

Rutgers Around the World - Episode 12: Alumni Interviews - Study Abroad Career Impact

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HOST: The following is a production of Rutgers Global.

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HOST: Welcome to Rutgers Around the World, the podcast with the finger on the pulse of all things global at Rutgers!

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In this episode, Rutgers alumna and former Study Abroad peer advisor, Sarah Pomeranz, interviews several fellow alums who studied abroad to find out how their global experiences have positively impacted their career paths

SARAH POMERANZ: Hi everyone, my name is Sarah Pomeranz, and I'm here with the Rutgers Global–Study Abroad office at Rutgers University! Please introduce yourself to everyone.

CHELSEA WONG: My name is Chelsea, I'm a junior in SAS! I major in Economics and Political Science. I studied abroad at the University of Hong Kong in spring of 2019.

ASSATA DAVIS: Hi, my name's Assata! I'm a rising senior at Rutgers studying Political Science, Spanish, and Arabic. I spent my entire junior academic year studying in València, Spain and then in Menton, France for the spring semester.

JULIAN BILLER: Hey guys! I'm Julian Biller, I'm a senior here at Rutgers. I'm majoring in Political Science and minoring in Jewish Studies. So I spent the spring semester of my junior year abroad. I spent it in Jerusalem, Israel at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

KAT SLUSARCZYK: Hi, my name is Kat and I'm a senior! I'll be graduating this May 2020. I majored in Linguistics and Korean. I also

have a minor in International Global Studies and a certificate in Asian American Studies. In South Korea in the summer of 2018, I studied at Ewha Women's University.

SARAH: Awesome! Why did you choose to study at Ewha in South Korea specifically?

KAT S.: Well Ewha, as a women's university, has had a really pivotable role in promoting women's education in Korea, so there's that historical aspect that I really love about the university. So it's a bit of a longer story, but I started studying Korea because my mother is actually Korean and Irish. She was born in Korea, then came here, so I've always been interested in Korean culture because it's a part of my life to have a chance to study there for a semester.

It was a really a first for me because I had never been [to South Korea] before, so I was really excited to be able to study at Ewha.

[KAT S. FADES OUT, MUSIC FADES IN]

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HOST: In this segment, Assata talks about her one year experience abroad in Europe.

SARAH P.: So you went abroad for a whole year, and that is a decision that not that many Rutgers students end up deciding to do. What made you decide to leave campus for a whole year to study abroad?

ASSATA D.: I think originally when I was deciding to do it, I just knew I wanted to immerse myself for as long as possible, and how it lined up with my credits, I thought that it would work out pretty well. And then also, I knew that going into job interviews and saying, "this is something that's gonna set me apart," saying I went somewhere for a full year, I immersed myself.

Originally with Spain, all my classes were taught in Spanish. I was among Spaniard students. I knew it was something that would really set me apart from just saying "oh, yeah I did Study Abroad, but like, I was in an immersive experience." And then when I ultimately made the

decision to be in France for the next semester, again, just showing adaptability, showing that I can be dropped somewhere without necessarily the same resources that other people might have, so I thought it would be a great lesson that also would be something that would be very compelling in an interview to discuss.

SARAH P.: Were you at all worried about what it would mean to leave campus for a year in terms of involvement in your commitments?

ASSATA D.: Yeah, I definitely thought about that a lot, just because I was very involved. Like my freshman and sophomore year, I was on a board for a couple of organizations, a lot of community service and things like that, and so there are also programs that I was passionate about, interested in, that junior year, is kind of a pivotal year to get in on that stuff; I was going to be gone.

It's a very unique experience, so I felt confident that the personal growth for me, and then also the way that it was going to set me apart, would be something that could make up for anything that I could of done on campus my junior year. And honestly, I'll be back for senior year, I'll still be super involved then. It's gonna be okay [laughs].

[ASSATA D. FADES OUT, MUSIC FADES IN]

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SARAH P.: Julian, so you mentioned that you were doing a program while you were abroad in Israel. So can you talk us through some of the classes you took while you were there, and how that program aligns with your long-term professional interests?

