This past summer (2009) I was awarded the Honors Enrichment Award. I put the awarded money towards my study abroad experience in Europe. The trip was organized through Colorado State University’s landscape architecture program. The trip was lead by Professor Brad Goetz. The group consisted of seventeen landscape architecture students, Professor Goetz, and a CSU landscape architecture alumni now practicing in Denver. We spent two weeks traveling and studying the landscape architecture of Italy and France.

We started out the trip in Italy, meeting in Venice. The first week was spent travelling around Italy. We saw Villa D’Este, Florence, and spent a day in Rome to mention only a few places we visited. It was amazing to experience the old villas and gardens of Italy as well as walking the streets of Rome. I had learned about all of these places freshmen year, but seeing them completely changed my understanding and appreciation for each place. Many of the landscape principles and design styles that are used today in the field can be found in some of the oldest gardens in Italy.

Being a visual learner it was a great experience for me to be able to walk through the landscapes and take in all the small details of the gardens, villas, and cities. Before we left Italy we spent the last night up in this little medieval hill town in Tuscany. It is perched on the top of a hill and there is a long pedestrian bridge leading up into the town. There is a little restaurant that overlooks the town. We ate dinner and watch the sun set over the brick buildings and got to see the little town glow with small lamps.

From Italy we traveled up to France, where we spent the second week. We spent our time traveling around the chateaus’ and seeing Versailles near Paris. We also spent a day at Normandy, walking Omaha beach and seeing the memorial to all the fallen heroes of WWII. It was powerful beyond words to walk the beach were so many soldiers gave their lives for freedom. That night we drove to Mont Saint Michel, which is a monastery on an island. It is surrounded by a little medieval town and the ocean’s tides come in and surround. We were there at low tide so we got to walk out onto the sand and see the sunlight setting over the old brick walls. It was another amazing experience to see how a monastery has survived and remained unchanged while the rest of the country is constantly changing with time.
I really enjoyed seeing all the history of France through the gardens and architecture. We also spent two days in Paris visiting the newer modern gardens. It was interesting to see the differences between the historical, traditional landscapes next to the modern parks. Some of my favorite landscapes that we visited were the parks in Paris. Parc Andre Citrone utilized some of the traditional garden expressions while creating a modern park. My friends and I spent a whole afternoon walking through the park and enjoying the sunshine. It was the middle of the week but there was a wide range of people using the park. It was nice to see such an amazing modern park being used everyday by the local community.

This trip expanded my understanding of landscape architecture, as well as, my exploration of other cultures. Seeing the ancient ruins of Rome then traveling to Paris and seeing the Eiffel Tower was a once in a lifetime experience for me. My experiences of traveling in other countries and learning about other cultures will help me better understand the people around me and appreciate the differences of people and cultures within my own community. I know that having seen some of the most famous landscape in Europe will help me be a better and more rounded landscape architect. I am excited to see how these experiences will influence my landscape architecture projects this year in school!

Below are a few pictures from my travels throughout Italy and France.

Venice’s Grand Canal
Our group at Bomarzo gardens in Italy.

Me standing in the upper level of the Roman Forum with the Coliseum in the background!
Omaha Beach in Normandy, France

Versailles gardens in France
The Eiffel Tower during the light show