

SCLS Graduate Testimonials, 2005-2013

2013 Graduates

Dawn (BA Art History and French) writes:

Please feel free to share my news with the current French finalists, it will be great to know that having a degree in French can change your life! [...] Je voulais vous dire que je suis inscrite au Master littérature française et francophone à l'Université Paris VIII après avoir échoué à la seconde preuve d'interprétation à l'ISIT (apparemment je n'ai pas une langue maternelle). Je pense toujours à vous et je continue à m'inspirer des oeuvres de Sartre et de Beauvoir qui, grâce à vous, ont suscité mon enthousiasme. Je suis actuellement en train de rédiger un mémoire dirigé par François Noudelmann sur la littérature franco-vietnamienne, sur les écritures migrantes féminines, et c'est avec une approche postcoloniale, d'inspiration philosophique (existentialiste, de genre(!), poststructuraliste), que j'analyse les textes. Le titre: "L'impossible réconciliation des identités ou la transcendance des binarismes: les écritures des femmes migrantes franco-vietnamiennes, Kim Lefèvre et Linda Lé.

[Dawn went on to pass "Master de littérature française et francophone" at the Université Paris VIII with an exceptional Distinction, 19/20 (95%), the highest mark the jury in question has ever awarded.]

2012 Graduates

Corinna (BA Drama and French) writes:

The MA [at King's College London] went very well in the end, I got a Distinction, which I was quite pleased with. I wrote my dissertation on the status of the body in Samuel Beckett's theatre, using Merleau-Ponty's theory of incarnate subjectivity as a theoretical framework ... hoping to explore the connections between the work of these two writers (both historical and theoretical) further in a PhD.

2011 Graduates

Rebecca (BA French) writes:

I went on my year abroad to study at the Sorbonne in Paris and I can say without doubt that it was the best year of my life so far. At the end of the academic year, I found an internship so I could stay in Paris until the end of the summer, as I was so reluctant to leave. I also went back to Paris the summer after my Finals to spend six weeks improving my French and catching up with the friends I'd made while on my year abroad.

The year abroad has had a huge impact on the rest of my life. Not only did my French greatly improve and I learnt a lot about another culture, but I fell in love with a city I intend to make my home. I plan to move back to Paris either to work or study after my Masters. The taste of living life in another country and speaking another language every day became addictive. I would never have imagined I wanted to move abroad had I had not the experience of the year abroad during my degree.

I am now at Oxford reading for a Masters in Modern Languages and I feel the language skills and in-depth knowledge of French culture and literature I built up during my time at the university and by living in Paris greatly benefited my application for postgraduate study at Oxford.

Courses I took on literature, theatre and translation while at university in Paris gave me the basis of knowledge for other modules I went on to study in my final year at Sussex and now in my first year at Oxford. The experience of being caught on a daily basis between two languages led me to develop an interest in the difficulties of translation which I then explored in my undergraduate dissertation.

I will spend two years at Oxford (a two-year Masters) before either continuing in academia (a DPhil at Oxford or at the Sorbonne) or moving back to Paris to find a full-time job. I am having a wonderful time in Oxford but nonetheless miss Paris and speaking a foreign language every day. I think the positive experience of a year abroad stays with you; it's surprising how much of an impact a year can have on a lifetime.

It's also wonderful to meet other young Europeans and surprise them with the fact that I'm an English person who speaks another language; as Britain continues to live up to its reputation of being shamefully monolingual, Europeans never expect that an English person will be able to speak their language. I think the year abroad is an essential part of a degree because it allows young people to learn another language, adapt to a foreign culture, and thus renders British students able to compete with their cosmopolitan European counterparts.

Should I have decided to stay in the UK to work, I feel my language skills would also have been a great advantage, as foreign language skills is one of the most desired and rarest qualities in young graduates. Finally, having to express yourself in a language which is not your own, navigate your way around an unfamiliar city and build relationships with people of another culture greatly builds confidence, which is hugely beneficial in all areas of life.

Zoe (BA French and Linguistics) writes:

In my third year of university, I spent nine months in Rennes, France working as an English Language Assistant in a sixth form college, as part of the British Council assistantship scheme. I cannot stress enough how important and valuable my time abroad was in terms of both professional and personal development.

Firstly, the year abroad is an absolutely essential aspect of learning a modern foreign language; without living in the foreign country for a while and totally immersing oneself in the language, it is just about impossible to achieve real fluency. However thorough the teaching at university, and however many hours one devotes to reading books, watching films and listening to the radio in the target language, there simply is no substitute for living among native speakers. It is how we are hard-wired to learn language – we learn our mother tongue through immersion, not grammar textbooks – and so it is no surprise that it is the most efficient way to develop our language skills and perhaps even reach near-native standards.

