

# Study Abroad Connections

## Message from the Director

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In this issue of Study Abroad Connections, Study Abroad alumni Eve Millett offers insight and advice about her study abroad experience in Angers, France two summers ago. Assistant Professor Mark Branner from the department of Theatre and Dance, who was the Resident Director for London in Fall 2013, provides a compelling argument as to why faculty with young children should teach abroad. Then, Mathematics professor Monique Chyba, who was the Resident Director for Paris in Spring 2014, shares her stratospheric experience inspiring and educating Moroccan youth with NASA scientists. Clearly, studying abroad builds confidence and opens students and faculty alike to the world, and the universe.

Sincerely,

*Sarita Rai*  
Sarita Rai

## Alumni Spotlight On...



**Eve Millett**  
Angers, France, Summer 2012

### Why did you choose your program location?

I wanted to go to Angers rather than the other French programs because I liked where the city is located and the excursions that were being offered. My goal in participating in this study abroad program was to work on my fluency in speaking and writing the French language. I also wanted to have the experience of living abroad in a different country, where everyone would not be speaking my native language.

### What did you appreciate most about this study abroad experience?

I appreciated everything about the study abroad experience. I am glad that I earned UH Manoa credits by going through the Study Abroad Center and that I did not have to worry about having to transfer my credits back. I loved the fact that I had a homestay. At first, I was nervous about the homestay, but it was the best experience I could ever have! My family was so nice and supportive, and they really took their time to show us around. I also appreciate the fact that we had a Resident Director with us, because if we ever had a problem, we could go to him. Finally, going to the Angers program was great because our classes had TAs who would not only help us refine and work on our French, but they also would organize events outside of school for everyone to come together. This was great, because it allowed for us to meet outside of class and get to know everyone better.

### What advice would you give to prospective students interested in studying abroad?

Enjoy every minute of it! Take advantage of all of the excursions and extra activities that are offered. Be sure to bond with your fellow students who are going. You will make life-long friends! And have fun!

*Eve graduated Magna Cum Laude from University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in December 2012 with Bachelor of Science degrees in Ethnic Studies and French. She is currently in the Graduate Program in French at UH Mānoa and is an instructor for French 102.*

*"I learned from this experience that I can do anything! I know now that I can live in another country and be all right. This experience gave me more confidence in myself that I can do anything that I want to."*

## "Honey, Don't Forget the Kids!"

**Mark Branner**  
**Resident Director, London, Fall 2013**  
**Asst. Professor, Department of Theatre & Dance**

The truth is, I'm almost ashamed to reference the *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* franchise from the late 80s and early 90s. It is difficult for me to avoid a snarky academic smirk when thinking about the premise and overall acting quality in Rick Moranis' big breakout series. Still, the reference serves well to situate how we often view children in our academic lives. As we 'build our careers' in the academy, it is often very easy to minimize the importance of children, even our own. Children are generally viewed with a lens of cool detachment or even animosity in some academic circles – I know, I've seen the looks I sometimes get when bringing my own kids onto the university campus. The implication is that the university is a place of "higher education" and that children don't really figure into that equation. But, truth be told, those of us with young kids realize how much of our lives they actually play into. If your two-year-old decides to 'offer up' a major tantrum right before you go to teach a class, chances are you won't really be thinking about "higher learning."

How then should we approach a decision to teach abroad as parents of young children? One of my colleagues told me that there was no way he could even consider it. "What about their schooling?" Others have suggested that the stress of taking young children abroad would be too much. Functioning well as a parent in our own country is challenging enough. Why add the stress of another culture, another language, another currency, etc.?

I'd like to advocate a different position. Here, then, are three reasons you *should* apply to teach abroad – ESPECIALLY if you have younger children. (I was going to come up with a cool 'Top Ten' list, but as a parent of young children (we have three kids under the age of nine), who actually has the brain cells needed to come up with ten good reasons?)

