

**Title of the Project:** Summer Study-Abroad: An American Teacher Becomes a Foreign Student

**Purpose of the Project:**

The purpose of this project is to gain deeper understanding of the experience of foreign exchange students by participating in a study-abroad experience.

**Summary of the Proposed Activity:**

I plan to enroll in a summer language- immersion program at the University of Burgundy in Dijon, France, a natural culmination of two year's of classroom study of French at Elgin Community College. I undertake this project in the hopes of fulfilling four objectives: 1) to experience first-hand the challenges of being a foreign student living in a foreign country; 2) to help our international students acclimate more completely into the college community; 3) to develop more meaningful faculty workshops on working with international students; and 4) to develop more meaningful orientation materials for our American students who choose to study abroad and faculty who participate in exchanges or visiting professorships.

**Project Statement:**

Two years ago when I enrolled in my first French class, I thought I was doing so for personal enrichment. What I found out was that I was engaged in the most profound professional development of my career. School was always easy for me, a place where I was comfortable and received accolades. Now, however, I am experiencing for the first time something akin to what my developmental students experience: lack of fluency, lack of automaticity, lack of confidence. And, while I believe I have been an empathetic teacher, there is a vast difference between *caring* about my students' struggles and actually *experiencing* that struggle first-hand. I anticipate that my study-abroad experience will initially make me uncomfortable by stripping away everything that's familiar; but it will also help me develop fluency in the language. Consequently, it will provide me with insights into my developmental and second-language learners who struggle with fluency on a daily basis, leading to a revision of the curriculum.

This experience will also have an impact on my job as international education coordinator. I work with international students to help them adjust to living in and attending school in the United States. After my study-abroad, I will be working with our international education committee to set up workshops to help students acclimate to the college and the community better. I also intend to train individuals to serve as mentors to the international students to help them further navigate their American experience.

I work with our faculty to incorporate international students into their classes. While the college's current workshops sensitize faculty to these students' needs, we need to provide more concrete information for inclusion, dealing with communication barriers, and cultural pitfalls. I believe that my experience as a foreign exchange student will provide the foundation for developing more helpful and realistic faculty development workshops and materials .

Finally, several students go on study-abroad experiences and faculty on exchanges or visiting professorships annually. Both groups are in need orientations to the country they will be visiting, but just as importantly to the experience of being the outsider. We currently rely on instinct in guiding these individuals toward successful experiences. We need to provide a much more complete foundation before sending them overseas. As a member of the Illinois Consortium for International Study and Programs, I will help amend the materials and presentations currently used in the orientations.

The experience of studying in France will help me develop more relevant training for my students and my colleagues. Undoubtedly a study-abroad will provide me with experiences and insights that I can't possibly anticipate. Warren Bennis speaks in his article "Four Competencies of Great Leaders" of the large number of top executives who have served in posts abroad. There is, he says, "something positive . . . about being upended, about having all your assumptions and beliefs questioned, about finding yourself in a strange land. The situation creates a great deal of self-knowledge." It is with a mix of fear, excitement, and anticipation that I think of having my world upended; I'm ready to go to a strange land.

**Proposed Length of the Project (1 year)**

Spring 2005	Enrollment in French 104, Elgin Community College
June 2005	Background reading on French culture, history, and traditions
July 2005	Summer school, University of Burgundy, Dijon, France
August 2005	Prepare student orientation workshops Develop mentoring program
Fall 2005	Implement the student workshops and mentoring program Develop faculty workshops and orientation
Spring 2006	Implement the faculty workshop

**Project Budget**

Tuition for French 104 at Elgin Community College	300
Summer school at the University of Burgundy, Dijon, France <i>(includes airfare, ground transportation, room, partial board, and tuition)</i>	3250
Additional travel expenses	800
Additional board	400
Textbooks and resource materials	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5000</b>