By the end of my second year at university, my written French was good but my ability in spoken French lagged far behind. This is to be expected, since most universities prioritise written accuracy and grammar over oral skills during contact hours – partly due to tradition, perhaps, but also because they recognise that students' spoken language skills will improve astronomically during their year abroad. Like many of my peers, I spent the first few months on my placement feeling exhausted from the sheer effort of having to follow conversations, and frustrated at not being able to express myself adequately. But what a learning curve! Soon, I found that I could join in my colleagues' conversations with ease and that I no longer had to formulate each sentence carefully in my head before I even opened my mouth.

By the end of my year abroad, I was fluent in the student slang of my housemates, confident in deciphering the school principal's wordy, overly formal speeches delivered in a monotonous mumble, and had even picked up a trace of a Breton accent, much to the amusement of my friends. No matter how hard I worked at university, there is no doubt that I could not have achieved this level of spoken French without having spent this time abroad.

Finally, the year abroad has been an immense help to my career. I am currently on placement in a British high school as part of a PGCE in French and German, and I believe I owe my place on the course at least in part to my experience in teaching that I gained in France. Not only that, but this experience has been invaluable to me: a bank of resources for teaching languages, which I developed during that time, and prior knowledge of how to plan lessons has made this year far less stressful for me than it otherwise could have been. Furthermore, my language ability helps me so much in teaching, not only in having a wider vocabulary, including more recent slang, but also in having the confidence to teach in the target language without having to think too hard about what I want to say. The benefit is evident when compared with my second language, German, in which I am much weaker because I have not lived in the country. And lastly, living alone in a foreign country and having to find my own accommodation as well as make friends has taught me a number of other skills which will help me in my career: independence, resilience, determination and the ability to laugh at and learn from my own mistakes. And I don't know of any teacher who could survive without a healthy dose of those.

2010 Graduates

Alice (BA English and French) writes:

In the month after my final exams at Sussex, I became qualified as a TEFL teacher: a training experience that was made a lot easier by the understanding of language that I gained through studying French. Over the summer of 2010, I lived and worked in France, where my French skills meant that I was able to help run a horse riding centre and work with the French children from underprivileged backgrounds who were able to enjoy holidays there. I then moved to Prague, where my knowledge of two languages meant that I was far more employable than those who spoke English alone, and where I was comfortable setting myself up due to my prior experience of living independently abroad during my third year of studying French. On returning to England, I got a month-long internship at the London office of *Time Out* guidebooks and magazines, largely on the strength of the internship that I completed at an art magazine while on my year abroad in Paris. While there, my knowledge of French meant that I was able to help put together guidebooks for Paris and Marrakech,

far more interesting and specialised work than the organisational duties usually reserved for interns! I am now working as an Editor in a company producing children's and students' books for clients such as Cambridge University Press and Bloomsbury, where my first sole project has been an International Baccalaureate textbook on the Algerian War: without my prior knowledge of the subject, studied as part of my French degree, I don't feel that I would have been afforded this opportunity so soon.

Christine (BA Anthropology and Spanish) writes:

Since graduating in July 2010 I've been working as an English Language Assistant in Badajoz, a city in the region of Extremadura in south-west Spain. Studying Spanish at Sussex gave me the language skills to live and work in Spain and since October 2010 I have been working with the students in the English department of the Official Language School, helping with conversation, pronunciation and giving classes about British culture (and learning a lot about Spanish society myself!). I applied through the British Council and will be working here until June [2011]. After this, I hope to work in England and am currently looking for a job in which I can use my Spanish, possibly within the charity sector or in a similar area.

Emily (BA French and Spanish) writes:

In September [2010] I came back to Granada (where I spent my Erasmus year) with my best friend, a Sussex English graduate. He has started to learn Spanish out here. We have set up our own English 'school' [...]. We started from scratch and found students by ourselves through advertising etc. I have students of all ages (from 4 years to 65) and am thoroughly enjoying it. Everyday is different. It is satisfying preparing students for exams and seeing them improve (as I am sure you know Aaron). In July I will be moving to Madrid to either continue teaching or try something totally new! I feel that languages was a perfect course for me but that the possibilities are endless!