JULIAN BILLER: So the program that I was on was actually a professional development program, the Jewish Professional Development Program. So it meant that 20 hours a week, sort of if it was an internship, for about 20 hours a week outside of the classroom, doing everything from meeting with professionals, to having immersive experiences throughout the country. In some cases, we even had to leave the country, and so that was an incredible opportunity on the side, let alone the amazing courses that I was able to take, ranging from a course specifically about how to educate to a diverse community, which

was incredible sitting in a room with Jews and Muslims and Christians and Druze, all different sects, there were the Yazidis...talking about how do we teach to communities that are as diverse as this classroom, and it wasn't just an interesting thought experiment, it was the reality that I was sitting in.

It was really, really incredible. I was able to walk out of the semester essentially bilingual, able to walk through street markets and buy and bargain for pricing with locals in the local language, which was really, really incredible.

SARAH P.: To highlight three of the things you're saying here, in terms of what Study Abroad can offer professionally, one element, in terms of being an educator, being able to take a class on diversity in the classroom in one of the most diverse countries in the world, is a really unique experience that you wouldn't of necessarily been able to have anywhere else, and we talked about Rutgers diversity, and we definitely do have diversity here, but to experience it in a completely different lens within the middle eastern context is completely unique.

And then also the geopolitical class. To be able to take a geopolitics class in the middle of one of the most contentious regions is a really cool experience, and lastly, I think a lot of students look to study abroad for the language element, and that's always advantageous in careers, regardless of what you're going into, to be able to speak other languages and connect the people. It's always going to make you a more attractive applicant for whatever you're applying for, and it's a skillset that as we're getting more globalized, is more and more sought after, so that's amazing.

[SARAH P. FADES OUT, MUSIC FADES IN]

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HOST: In this portion, we hear from Chelsea Wong, who studied abroad in Hong Kong.

SARAH P.: Chelsea, so, what is the experience you find yourself drawing on the most from your study abroad when talking to employers

or, you know, if you're applying to law school do you think, what elements could best be highlighted in a personal statement?

CHELSEA WONG: Yeah, so definitely right off the bat, just having the experience is something that all students have. Every single time I've applied for things like scholarships or fellowships, that's the first thing everyone asks is, what was your favorite memory, or why did you choose to study abroad at all.

I feel like in the future when I'm applying for law school, it's going to come to my advantage because I've experienced another culture even though I'm studying law here, there's not really a lot of international applicability there. I still feel like learning in another culture, being, living there, the fact that I know some people abroad, I've known some Rutgers alum abroad, I think is going to come to my advantage when I might need their help in the future.

SARAH P.: Were you able to take, I know you said you took some courses that ended up transferring back, so which of those courses you feel like was most applicable to your long-term career goals and what were some of the insights you gained in those classes?

CHELSEA W.: For my Econ major, my public finance class, which here is public economics, was the class where I learned the most. The professor, he was just someone that was really, really smart. He did a lot of public planning with the government itself, wrote a lot of proposals about transportation economics.

When I came back home, it really came to my advantage because I had learned public finance in a space where it mattered so much for everyone's daily life. I'm able to pursue research in public policy because I've already learned the principles from public economics. Really helpful for me me technically. That was still my favorite memory by far.

[CHELSEA W. FADES OUT, MUSIC FADES IN]

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HOST: Student Kat Slusarczyk discusses her decision to study abroad during the summer.

SARAH P.: Can you walk us through your decision as to why you wanted to study abroad during the summer?

KAT S.: Yeah, totally! So linguistics is kind of a smaller department here at Rutgers and what they offer is really important to how I'm completing my degree, so I wanted to make sure I wasn't kind of giving up a fall or a spring semester because I needed to complete that degree, of course. So summer was really the perfect option for me because it was a little more out of the way of that schedule and I could still complete courses for my Korean degree. It was really like the perfect timing.

SARAH P.: Yeah! And you went basically went halfway between the two half of your collegiate career, right?

KAT S.: Yeah, so I went between my sophomore and junior year, and I think it really was the perfect time. I had been studying Korean, like the Korean language, for two years already, so I had enough skills to get in a taxi and order food, but I was also at a point where I could make a lot of progress in my language learning, like being on the ground and being able to practice. Having that experience outside of fall and spring I think was also important to my development of my language skills.

