

Laughing and learning across the world

Ladue student describes her foreign exchange experience

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For five months, junior Aly Francone lived 4,548 miles away from home. While studying abroad in Pori Finland, Francone enjoyed late classes and daily lunches in the city. She decided to study overseas because of her interest in culture and linguistics.

“[Finland is] just really pretty, and it’s peaceful,” Francone said. “It’s just a nice country. I miss it so much, and I’ve only been back a couple weeks.”

Francone’s desire to study abroad stemmed from her interest in different languages and her love for travel. She has always wanted to branch out and explore different cultures around the world. For Francone, traveling abroad seemed like the perfect opportunity to dive into her passion headfirst.

“I know that she wants to study linguistics,” friend of Francone and junior Mahima Gunapooti said. “She really likes traveling and learning about different cultures, which is why she applied for the program to begin with.”

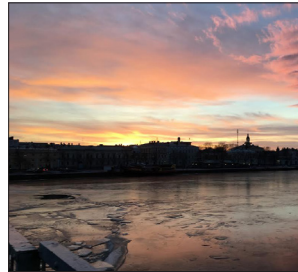
Francone’s interest in language is not only shown in her decision to study abroad, but also in her course load. While in Finland, Francone took mostly language courses rather than the typical core classes.

“I took four language classes,” Francone said. “I didn’t take any math and science. I took English, Finnish, Swedish and French.”

High school in Finland is very different than how it is in the U.S. With fewer required courses, Finnish high school students have more flexibility with their schedules, which allows them to take more interest-focused courses.

However, high schools in Finland are set up similarly to American colleges in that students have only a few classes every day.

“There would be days I’d [only] have three classes or two classes,” Francone said. “I would come in at 8:30 or 10:15. It [was] really nice.”



AROUND THE WORLD IN 5 MONTHS ♦
Top left: A street scene in Pori, Finland. Top right: Pori, Finland at sunset. Bottom: Proudly displaying the Finnish flag, junior Aly Francone smiles with her newly-found friends. “I was actually supposed to go to France,” Francone said. “Last year [with] all the attacks, my mom was worried so I switched to [Finland].” (Photos courtesy of Aly Francone)

Finland also differs from the U.S. in terms of populace and way of life. In Finland, most people enjoy a calm and subdued life, whereas Americans are known for their busyness and volume.

“People in Finland are a lot shyer,” Francone said. “[They are] a lot quieter, more reserved. Everyone keeps to themselves.”

Francone’s friends also agreed Francone liked the more laid-back Finnish lifestyle. By immersing herself in the culture, she truly understood the quality of life there.

“I can tell she prefers that more low-key, close, down-to-earth, more natural lifestyle,” Gunapooti said. “She definitely prefers the lifestyle there [compared to the lifestyle] over here.”

Studying abroad has allowed Francone to step outside of her comfort zone and learn about herself and the world around her. Francone’s former AP World History teacher Eric Hahn agrees that there is an astounding amount of advantages to studying abroad. He believes that experiencing life overseas helps kids see the world from a different point of view and enhances the learning process.

“Beyond learning another language, learning other customs and eating different foods [are also important],” Hahn said. “The advantages of making new friends and forming new relationships [that] may turn into lifelong bonds [come with studying abroad as well].”

Francone believes her experience has changed her for the better. Traveling alone in a completely foreign area forced Francone to become independent and outgoing, and it showed her the larger picture of the world.

“I gained a different outlook on the world,” Francone said. “I’m more patient, more independent and more confident.” •

The rest was history: Student’s job encourages the discovery of her love of history

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Three times a week, senior Sophia Wu leaves school and heads straight for work, where she can pursue her passion while gaining a valuable hands-on experience. Wu has worked at the Missouri History Museum for a year and a half, and she works in the Exhibitions and Research department with professional historians.

“I help with making exhibits, researching, cataloging, brainstorming project ideas for the museum, maintaining the archives, enhancing visitor experience, giving tours to the public and conducting oral history projects,” Wu said.

Wu fell in love with history during United States Studies in social studies teacher Robert Good’s class. She felt captivated by the idea that social studies is

not just the process of memorizing facts and dates but more of the study of how people across different cultures work together to change and shape society.

“Dr. Good also mentioned that history is an argument of the past, and since I love to debate and talk about contentious issues, history was just for me,” Wu said.

Wu has also been greatly influenced by social studies teacher

[Wu] is an amazing student, and her interest and passion for history is amazing.

social studies teacher Christopher Saxton

Christopher Saxton’s AP U.S. History class. Wu says that it is her favorite class in high school, and the one that inspired her to take the job at the museum.

“Mr. Saxton made history fun and a passion for me, and his lectures were intriguing and

interesting to listen to,” Wu said. “In APUSH, document-based questions and analyzing documents were a big component of the class, and I realized that I loved to analyze history from primary and secondary sources. I realized that since I loved to learn history in class, I wanted to explore more outside of the classroom, which led me to apply for a job at the Missouri History Museum.”

Saxton recognizes many character traits that Wu possesses that make her an exceptional addition to the museum. He believes that history is an active subject, and he hopes Wu will continue to be passionate about it.

“[Wu] is an amazing student and her interest and passion for history is amazing,” Saxton said. “[Wu’s] interest in history went way beyond APUSH, and her commitment to not only studying history, but [experiencing] it by working at the Missouri Histori-

cal Society has hopefully made an example to other students who share the same passion for the discipline as she does.”

Wu thinks that the best job at the museum is handling the collections and researching the origins of every object in the museum’s inventory. She has been exposed to St. Louis’s interesting history as a prosperous trading site along the Mississippi River and as a host for the World’s Fair in 1904.

“I love being one of the first people to touch objects from donors and [include] it in our collection that could be used for future exhibits,” Wu said. “Some of my favorite objects ranged from a 150-year-old cookie to a buffalo’s bladder from a Native American reservation that was donated.”

Wu’s friends are extremely supportive and motivated by her hard work and dedication. Senior Bibi Schindler believes that the job at the museum fits Wu

extraordinarily well because it applies to her interests.

“[Wu] loves history,” Schindler said. “She went to the Inauguration and the Women’s March [on Washington] because she knew she was witnessing really important historic events.”

Wu has been an integral part in producing many phenomenal exhibits at the museum. However, her favorite display is one that focuses on Route 66, one of the original U.S. highways that passed through St. Louis.

“[Route 66] touches many themes and issues that people encountered when traveling on the route such as themes of family, isolation, traveling, gender roles, racial issues and achieving the American dream,” Wu said. “The exhibit is a prime example of how you can look at history through varying experiences of people who traveled on the highway. Everyone had his or her own experience, and that’s what made the exhibit so special.” •