Imogen (BA History and Spanish) writes:

After finishing [my degree], I did some exam invigilation work before doing a month-long Trinity TESOL course for teaching English. Then, I completed a three-month volunteering research placement at the Imperial War Museum London, as part of their overhaul of their First World War galleries. I have been travelling in South East Asia since mid-January [2011] and am due to start an English teaching job at a summer school in Hanoi at the end of May [2011], which will last until the end of July. After, that I should have the possibility to sign up for a long-term contract with the school in Hanoi, though I am quite keen to work for a while in a Spanish-speaking county, so I am thinking of looking for English teaching jobs in Spain or Latin America. I don't have any plans as yet for further study; however, I would certainly like to do a Masters, ideally specialising in Latin American history, or at least combining the two parts of my BA in some way, and I have been thinking about looking into courses for the year after next.

Olivia (BA Art History and Spanish) writes:

Over the summer [following graduation], I managed to complete two fantastic internships working for the Contemporary Arts Society in London and then at Vice Magazine in Barcelona. It was especially rewarding to put my language skills into practice within a real working environment at Vice. During my time in Spain, I helped with the inauguration of Barcelona Fashion Week and managed the national distribution of the magazine. By October I had found a job back in London working for an arts based publishing company making books for Thames & Hudson. As the Publisher's Assistant, one of my main tasks is to oversee the reprint sales of our backlist titles. This involves liaising daily with the Foreign Language department which, again, demands use of my Spanish language. I love the job and am very happy that it makes use of both my Sussex University majors.

Ruth (BA Italian and Spanish) writes:

Before starting the course [at Sussex], I had no idea how my degree would serve me and there was a long-term, prominent feeling of denial which stopped me considering future career options! Nevertheless, the final term of the final year rolled along – after what felt like five minutes! – and I decided to apply for a PGCE course at Sussex [...]. A successful application led to the most intense year of my life in terms of workload and time management, but also the most rewarding and beneficial. Certainly, it was a shock to the system 'playing teacher' – a shock or a metaphorical shoulder shake – after four years of undergraduate bliss in which responsibility was a word which had never seemed to apply to my life in real terms. How the tables have turned! I have just got my first teaching post which I start at the end of June [2011]. Thanks to my dual languages degree and PGCE I will be teaching Spanish and French up to A-level in a forward-thinking secondary

school in Crawley. A final word: if you ever hear someone use the phrase, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach", give them a good shake from me.

Sheida (BA Development Studies with Spanish) writes:

After having spent a year in Bilbao, studying at the Universidad de Deusto during my third year (ERASMUS year), I decided that Bilbao was the place for me to go back to. So at the end of June 2010, I moved to Bilbao. Since then I've been collaborating as a volunteer with a few NGOs in the Basque Country, and that led onto one of these NGOs (SETEM Hego Haizea) offering me research on the conditions of Guatemalan workers in maquiladora factories, which I am currently [2011] working on, as well as a few opportunities to [give] workshops with other NGOs on "fair trade" and "Women in Islam: the case of Iran", in the Basque area. Next year I'm hoping to study a Masters in Research on "Globalisation and Development" at the HEGOA Institute in Bilbao and to widen my scope of knowledge by either continuing this part of my life in Bilbao, or possibly working in Central or South America and /or the Middle East. I thoroughly enjoyed my degree at Sussex, as well as my year abroad, and I'm 100% convinced that my life would be very different now if I hadn't chosen to study there. The atmosphere was inspiring, the teaching fantastic and in general the people I've met over the course of those 3 years have made me very happy to have been of part of it.

Victor (BA French and Spanish) writes:

[After graduation] I worked in a French cafe in central London whilst I had various interviews and applied for jobs. Finally, after a few very hard months and with no weekends off, I got a call back for a second stage interview process at RWS Group, which is the biggest translation company in England and one of the leading companies in the world. It specialises in patent translation, medical, mechanical and legal documents. My role specifically at the moment is as a Translation Co-ordinator / Project Manager. In other words, I am using my Spanish and French language skills and I am the direct contact between the corporate clients, the translators and the lawyers. I have to constantly use my languages to read through the patent documents and organize the appropriate in-house translators to do the job within the deadline. Having studied Languages at Sussex, [I can say] the course gave me a great insight into the appropriate skills needed to work in the translation industry.

2009 Graduates

Caroline (BA French and Spanish) writes :

I can safely say that I thoroughly enjoyed [...] the course [...] every aspect of language learning was covered by the course. Not only are students offered in-depth modules on history, culture and literature, but there is also a strong focus on essential written and oral language skills. Unlike the vast majority of undergraduate courses at other universities, Sussex even delves into translation and interpreting, which opens up a whole new world of career possibilities to students. In short, not only does the course enrich students on a personal and cultural level, but it also provides practical aspects of the languages that can carry us into the 'real world' as successful linguists.