HOST: Sarah now introduces Julian to talk about his experience in Israel and how it influenced his graduate and professional studies.

SARAH P.: I'm interviewing you for a job, writing a professional statement, personal statement for grad school, what is like the number one thing you would want to highlight in your study abroad experience for that?

JULIAN B.: Number one take away that I have from studying abroad and this was not unique just to being in Israel, this would apply wherever you study, is that at the end of the day, sort of most things in life come down to communication, right? And they come down to understanding. The goal of communicating means to understand one another and taking myself, as you mentioned, Rutgers is an amazingly diverse campus, but there's nothing like taking yourself and

transplanting yourself into an entirely different world, right, with entirely different social norms and cultural norms, and unspoken understandings that you simply don't have.

And going abroad gave me the tools and the skills and the opportunity to figure out how even in the midst of what is totally alien to me, how to make myself understood and how to understand others, right, and how to have empathy and this sort of human connection with everyone. And so when it comes to job interviews or grad school, applications, et cetera, at the end of the day you're trying to communicate who you are, right, and you want to say these are the things that I value, these are the things that I care about, these are the things that I have to offer you, and here's what I understand you to be offering me. Let's make a merger here. And so I think going abroad gave me sort of one of the most unique and immersive opportunities to truly understand how to do that.

SARAH P.: Do you feel like your study abroad experience supported your pre-existing notions of what you were going to do professionally, and, or, changed your mind in some way on maybe how you want to approach your career post-Rutgers?

JULIAN B.: In many senses, going abroad affirmed what I wanted to do. Again, that being to go into education, in formal education, but at the same time, it challenged me because there were many assumptions that I had about education and how it works and how I intended to pursue it, which now are going into question. What I might have taken as a definite "this would work everywhere," suddenly I've encountered situations where it wouldn't, which has forced me to expand my thinking into ok, if this part of that was successful, what else can I infuse that with, what can I combine to make a better...to turn myself into a stronger, better educator.

HOST: We will now hear from Chelsea on how Study Abroad shaped her perception of personal time management and law school.

CHELSEA W.: I wouldn't say it deterred me from pursuing law because I knew that, you know, I'm not studying international business, I'm not going to be traveling around for work, so the opportunity wouldn't

present itself naturally as it would now. Studying and traveling at the same time had the lowest opportunity, and if I didn't do this now, I would have to be taking personal time off, not getting paid for the time that I would have to be off.

Given that I'm trying to go into law school right after graduation, it's going to be a long time before I have any time off again, kinda put it into perspective that as a student, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I really wanted to seize that.

[CHELSEA W. FADES OUT, MUSIC FADES IN]

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HOST: We will now hear some words of advice from Chelsea.

SARAH P.: Last piece of advice for other students? And one line as to what you would tell someone considering study abroad as to what it could do for their career, what would you say?

CHELSEA W.: I'd definitely say plan early. When I came into Rutgers, I knew I wanted to study abroad, I went to the fairs, talked to advisors, and it really helped me get the process going, plan my courses ahead of time so that I wouldn't have issues down the road, I think that's critical. It'll definitely relieve your stress later.

I hope that those that had to come home are not disheartened and that we'll enjoy the rest of our time.

HOST: Julian shares his study abroad experience in tandem with practical application.

JULIAN B.: First, I would say do it. It's the best way to get a feel for the real world and to learn about it in a safe and healthy way.

HOST: Kat shares some additional perks of studying abroad and free time.

KAT S.: I believe that for everybody, it's kind of the perfect option. You're taking advantage of the time maybe some other people will spend relaxing, and that's totally fine, but you can also go on your study

abroad study during the week, and then on the weekend, take a weekend trip. Go somewhere that interests you, and still take a little time for yourself because taking care of yourself is important too.

HOST: Assata shares her final thoughts on growth and development.

ASSATA D.: It's only given me more, to my experience, to my personal growth, and to my professional capabilities, so I would say go for it.

SARAH P.: Awesome! Alright, well, thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today!

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HOST: Be sure to visit our website, at global.rutgers.edu. That's all for this episode of Rutgers Around the World. Join us next time as we discuss all things global with members of the Rutgers community.

Thanks for listening.

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