CAFCE International Committee

Student Engagement Sub-Group

Draft Questions for Student Profiles

June 14, 2011

First Name: Allegra McCreath
Institution: Wilfrid Laurier University

Where did you work abroad (city, country): Paris, France

When did you go abroad: January 2nd 2011

Which work term: 2nd

1. What motivated you to seek out an international work term?

I was motivated to seek out an international work term because I was already in Paris through an academic exchange. I was very adjusted to the city and way of life already and wanted to continue my stay abroad. I started looking into job opportunities and then when I found several postings that interested me, I applied.

1. How did you fund the travel and other costs associated with this opportunity?

Because I was already on an academic exchange, I had received a minor scholarship, I had resources saved up, and before accpeting the job I budgeted out my expenses with my parents and they contributed some funding. It was also much easier to accurately budget for my work term because I had been living in Paris for four months.

1. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your co-op position? Did you feel it was hard to secure your co-op position and how would you advise other students to make the same effort?

I first applied online, went to the interview and then was offered the job. Due to the fact that I was doing everything face-to-face it was much easier. I would advise other students that would like to pursue an international co-op to do the same thing, and if that is not possible then to interview via Skype.

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

Most of the jobs varied from luxury marketing to human resources to assistant positions but were all within the corporate sector. Internships or “stages” are very popular in France so there are lots of companies looking to hire students and you have a broad range or specifically corporate options.

1. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare to your income based on the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money and where did you find savings or discounts, which reduced your expenses?

Paris has a VERY high cost of living, and the legal limit that internships can pay is 417 Euros a month. I was very lucky to also be able rent an apartment more cheaply (I sub-let from a friend from my exchange school) so I could save some money, but I think under most circumstances it would not be possible.

1. How did you find accommodations and what rent can you expect to pay in (city or country)?

Typically rent is less expensive the farther you are from the center of the city, (in the suburbs it is not expensive but it is also not as safe) so you can find something within your price range, but it means your commute will be longer and potentially more expensive. In terms of living inside Paris, rent is very expensive and apartment conditions are not always ideal (there is no air conditioning, elevators, etc). My first apartment was 11 square meters and the hot water only lasted 5 minutes.

1. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome and what were some of these challenges?

Since I had already been living in Paris for 4 months before I started my internship, I found that I was already adjusted to the French way of life, the only barriers I still encountered were occasionally language, and that the bureaucratic system can be very frustrating in terms of getting things done efficiently with work visas, answering emails, etc.

1. 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 a new setting?

I had already met new people from my academic exchange but I continued to meet new people through going out in Paris and my roommate. I would recommend taking student language courses (many of my friends did this and were able to meet other students this way and also learn the language).

1. Overall, what advice would you give co-op students who are seeking international opportunities?

To be persistent, to have a positive attitude and to also to not give up! It is a really amazing experience to be able to work in another culture and I think it is totally worth it.

1. Is there anything else you want us to know about your experience?

I think this experience has been one of the best things I have ever done! Living and working abroad allowed me to face new challenges and experiences and become more independent. It is important to remember that there will be setbacks and that there will be times when you are frustrated or homesick, but it is about the bigger picture of being able to be immersed somewhere new and out of your comfort zone. It is a great experience to try something completely new and to see how other cultures work and live differently. I would also recommend that if students are not already abroad for an academic exchange, that they come over with enough time to really get adjusted to the culture and get comfortable with transportation, accommodation, etc.