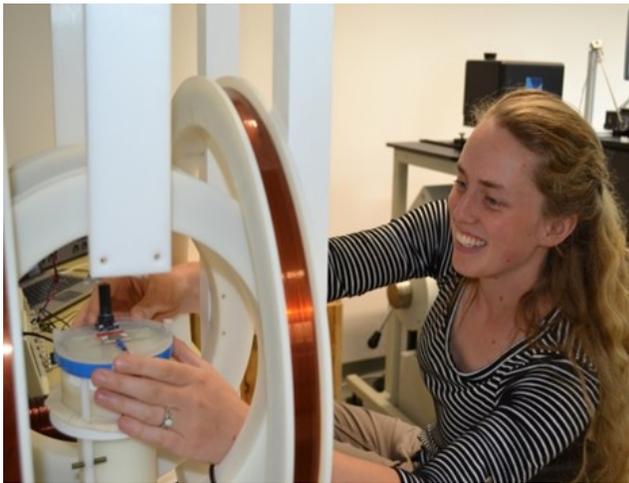


Mechanical Engineering Students Explore the World



Josh Warnick—Agadir, Morocco

Mechanical engineering students Josh Warnick, Cody Smisek, Autumn Pratt and Nick Bachus share their recent study abroad experiences and answer the question is it worth it?



Autumn Pratt —Hannover, Germany



Cody Smisek—Barcelona, Spain



Nick Bachus—Chiang Mai, Thailand



On a mountain hike in Chefchaouen, Morocco.

STUDY ABROAD:

is it worth the time and money?

Joshua Warnick spent spring semester 2016 in Morocco, Al Akhawayn University

It's hard to put my study abroad experience into words. It was a whirlwind, a huge adventure, a trip filled with countless firsts, and so many other things. I don't have the words to convey its impact. Plainly, it is the greatest experience I've had so far.

The way the trip started is indicative of the whole trip experience. Somehow it was frantic, last minute, almost accidental but planned and perfect—almost fated.

The meeting with a study abroad advisor in mid-October of 2015 started it all. After hearing my desire, questions, and thoughts they suggested going abroad in the spring, just a little more than two and half months from then. I was shocked. Honestly I was flushed with nervousness at the suggestion. I hadn't even thought that was possible. Then they followed

with the idea that I should go to Morocco! That was another thought that had never crossed my mind. But it made sense because I would not fall behind in my engineering studies and all the classes would be taught in English. Morocco, I had never been there, I thought, sounds crazy, let's try it!

The next couple weeks were filled with last minute paperwork—study abroad, college, and scholarship applications. Telling friends and family my idea, to mixed reactions (some people didn't even know where Morocco was) and then acceptance emails, scholarship awards and more paperwork. By mid-November I knew I was going. My plans for spring had changed so fast, so drastically, and now in less than two months I would be living in Africa.

I arrived at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, a small town in the northeast of Morocco in the mountains, on January 12th 2016 after over two days of travel. (My cheap flights came with a cost—a couple of very long layovers, including a night spent in the Madrid airport). Ifrane was home base for the next four months. I tried to travel around as much as I could—almost every weekend. This included grand taxi rides (taxis that go between cities), in Mercedes sedans from the seventies spotted with rust, which somehow are still running. We would pack six passengers, two on the front seat and four in the back, into the cars. If I didn't take a grand taxi I would take a bus. I would get the first one that I could after classes were over and ride up to twelve hours to be able to explore a new city. Then catch an overnight bus back to arrive at campus by 7:30 am in time to stop by my dorm and make it to class at 8:00.

I also traveled to France, Spain, and the Netherlands to visit friends I made on the exchange. Highlights from my travels: renting a scooter and driving along the Atlantic coast of Morocco to see rock arches in Legzira; surfing for the first time in Agadir; touring the Sagrada Familia (the most amazing building I have ever seen) in Barcelona, Spain; going to a music festival in the Netherlands; seeing the Arc de Triumph, Eiffel Tower and Musee d'Orsay in Paris.

