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**FEATURES**

## Two Semesters is Better than One

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I was thinking about finishing this semester with a summary of my year abroad but decided against it, for two reasons. One - who cares? I wouldn't want to hear other people going on about how much more enriched their lives are after a year in some weird country. Who needs that? Two - it's kind of redundant to sum up, anyway. When studying abroad, you re-evaluate your situation daily, wondering if you're happy, if you're making the most of your time, if McDonald's is still open and whether or not you made the right decision. The experience is a work in progress, and repeating these thoughts seems unnecessary.

Instead, I thought I'd address a question concerning students considering studying abroad. They must decide whether they want to stay for one semester or for the whole year (unless they are pre-med, since they are warned that if they leave the country, they will be banished from the medical field forever.)

I found myself in the same scenario (minus the pre-med situation), sitting with my parents in the study-abroad office about a year and a half ago. After we found that I had the option of three months versus seven, my mind was flooded with concerns. What if I missed my family too much to go the whole year? What if my Italian was an utter joke? (Unfortunately, a prospect too real to be ignored.) What if my junior year was to be the most fun year at Georgetown in recent history, and I missed it? My dad elbowed me and said, "What, are you kidding? It's Italy. Why only have one semester when you can have two?" And so there it was.

I'm not going to lie and say that if you can do one semester, two is a piece of cake. Can you even handle one semester? I wasn't sure myself, and there were periods towards the end of last semester where I thought, "I cannot do this a second time." So, some caveats about doing double-duty:

Firstly, missing your friends and family does not get easier. If you were one of those kids who always cried at sleepover parties and had to have your parents come take you home by 9 p.m., maybe a whole year away from your loved ones isn't for you. You can get used to it, but sometimes there are those occasions (such as when you're sick from a jaunt to the Middle East and can only stomach lukewarm tea, because any other temperature is just unacceptable) when you just want your mom.

Secondly, an entire year in one locale might be too much for your patience. Villa Le Balze is a beautiful, amazing place, but it also has rules, regulations and routines. Living within them can be taxing, to say the least. Anywhere, I think, can be like that. Whatever you may face first semester can be new and exciting. but you may be thinking to yourself later. "Oh. great. another

croissant," or, "If one more scooter tries to cut me off, I'm going to clothesline them." Okay, it can be enough to make you think violent thoughts sometimes, too.

Finally when you stick around for a year relationships can get funny. Even if you're abroad for just one semester, you quickly realize that some friends from home just aren't the pen pals you thought they were. You wonder, towards the end of the semester, if your group is going to remain as close when you are all back on campus.

Two semesters, though, is even stranger. Do you know the saying about hindsight being 20/20? It's the opposite, second semester abroad. All of a sudden, you can't figure out how you ever got along with some of the people you did, or why you had such a short temper with somebody else (basically, you figure that there must have been something in the water). The details become blurred. In retrospect, it is striking and a little disturbing how strange a scenario it is to become so close with a group so quickly, only to separate so soon.

On the flip side, though, for second semester, foresight becomes pretty clear. In January, returning to the Villa, I took one look at all these new weirdos, and wondered if I could really get to be as close to them as I did with those last semester. But I also knew, deep down, that within a few short months, we would also be sharing stupid inside jokes, not to mention Nutella, deep-seated insecurities and respect for each other. It's kind of cool to know that, deep down, you're more mature than you'd like to admit.

Also, once you have figured out your foreign city, there are ways to take advantage of it. You're not afraid to go off on your own and explore your town or country. Even better, already being familiar with the situation, you can travel internationally like a rock star. I went to Switzerland this semester the same weekend that last semester I was trying to remember how many bus lines it take to go to Fiesole (Answer: one.)

As for missing your loved ones ... well, it sucks. It's not as if after one semester, you can become jaded and think, "Well, who ever needed anybody in the first place? I am a rock; I am an island," or something like that. But you can prove to yourself that you are a big kid, who can at least make some effort at being independent. And, after a while, you appreciate your parents more and your friends too (especially when they send you lots of mail, or, better yet, completely tasteless email forwards).

Although this is all based on rumor, I hear that while they are no fun from the loneliness standpoint, long-distance relationships can work out okay, if only for the sake of the big, sappy reunions.

In short, a full year at Villa le Balze made me an adult, made me appreciate all walks of life and cultures, helped me quit smoking, raise my energy level, lose ten pounds, find a new job (after being unemployed or under-employed) and finally get the monkey off my back!

No, wait, that's not entirely true: I will never be an adult. I will say that, was I offered the option at this moment of taking a third semester here, I don't think that I would take it. But two semesters was a good deal. I don't think that a single semester is so shabby, either. I've gotten to know people who have only been here for one and others who have been here for two, and I've had a great time with all of them.