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I spent the past six months in Kautokeino, Norway studying North Sámi language and culture at the Sámi University College. Over the course of these months, I was enrolled in a semester course in North Sámi designed to improve students' language competency to the point where they can take North Sámi language medium courses in other subjects. At the end of the semester, my skills in North Sámi had improved substantially, I scored highly on both the oral and written final exams, and I felt I would have been able to continue on to North Sámi medium courses. My written North Sámi skills improved faster and to a greater degree than my spoken skills, but I noticed a marked improvement in both.

My understanding of Sámi culture also improved over the course of the semester. Due to the help of the Mellon Fellowship, I was able to take part in some cultural events farther away from Kautokeino. I visited a film festival in Inari, Finland, and visited both the Sámi Parliament of Norway in Karasjok, and the Sámi Parliament of Finland in Inari. Aside from this, I visited Hetta, in Finland, and Ávži, in Norway, two small towns with Sámi populations.

In Kautokeino itself, I got to see the Kautokeino residents celebrate the Norwegian national day on the 17th of May, I supported Sámi contestants in the Finnish and Swedish Eurovision song contests with my fellow students, ate traditional Sámi meals with several groups of friends, visited museums and exhibitions, had coffee with the student association, and spent many days studying with fellow Sámi speaking students, some of whom were Sámi themselves and some of whom had learned the language for various other reasons. I also had the opportunity to visit a reindeer herding camp out on the tundra, and to hear a joik artist perform and tell folktales. All of these activities helped me better understand traditional Sámi culture as well as daily life, and the support of the Mellon Fellowship made me freer to participate in these activities.

My cultural knowledge also improved through the class I took on Sámi language, as the class used both linguistics and literature to help us acquire the language. In our discussions of Sámi literature, we naturally discussed culture as well, and the professor and fellow students helped me learn more about the place I was living in and the people whose language I was studying. Furthermore, the literature section of the course piqued my interest in Sámi literature generally, and gave me the tools to analyze it on my own, so that I can continue to learn more about Sámi culture through literature, even now that I have returned to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The literature and linguistics sections of this class will continue to inform my research as I prepare to write my master's thesis this coming year. I am considering writing this thesis about Kirste Paltto, one of the Sámi authors I studied this past semester.

The time I spent in Kautokeino was invaluable to me and my conception of the Sámi homeland has changed in ways that only living there can encourage it to do. The Mellon Fellowship has helped make this experience possible.