Most important to me though, and my answer when people ask for my favorite part, were the people I met and the friends I made. I met people from France, the Netherlands, Morocco, different parts of the U.S., Libya, Jordan, Japan, and South Korea just to name some of them. I have friends that I still keep in touch with. I traveled, ate, studied, procrastinated and did everything with them for the time I was there. I made countless memories, laughed so much and even cried with some. I got to have thought-provoking conversations on questions of culture, politics (since Morocco is an Islamic country, I was asked countless times about Donald Trump and was expected to have a knowledgeable answer) and religion. I was able to hear amazing stories of their lives and experiences. These conversations challenged and broadened my world view.

I feel very lucky that I was able to continue with my engineering studies abroad. It was different in many ways and had its difficulties but it was absolutely worthwhile. I was the only engineering exchange student at the school, so I was the only exchange student in my classes. That gave me a lot of opportunity to meet Moroccan students, which was wonderful.

I had to take twelve credits abroad so I took Material Science, Mechanics of Materials, Dynamics, and Intro to Circuits. These classes are exactly what I would have taken at UI. The class format was similar to what I was used to—lecture, homework, midterms and a final. There are definitely differences in doing school in Morocco though. One difference is organization, it was not uncommon for class to be canceled and a mandatory make up class be scheduled almost anytime--Sunday morning or Tuesday late in the evening (8-10pm) for example. Midterm exams were almost always outside of class time. They could also be scheduled on the weekends or late evenings. A friend had one scheduled from 10 pm to midnight! This was one thing that was hard for me to get used to.

The semester had its challenges: expected things like homesickness, difficulty keeping in touch with friends and family, embarrassing language moments and general feeling of having no idea what is going on; as well as unexpected things like adjusting to the difference in school structure, to having a roommate for the first time, and missing Mexican food intensely. Honestly the biggest challenge for me, which I did not expect, was coming home. It didn't hit me until I

was back but then it hit me hard. Readjusting to American culture, missing Morocco and friends I had made there, coming back to a place where things seemed less exciting, more mundane, was a challenge. That showed me a little of how much this experience means to me.



Rock arches at Legzira, Morocco. I visited these during spring break and was almost caught when the tide came in.

**Cody Smisek spent summer 2016 in Bilbao, Spain,
University of the Basque Country**



Overlook of Bilbao, Spain

For anyone who has taken ART100 through the University of Idaho, Bilbao, Spain is likely most known as the third answer for question 25; the location of the Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Gehry. Fortunately, I came to know Bilbao as more than an answer to a 100-level test taken during my fourth out of five years at the university.

Through a few friends that had traveled to Bilbao during previous semesters I became motivated to look into a summer abroad. I researched many alternative programs but came to the decision that Bilbao would fit my current goals. On May 22nd I left on my first international flight. Once arriving in Bilbao I was immediately immersed in the difficulties of having basic elementary language skills in the national language. After being assisted to my apartment location by the program staff, and with the collective group effort of my new roommates, I began to acquaint myself with the day-to-day lifestyle in a different culture.

Our program group quickly became familiar with the late-night equivalent of Moscow's Taco Bell—The kebab. The simple description of the kebab is a wrap with meat cut from a giant rotating spindle combined with additional sauces and usually some sort of leafy vegetable. Being only a five-minute walk to the local kebab stop, and costing no more than five to six Euros, it was frequently visited during the two month stay. For lunch, menu del dia was a must. Typically served starting around 2pm until 4pm the meal usually consisted of three courses for the cost of about 11 Euro. The first course usually paella or salad; the second was the main course which could be anything from fresh fish to chicken; and lastly a dessert of ice cream, rice cake or a brownie. All this was topped off with at least one glass of wine included in the price.

The program was split into two sessions, the first five weeks long and the second three weeks in length. During the first session I was enrolled in a global entrepreneurship course which helped me begin to understand the difficulties that could arise from having an international business. Once a week a representative from a local startup met with the class to present their business and how it applied to the course. We were introduced to an individual starting an application for mobile devices, an incubator at the local university for startups and an individual who worked for a wind turbine manufacturer. For the second session I took a course in supply chain and operations management. This introduced topics ranging from just-in-time manufacturing to the concept of six sigma.

