

From our alumni: Gregory Zegarek, University of Geneva (Fall 2011)

My time spent in Geneva on the Euroscholars program proved to be everything that I expected and more. I look back very fondly on my time in the laboratory, and the people that I had the chance to meet while I was there. In my view, studying abroad is a fantastic opportunity to broaden horizons in terms of cultural awareness, but the Euroscholars broadened my personal academic ambitions as well. Not only did I come back to my home institution with a new outlook on American relations, but I am now looking to pursue research as a career which I had not considered as a serious option before this experience.

In Geneva, I was working in an fMRI laboratory on a project concerning the effect of hypnosis on pain and stress. Of course there are laboratories in the United States that are doing fMRI research and even research on hypnosis, but traveling to Europe and conducting the research in Switzerland gave me the opportunity to see how the university system differs in Europe compared to the United States. Specifically, what I observed is that there is a more strict differentiation of the students into their respective disciplines in Europe such that they pursue a more focused course of study from high school whereas the American System embraces the idea of a liberal arts education with much opportunity to explore different areas of study. What I truly enjoyed about studying in Europe was the fact that the people in my lab came from many different countries not only in Europe but around the world. Thus, each person contributed a unique perspective to the lab environment.

As I now plan to continue to do research, I do want to retain some of the characteristic features of my European experience that I found to differ in America. For instance, I noticed that my colleagues in the lab took out time each day to eat lunch together in the café, whereas in the US researchers are more likely to grab a quick bite in between runs of an experiment. I think that keeping a social structure is important not only for human interaction but also for the spread of scientific ideas. Overall, the experience in Geneva was fantastic and I hope to someday make it back!