### 1. The world opens to your children.

One of the main reasons we encourage our college students to pursue a semester or year with the Study Abroad program is to allow them to "experience the world." What a different experience it was for my Study Abroad students to read a Shakespearean play and then go to see it performed at *The Globe*. Compare this with students who are reading the same play while stuck inside a fluorescent-lit classroom within the bowels of Kennedy Theatre. The author is the same. The words are the same. But the

experience between the two groups couldn't be more different. Guess which group tends to like the experience of reading Shakespeare more?

In the same way, our children experience a whole new world of possibilities and challenges in living abroad. We were lucky to find housing in London right next to a tiny local library. It seemed only fitting that we should dive into British children's authors. While we'd read one or two Roald Dahl books as a family while living in the U.S., living in London opened up his works to our children in wonderful ways. Some of my fondest memories of the entire semester involve our kids literally laughing themselves onto the floor upon hearing some delicious passage in *The BFG*, *Danny, the Champion of the World*, or *George's Marvelous Medicine*. My son – a rather reluctant reader at age eight – devoured the first two *Harry Potter* books, only to stop himself on book three. "I think I need to wait a few years more. It is getting too scary." BEING THERE made all of the difference.

### 2. Your children open to the world.

One of the best experiences we've had in taking our children abroad has been re-experiencing Hawaii after our return. Suddenly, things here at home are new – the weather, the lack of traffic, the colors, etc. Even language becomes an adventure. Our almost five-year-old had us rolling when she announced at a park play date, "Mum, I need to use the loo!" Suddenly my kids are "cosmopolitan," chatting with their friends about Harrods department store, daily tea time, and public transportation. They have not only seen another part of the world, they have brought parts of that world back home with them.

While in London, we all grew in our knowledge of the world. We would often pull out a map of where we were heading for the day, with occasional input from our children as to the best method of getting there. The simple act of "moving to a place where you need a map" has introduced our children to geography in the real and practical way. This relatively simple act has opened our children to new practices – pulling out maps, for example, or asking to participate in the "geography bee" at school.



*"Suddenly my kids are 'cosmopolitan,' chatting with their friends about Harrods department store, daily tea time, and public transportation. They have not only seen another part of the world, they have brought parts of that world back home with them."*

## "Honey, Don't Forget the Kids!" cont'd



Previous page: Waiting with children for a double-decker bus in London is easily managed with the help of ice cream.

Top left: Shortly upon their arrival to London, the Branner family found one of England's ubiquitous red telephone booths...and attempted to squeeze inside.



Top right: When asked about a favorite attraction in London, the Branner kids would unanimously choose "parks." Filled with sand and pirate ships, the Diana Memorial Palace certainly received a top ranking.

Bottom right: On site at Kensington Palace, Branner and his three children explore the royal grounds.



Bottom left: Sitting with the imposing lions at Trafalgar Square, Micah (8), Jacquelyn (1.5) and Audrey (4) Branner attempt a similar pose.

### 3. And perhaps, if you are lucky, YOU open to your children.

Let me be honest. Living abroad with children is a challenge. Our family of five shared a tiny two-bedroom flat in London that cost nearly double the price of a similar place in Honolulu! Can you imagine thinking that living in Hawaii is cheap? Go to London. Suddenly the prices at your local *Foodland* seem downright reasonable. Getting three kids under the age of ten onto a jam-packed London tube line during rush hour can give even the best of parents nightmares for months and years to come.

But, the benefits are enormous. Since *everything* was new to *everyone* in the family in this new place, we all learned how to do things *together*. My son took great pleasure in navigating the various tube lines by the end of our time abroad, "helping Mom out." London is filled with activities that families can do together – including lots of cultural activities for everyone. We toured many museums with specially designed "explorer backpacks" that many of London's stuffiest museums now provide for children. Several theatre companies in London are "hand crafting" events for only 30 to 40 audience members, catering especially to those audience members under two. Our entire family thrilled to see "Mr. and Mrs. Moon" – a simple tale about the man in the moon, but performed in and around a giant sand pit where all of the audience members were required to take off their shoes and dig in the sand while the performance took place. I don't remember ever playing in the sand in Hawaii quite like the way we played in the sand in central London.