During the weekends most time was spent exploring the city of Bilbao and relaxing on the beach with a bottle of Spanish nearby. My favorite location in Bilbao was the old city. The numerous cafes and bars offered a large variety of pintxos, basically Basque for tapas. These places offered a great location to sit back and enjoy a quick snack with a glass of wine. The numerous beaches within walking distance of the metro system allowed for nice places to soak in the sun and watch surfing.

Between sessions I traveled with new friends to Switzerland, Czech Republic and the Netherlands. Switzerland was easily one of the most scenic places I've been so far in my short 22 years. We spent time in Zurich, Interlaken and Lucerne. While in Interlaken we hiked through part of the Bernese Alps and were lucky enough to have blue skies after a previous day of rain. After Switzerland I made my way to Prague and spent time seeing all the top sights. I would recommend a pub crawl to meet new people and be introduced to some of the night life.

Without question traveling abroad opened my eyes to the number of different cultures that spread across Europe. I think given the chance while in a university environment everyone should spend a summer or semester abroad. It is important to not be narrow-minded in our ever increasing global environment. Not to mention the friends you meet who will impact your life significantly. These friends will introduce many new ideas that can and should be incorporated into your future life. And yes, you will be asked about the current presidential election.



San Juan de Gaztelugatxe (Ask Cody to pronounce that for you and listen for the z and x!)

Grindelwald, Switzerland, near the summit of First (English name of the highest peak) in background)





*Villages like this were all over.
I did lots of biking around the
countryside.*

Autumn Pratt earned a summer 2016 internship in Hannover, Germany, at Leibnitz University

For those of you who have asked me what Germans are like, I can say they are a lot like people. I made this discovery on the first day, watching an intermittent stream walk in through the exit door of the supermarket. While I found this vaguely disappointing at the time, it was later quite comforting.

The purpose of this summer expedition to Hannover was I had an internship at Leibniz University in Hannover. I was to work with a doctor of engineering candidate (Meriem Akin), at Leibniz University, on her research of paper-based electronics. The idea is that using paper as a base for electronics could make them cheaper, more sustainable, and reduce the volume of toxic ingredients. If you've seen the Circuit Scribe pen you will probably

understand the appeal, especially for educational materials. My job was to create demo applications for a rotation sensor Meriem had developed – I would tell you more, but she is planning to publish a paper! The task implied first creating a circuit and set-up for the sensor which would return a consistent response. I was feeling a little out of my depth, but at the same time it was pretty cool to have everything unfamiliar: electronics at work, and outside a strange new world full of things I didn't understand.

Life at first was mostly work and saying “Hallo” to Valdi, the Polish trucker, on my way back up to my room at what was basically a long-term stay hotel. So I joined a choir (mostly of older people - I was the odd duck in many ways). Although I rarely understood what anyone was saying, it always seemed like they were making the same jokes that my honorary great aunts and uncles make at home. They were quite nice about me and my funny accent messing up their songs – they even took me along to perform with them. I didn't actually know where we were going (most of them didn't speak English) but it turned out to be a christening, which was neat. Oda, one of the ladies, was concerned with my living quarters and asked if I wanted to come live with her family. (One of her friends heard her, smiled, and said something along the lines of “Ah, Oda of the tender heart.” She had adopted a couple refugees the year before.) I am very glad I took her offer. It was so nice to have people to come home to after work – though it took me a little while to break my habit of drinking straight out of the milk jug.



*Adventures in the supermarket. Note the
authentic spelling in the price tag:
AMERICAN STYLE*



*Oda, Reinhard, and Felix,
the family who took me in.*

My new friends were very punctual. Every morning we had breakfast just at seven. One time when we were going to meet some other students, Felix noted “Well, they’re Americans, so it doesn’t matter if we’re late.” I think I must have put my hosts to the test with my assumption that half nine is half after nine – it’s actually half before nine.