The standard and quality of teaching at Sussex are also truly exceptional. The teachers are dedicated, and incredibly passionate about their work, and this shows through their enthusiastic teaching styles, and the effort they put into lectures and seminars. They make the course content diverse, interesting and relevant. They opened my eyes to new ways of thinking and of viewing different cultures, and of course, my language abilities improved vastly as a result. [...] I am currently [2010] doing an MSc at Imperial College [London], and none of my course-mates have had such a positive experience in their undergraduate language degrees (even Cambridge graduates are impressed when I talk about my course content at Sussex, particularly the translation and interpreting module). I would highly recommend studying foreign languages at Sussex [...] a programme that is producing excellent linguists and cultured, well-educated people. [...]

Kasia (BA German and Spanish) writes:

The linguistic knowledge acquired over the course of Modern Languages degree at the University of Sussex has greatly contributed to my academic and professional success to date. In addition to substantially improving my language skills, this course has made me aware of the different mentalities of people and thus has allowed me to nurture a rich understanding of diverse cultures. I have also developed the ability to think critically, analytically and to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds. As part of my study programme, I spent a year studying in Spain and an extra term in Germany. Through living [abroad] and studying languages I have fostered the ability to acclimatise to various environments, familiarising myself with

norms and conventions different from my own. Such experience has built up a set of skills which will prove indispensable while working in an international environment. After graduating, I was accepted by SOAS, LSE and University of Edinburgh for postgraduate courses, but I have chosen to enrol on a "Master" course in Advanced European and International Studies at l'Institut Européen des Hautes Études Internationales (IEHEI), a trilingual programme in Nice, Berlin and Rome.

After my graduation I got an internship at Amnesty International Poland, the External Relations Department at the Permanent Representation of Poland to the European Union, and won an open competition from the Polish Ministry of Education to be Youth Delegate to the Future EU Cooperation in the Youth Field panel during the Swedish EU Presidency. Currently I am employed as a Foreign Affairs Specialist in the Cabinet of the Governor of Lower Silesia. I am responsible for the organisation and coordination of diplomatic visits to the Governor and liaison with contacts abroad. I also assist [with] preparation of Poland's EU Presidency in 2011. I often interpret during public appearances and meetings with foreign guests, a skill practised intensively during my course at Sussex.

2008 Graduates

Jane (BA ELT and Spanish) writes:

On completion of my degree in ELT and Spanish at Sussex University, I moved to Italy to work as an English Language teacher and take on the challenge of learning a new language. After three years working in a private language school, not only teaching but also working on curriculum design, placements tests, end-of-year assessments as well as recruitment and training of new staff, I now work in the tourist industry on a seasonal basis whilst studying part-time towards a Masters in Translation Studies [distance learning with Bristol University]. My time studying at Sussex provided me with theoretical knowledge, awareness and skills related to languages and language-learning which, together with the practical experience gained during my degree, have opened many windows of opportunity in both my professional and personal life.

Luke (BA History and French) writes:

Since [graduation], the different paths I have taken, whether they be work, study or life in general, have been greatly influenced by the experience I had as an undergraduate Modern Languages student. This experience, in the ideas and cultures that I was introduced to on an academic level, was a key factor in the time I have spent as an English language teacher in London and in the south of Spain. [It also lay] behind my decision to pursue an MA in European Thought at UCL. My undergraduate degree was also the period where my interest in the arts was stimulated and developed through the literature and criticism I studied as part of my course. In my view, nothing beats being able to read a text or watch a piece of theatre or film in its original language. I really think it allows you to gain a different perspective and a deeper understanding of the work. I continue to be involved with, and take an interest in, arts projects in London and beyond and a great deal of this interest was initiated through my French degree.

Learning a language is like cracking a code that opens doors to a whole range of opportunities, experiences and encounters. It is a rewarding and enriching enterprise that is vital to a stronger awareness and appreciation of other cultures. I feel extremely lucky to have had these doors opened to me [...].

2005 Graduate

Adriana (BA Anthropology and Italian) writes:

After graduating [...], I went on to do an MA at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, Austria, which brought me to my first internships at the United Nations (HIV unit, UNODC) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis in Geneva. During my Masters I also volunteered at a local Viennese radio station in the Africa department to report on daily news. My first UN internship combined with my MA Thesis on public health matters brought me to my first job as "consultant" in the HIV unit of UNODC. I then went on to be a volunteer at IOM (HIV unit), in South Africa to gain field experience. Consultancy and volunteer work being unsteady types of contract, I had to fall back onto my language skills when I went back to Vienna and did both free-lance translation for University of Geneva-based professors and language tutoring for French and English, including in an Austrian bank. After this break from the UN, I re-entered UNODC as a consultant in Drug Prevention, after which I landed my current [2011] job as External Relations Officer at UNAIDS in Geneva.

