

## Summer 2005 Internship Report

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Going into my internship this June, I was under-prepared for the extent to which I was going to enjoy myself. I expected a stuffy diplomatic atmosphere, complete with the requisite aura of the often-described French arrogance. To say that I was pleasantly surprised is an understatement: my co-workers could not have been more friendly and welcoming. They are of course sophisticated and worldly, but they are incredibly kind and also lots of fun. It is this reaffirmation of why I am so fascinated by French culture and French people that will stay with me the longest after this experience.

I also realized that I would be happy and also very lucky to have a career working in the cultural field. Despite the penny pinching and sometimes small audiences for admittedly obscure cultural events, the dynamism and talent in this field is unbelievable. It is this aspect of my job this summer that gave me the desire to succeed in publicity efforts; I truly believed that people should know about this lecture, that dance recital, and the flute concert next month. It was an eye-opening exposure to the wealth of cultural opportunities, and I am even more overwhelmed by the fact that we were only associated with the French-flavored events in the area. I had no idea how much was out there, and how many people are spending their lives working passionately to not only perform and create, but to facilitate, organize and publicize these happenings. It is the latter group that I found to inspire me (could be that my total lack of artistic talent lends me not at all to the former), and I will spend this year researching more opportunities in cultural institutions.

This summer I made a wonderful French friend; Chahinez Benmissi, 20, came from Paris to spend a few months as an intern in Boston before returning to HEC, an ivy-league-like business school in France. It is safe to say that Chahinez and I taught each other more about our respective cultures than we had learned before through extensive study, class time and observation. I made sure to explain to her the importance of Seinfeld episodes in illustrating everyday ironies, while she outlined her use of French slang so well that, to her chagrin, I started using it effortlessly. Chahinez, a young Muslim woman of North African origin, is completely enamored with America. Equally as valuable to the knowledge I gained about France was the knowledge I gained about my own country. Through her effort to understand our culture and our systems, Chahinez reminded me of how important and often brilliant American establishments and customs are. Who would have thought that by working at the French Consulate I would shed some of my anti-Americanism?

My contact with the Chancellery, the part of the Consulate that deals with the more diplomatic and administrative duties, gave me the opportunity to meet other young Americans interested in State Department work. There were two 20-something men working with passports and visas in order to gain enough "international experience" to pad their applications for Masters in International Affairs programs. I benefited from their extensive research into their chosen career – working for the State Department – and can now safely say that it's not for me. I would much rather continue the kind of work I was doing with the Cultural Services, whether it be in public relations, development, or education. I am grateful for this insight into preparation for

a career with the State Department and the lifestyle it would entail, because it has allowed me to narrow down a bit more my vision of my future.

Of course, I'm much better at French now. I understand it almost effortlessly, which is saying quite a bit since much of it was quick and scattered office conversation. Speaking doesn't make me nervous at all, and the French understand me easily. I feel confident that I could work in a position where I would be required to communicate in French, and I owe this confidence completely to my internship this summer. I know that I have plenty of room for improvement, though, and I'm committed to perfecting my French. I'm fortunate that I made the connections I did this summer, for they'll prove invaluable in finding an internship or work in France if I decide that's what I want to do. It's looking more and more like that will be the case, and I'm so thankful for this kind of direction I've gained from my experience at the French Consulate this summer.

#### BUDGET

Food (mostly grocery but periodic meals out)	\$1200.00
Transportation (subway, bus, train)	\$250.00
Entertainment (movies, newspapers)	\$50.00
Financial Aid (part of my \$3000 contribution)	\$1000.00

I'd like to thank you again for making my experience this summer possible.

There is no way that I could have done it without your support.

Sincerely,

Renee