I’m sure they put up with many other misunderstandings as well, because one of the daughters of the family decided that I had better learn their language quick and told them not to speak English to me. (They tended to cheat when she wasn’t around.) I don’t think she knew how little German I knew when she made the rule. She had once done a study abroad in the U.S. and I think she was eager to get even. It was a lot of fun – for me, having never learned another language, it was uncanny to start understanding the people around

me. I did a lot of eavesdropping at work, from which I gathered that German grad students like to blow food up in their microwaves and compare notes on the process, so we are not alone on that front.

It’s hard to decide which stories to tell, there are many. But speaking of language issues, I thought this was funny: One time I was biking with Oda through some fields, and I got confused because evidently the word for “wheat” is “korn” as pronounced “corn.” She then told me that the Americans were trying to help the Germans after the war (WWII seems to still be The War there) and they asked what Germany needed. The Germans said “corn” meaning wheat, but they got corn... lots of it. “My dad was so sick of eating corn as a kid.” she added.

It was very interesting to live in someone else’s world and realize that it is as utterly normal to them as mine is to me. For the first time in my life, I know what an American accent sounds like, since I went long enough without hearing one. (It sounds very nice, actually.) When I first got back to the U.S., I was a bit sad that everything was normal again. Then I saw the German man I’d been sitting next to on the plane looking around big-eyed at the foreign land of Portland airport, and I realized that America is pretty interesting too.



*Seems that the Germans
are quite adamant
about certain things.*

Nicholas Bachus' Summer Study Abroad in Thailand, Chiang Mai University



Every time I think of Thailand, the same thing comes to mind: I wish I was still there. The people, the places, the food, and especially how different Thailand was from anything I had ever seen. Recently, I had found everything great in life is one step outside your comfort zone, so just like choosing to attend the University of Idaho, studying abroad in Thailand was truthfully the best decision I have ever made.

To be honest, studying abroad was not something I had been planning for, but was a spark of excitement which grew over about a month. Towards the end of my junior year in mechanical engineering, I desperately needed a break from everything related to engineering, especially Mohr's circle. While perusing the list of study abroad programs, Thailand caught my eye because of how different and strange it would seem compared to

life here in Idaho. Because of this, I immediately applied, with practically no knowledge of Thailand or any Asian country for that matter; not having taken any Thai language courses and with no one from U of I on the trip. I literally threw myself into a strange and foreign country, but that was what actually excited me the most.

One of the first things I discovered on my adventure, before I even got to Thailand, was sometimes the greatest moments arise because of the worst ones. The flight to Thailand took some of us through Seoul, South Korea, and we ended up missing our final flight due to a delay. Because of this, the airline gave us each our own room in a five star hotel, free food and free transportation to explore Seoul for a whole day before the next flight for Thailand. What could have been a catastrophe turned into one of the highlights of my trip. It's events like this that allow you to spare a moment, take a deep breath and enjoy everything a new adventure has to offer.

Most of my time in Thailand was spent in Chiang Mai taking courses at Chiang Mai University (Chiang Mai University, มหาวิทยาลัย เชียงใหม่), or exploring all the nooks and crannies of the city. One of my favorite parts of Thailand was how inexpensive everything was. I would commonly refer to their currency, the Baht, as monopoly money because an amazing dinner would cost less than a dollar or a five star hotel room in Bangkok for next to nothing, compared to the United States.

With everything in Thailand being so different, my classes became extremely beneficial to understanding what was happening around me. I thankfully took only general educational courses such as Thai Society and Culture with exchange students like myself from the United States, as well as a class in Thai language which drastically improved my chances of ordering a curry dish instead of fried bull testicles.

Thailand was the best thing I have ever done and even writing about it now, it is difficult for me not to get emotional about all the amazing adventures I had and the terrific people I met. But even the little things made it that much more special, such as how different my classes were from those in engineering—more women than men in my classes for once. Everything about my trip makes me want to go back, to then explore the world some more. If you are looking for an adventure or most likely your best moment in life, just know that every amazing story you may ever get the chance to tell, is just one step outside your comfort zone.