My kids are already begging to go back to London or to another city. Why? Their number one reason is always something along these lines: "Because we did lots of things together." So, my rather simple and non-academic premise is essentially good parenting advice for all of life. Don't neglect your kids. Involve them in your life. Take them with you. Bring them to work. Their childhood is too short and your academic life will *always* be full of too many pressures that will *always* be pulling you away from them. Don't forget those things of first importance – the health and happiness of our families and children. Going abroad can actually help to support these 'First Things.'



#### About the Author

Born in Los Angeles but raised primarily in Taiwan, Mark returned to the U.S. to attend college, whereupon he quickly dropped a scholarship from UCLA to work as a clown with the **Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus**. Mark eventually received an MFA from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He teaches courses in theatre for young audiences, puppetry, mask, and physical comedy.



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*Dare to Discover,  
Dare to Learn, and  
Dare to Understand*

## Study Abroad without Frontiers

**Monique Chyba**  
Resident Director, Paris, Spring 2014  
Professor, Mathematics

As a young child, I dreamed of becoming an astronaut; there is probably not a better sight than a round Earth viewed from above in its entirety. I however got even luckier: I became a mathematician. It allows me to see the invisible, to travel to the past and the future, and to explore the vast universe or the dark side of our own oceans.

However, my encounter with astronauts did not stop with my dream: in December 2013, Dr. Kamal Oudrhiri, telecommunication engineer at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (he was the first to announce the establishment of communication with the Curiosity robot after its landing on Mars), invited me to join Grove of Hope's team of educational specialists and NASA scientists to bring inspiration, imagination and innovation to the Moroccan youth throughout various events in February 2014. As a resident director of the study abroad program in Paris for the Spring, I was geographically ideally located for such initiative, and it provided me with the possibility to honor this invitation. For one week, we delivered school presentations, large audience lectures and met with University leaders to share our passion for science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Through live presentations and hands-on demonstrations, students explored some of the amazing innovations behind space exploration.



*Left, Center: Monique Chyba in action presenting the robotic section of the Grove of Hope program to a public of about 300 Moroccan families at a theater in Rabat, February 2014.  
Right: Monique Chyba and Loren Acton in Morocco, February 2014 (note that Loren is wearing the same suit he had in space). Pictures courtesy of Vivian Lin, photographer.*

Among the scientific experts of the program was Dr. Loren Acton, a payload specialist who flew with the STS-51F/Spacelab-2 Challenger space shuttle from July 29 to August 6, 1985. His space mission travelled over 2.8 million miles in orbiting Earth 126 times. Dr. Loren Acton is an expert in solar physics and has been leading experiments for the study of high-energy processes in the universe, such as solar flares.

The opportunity to spend one week with Dr. Loren Acton and the team of Grove of Hope was a unique experience at a scientific and personal level. The UHM Study Abroad program made it possible, and I am extremely thankful for this beautiful gift associated to my role of Resident Director in Paris for the Spring 2014 semester. The students at the American Business School looked as excited as me and it was a magical moment to share my experience with them.

Remarkably, this amazing journey does not stop here: indeed, plans are well underway to welcome Grove of Hope leaders Dr. Kamal Oudrhiri, Dr. Loren Acton and educator Marisa Cleghorn at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa in December 2014 for several major outreach events. In particular, a public lecture by Dr. K. Oudrhiri and Dr. L. Acton is scheduled to take place in the ballroom at the Campus Center. There is also now advanced discussions for me to spend some time at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in a near future. The UHM Study Abroad program is much more than a student exchange, it is a life-changing experience for the resident directors as well!