Nichols snapped this photo in Old Town Antibes, France, while on exchange at SKEMA Business School’s Sophia Antipolis campus. The Provençal sign is a play on words: NAPOLEON never slept in this hotel, but BONA PARTE (a good number) of people have.

Napoleon Never Slept in This Hotel
by Alexis Nichols, fourth-year BCom

When I first started university with a basketball scholarship in Bellingham, Washington, I never considered travelling, studying or working abroad. Fast forward two years, however, and the business school at UVic and a spot on the varsity basketball team drew me to Canada. Although I hadn’t anticipated it, this taste of international life turned out to be the start of something special to me.

After graduating from the BCom program, I was fortunate enough to land a job with the UVic Vikes athletics and recreation department that truly piqued my interest. My task was simple: get students more interested in our activities. As an ex-varsity basketball player, I knew the value of having big crowds of fellow students supporting our teams at home games. To make this a reality for our campus, I took my value co-creation learnings from BCom classes and launched focus groups to gather ideas. After many conversations with students, collecting feedback and brainstorming about the issue, Vikes Nation was born. The students not only helped create it, but also made it come alive. Vikes staff collaborated with a large group of student volunteers whose mission was to create an active, inclusive athletics community on campus.

Their energy fostered a building passion throughout the school as Vikes Nation gave UVic students a brand to showcase their passion for the university. Nearly every other weekend throughout the school year, Vikes Nation events brought together both students and staff. These events were built to be fun for everyone and engage the campus in unique ways. They ranged from the whimsical — like the student-created Yoga Rave, which was an instant hit and became a marquee Vikes Nation event — to the classic: big varsity events such as the ThunderFest soccer game. At this event, nearly 3,000 UVic students packed the stands for the home-opening games during the first week of school. Spirit on campus was at an all-time high. Professors were wearing Vikes Nation Game Day shirts, students were using #vikesnation on social media and student engagement at Vikes events and activities took off.

For five years, the momentum continued to build. I loved helping foster the passion that lived within UVic. However, it was time for me to grow again.

I heard about the Master of Global Business (MGB) program offered through Gustavson and chose a path which covered Victoria, the Netherlands and Peru. I met some of the most amazing people in the program and travelled nearly every weekend while studying in these countries. Similar to my first foray into Canada, my eyes were opened to new cultures and experiences. Combining what I learned in MGB classes with my UVic work experience, I landed an internship at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, where it was again my task to increase student engagement, this time for basketball games. Students rallied around the “6th Man” platform and student attendance saw a massive increase from the previous year. The Stanford campus was rocking!

These experiences in community-building have helped shape who I am, led me to meet amazing people and molded my career. Travelling has also helped me understand my own values as a person. I recently started a new job at the non-profit Sport for Life in Victoria, an organization that aims to support happy, healthy lives across Canada and globally through quality sport development. I am excited about the possibilities of bringing communities together across the world in new ways, and I truly thank the Gustavson School of Business for paving this international road for me and so many others.