

Summer 2 Blog - LIA showcase

The end of my third college year was probably the most nervous I have ever felt for the summer break. I had been planning this Leadership in Action project for over a year but it hadn't really sunk in until a few weeks before I jetted off for mainland Europe. I had spent hours emailing back and forth with the director of the EU project MOF4AIR, 'Metal Organic Frameworks for carbon dioxide Adsorption processes in power production and energy Intensive industries', discussing what I would be doing with the project and how I would work with the team once I got to UMONs which was acting as headquarters for the project. Despite all this planning and various zoom meetings determining the aims and objectives of my LIA project, my plan went out the window nearly as soon as I arrived.

The main issue encountered resulted from totally unpredictable circumstances of the war in Ukraine coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic and the ever inconvenient Brexit. This cocktail of world events caused major delays in the shipping and production of both mechanical and chemical products meaning the MOF4AIR project timeline was disrupted and it was months behind the stage that was accounted for in my LIA proposal. I was meant to be providing a chemistry perspective to the optimisation of the testing of the carbon capture abilities of certain materials using a multifaceted testing apparatus. Unfortunately the delays meant that the testing apparatus was still only in its construction phase, so that was a fun surprise I was greeted with on my first day with the project. I had to reevaluate the weekly objectives of my project but my overall aim to assist with this primarily engineering project using my unique chemistry knowledge remained the same.

Another issue I encountered during the course of this project was the language barrier. This of course was something that I had anticipated and so I had been religiously keeping my Duolingo streak for months in advance and also took a French elective for my second semester. As it turned out I put far too much faith in my Leaving Cert French level and realised pretty quickly that my French was not up to scratch for living independently in a small French speaking city in the south of Belgium. One of the skills I perfected over the 6 week project was the art of miming different grocery items. It took some time to get used to but I managed to locate shops that I knew the cashiers had some English and even from everyday immersion in the language my French improved greatly. I am nowhere near the delusional confidence level I had prior to this summer but I have definitely gained confidence in my communication skills both verbal and physical.

This project has undoubtedly been an amazing experience for me not only from a leadership perspective but also from a personal growth perspective. I got to witness first hand the leadership skills required to coordinate a multinational research project that is making real world changes by making the air cleaner and reducing global warming. I learned how different leadership styles are required in order to accomplish particular goals within a group. I also gained a huge amount of independence and self confidence from having to adapt my plan and navigating living alone in a foreign country.