don't mean the same as they do in Canada. I also got teased because of my accent (I was the only student from Quebec), so it was definitely a challenge working and learning in French. However, the French residents were very friendly, and they did help me out a lot when needed.

8. Did you find it difficult to meet new people? What steps did you take to integrate yourself into your new surroundings and make yourself more comfortable in your new setting?

The setting was definitely unique, and it was interesting to be working and living with the same 13 people. I had a great time with my co-workers and I think they were a big part of the reason I enjoyed my stay there so much. It was hard to meet new people outside of my job because of the age difference, but I still managed to make new friends and have fun.

9. Overall, what advice would you give CO-OP students who are seeking international opportunities?

My advice is to make sure you always put in the effort needed, and to stay committed throughout the process. It isn't an easy process, and it is definitely different, but it is worth it in the end. Make sure you apply early, because it takes a long time to get all the visas, work permits and other documents ready. If you think the process for a regular CO-OP term is long, this is definitely beyond that! Also, keep in mind that the CO-OP Office doesn't make special requests—everyone is treated equally. And when you arrive at your destination, make sure to get in touch with the CO-OP Office immediately and stay in touch throughout your work term! It's imperative for them to make sure you are safe, so you absolutely must keep in touch when working abroad. Overall, international CO-OP is an amazing experience.

10. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience?

N/A