

NOV 16 2010

1. Arrival and on-site orientation

I recommend arriving at the time and date recommended by the coordinators in Montpellier. When I arrived by train in Montpellier, two student helpers were there to pick me up and take me to the temporary dormitory housing for the pre-session (pre-stage). If you decide to arrive earlier than the meeting date in Montpellier, there is a youth hostel on the Rue des Ecoles Laiques.

Our year had a welcome program for the American exchange students where we met the international programs staff (from the Service des Relations Internationales, I'll call it SRI from now on), the president of the University, and the president of the SRI. On the first day we had a language assessment that placed us in an intensive review course that covered grammar, French methodology, and general information about the region. Throughout the pre-session, the office of programs of the English-speaking world held meetings regarding registering for classes, finding time schedules and locations of classes, enrolling in the University, your residency permit, and health insurance. The coordinators in this office are wonderful, but keep in mind that they are managing a large number of anglophone study abroad students, each with their own specificities and needs. Be prepared to take on a lot of administrative steps on your own, and take it as a learning experience.

2. Academics

I had an overall positive experience academically at the University. What is key is to go into the experience with your mind open and be as adaptable as possible. In general, methodology is stressed in your writing and oral presentations, so make sure that you understand what your professor is expecting from you. That being said, the format of the courses that I took differed according to the professor. Classes meet less often and have less student interaction than classes at the UW. Often, the only dialogue that I had with the professor or with the class was in the form of a (very) formal oral presentation, a paper, or in-class written exam. Lectures are exactly that, lectures. You may have a professor that reads directly from his/her notes, and your French classmates will write down their every word.

What I recommend the most is that you make sure that you understand the nature of the assignment that you are expected to complete for your courses. Some teaching staff are more approachable than others in giving clear directions about the methodology that you are expected to employ to complete your assignment.

Some professors that I recommend: Berriot-Salvadore, Chabrier, and Pascal, as they were very receptive

to the needs of american students (ie. they explained in detail what they mean by a dissertation, commentaire composé, or an oral presentation).

Some courses had a syllabus at the beginning of the semester, and others just had a 4 page bibliography. For one course in particular, we didn't have a coherent theme until the last four weeks of semester, and 15 days before the due date, we received a prompt and were expected to produce a 15 page paper single spaced and hand written. I would advise to take all of your assignments as learning processes. You will work in different ways than you are accustomed to, and it is a great thing to know how to meet expectations in an unfamiliar context.

My coursework fit in quite well with my UW major, as I will graduate with a degree in French studies. The lettres modernes department offered more courses per semester than the French department at the UW, so it allowed me to explore several periods at once. I also received I&S credit for a history course I took, and even had a chance to take an introductory German course.

3. Housing

I was very lucky to have my on site coordinator inform me of the possibility of living in a private home. I had an apartment-like situation where I didn't have to sign a lease but reached an agreement with my landlord. I shared a kitchenette and bathroom with other tenants, when other rooms were let out, but had my own entrance, so it was the best of both worlds: living with a French couple, but having my own privacy.

I would recommend any situation like this, as I found my landlords to be an indispensable resource. They clarified any questions that I had about administrative steps in France (Particularly applying for the CAF, government housing subsidy). The downside is that living in a private apartment, or renting a room can be considerably more expensive than a dormitory, and it is more complicated to apply for the CAF (it is not always possible to receive it). When I went to France, my coordinator at the IPE assured me that I would receive the CAF before Christmas, and that the high cost of my housing would be cut in half by this government subsidy. This was not true, and I would not advise anyone to go into a living situation in France thinking that they will receive the CAF right away. The best thing would be to budget for paying the entirety of your rent for the length of your stay, and to consider the CAF to be financial help that you may or may not get after you have been living in France for a while. The rules for the CAF are not clear, and foreigners may only qualify if they have had their residency validated by the OFFII. The rules seem to change often, so make sure that you go to the CAF office and find out for yourself. For one thing, I think that only full academic year students qualify for the CAF, and only certain housing situations.

The dormitories are considerably cheaper, and receiving the CAF is much simpler. You could get lucky and meet a lot of people this way. The rooms are tiny, though, and most of the dormitories are out of town, isolated, or don't have a market nearby. Upside: you get a private bathroom and shower.

Downside: shared kitchen, and internet doesn't always work.

The most ideal housing situation is to find a "colocation," as 3 and 4 bedroom apartments rent for less per room than a studio or a homestay. This is more difficult to arrange from abroad, but I know people who arrived in Montpellier without any housing situation, and while it was stressful to not have a place for up to a month, they eventually found something that was suitable for their budgets. It just depends on how comfortable you are with arriving in a foreign country without having a place to land.

4. The Campus

The campus is far less comfortable than UW's, there are fewer facilities, and it shows that the university is almost entirely subsidized by the state. The campus has WIFI, two cafes, and a cafeteria that is great, since a meal only costs 2.90 euros. You can find two copy shops outside of the campus, which is where I did all of my printing, as more often than not, the computer lab was out of service. The library is your best bet for studying, especially the newer annexe.

5. Health/Safety

I wouldn't recommend walking by yourself at night, but I did and it was fine. I lived in Gambetta, a bustling neighborhood, so I felt fine about walking by myself since there were other people out and about. Be smart, but on the other hand, you can rest assured that predators are less likely to have handguns, unlike our wonderful University District.

Health facilities were fine. I had a friend go to the hospital twice in November, and while the paperwork was a nightmare, he was treated. The patient care was a bit less personal than in the US, but again, that is a service that we pay for. For any minor medical problems, just go to the pharmacy and describe your symptoms. Maybe take a dictionary along with you.

6. Social Component

a. I met people during the pre-session, mostly other international students. Class is not as social as in the US, and I met few French students that way. Get involved in what you love, and then you can meet people that way. I used to go to a bar near my apartment that had live music Sunday nights. Get into a routine, and find your familiar places, it's a great way to meet people.

b. I got many funny reactions when French students realized that I was American. French and International students alike wondered, "but, why do you speak French?" Take criticism and generalizations of your country/ culture with a grain of salt. It's your chance to change misconceptions, and to consider other points of view.

8. Evaluation of the IPE

a. The IPE was not as helpful as I would have hoped. While my advisor was very enthusiastic about the program and about encouraging me to go abroad, most of my emails to my advisor went unanswered. When I came into the office with pointed questions, I never got straight answers. I departed for France ✓

without a final estimated budget from my advisor, which was horrible, as I had no idea about certain expenses that I was about to take on. The IPE took care of securing my place in the University, but after that, I was on my own.

b. The office of international relations SRI at the Universite de Montpellier III was incredibly helpful.. Judith Misrahi-Barak and Andree Meyers do everything to make sure that you have your papers in order, registration completed, and answer other questions that you may have. They even told us about social/ cultural events that we might be interested in. I even found a couple of tutoring positions through connections that they had.

9. Who is suited for this program?

A self-starting, independent individual with a strong background in French language is the best person for this program. Being as adaptable as possible is the only way that you can get the most out of the experience. You must be willing to take on the administrative steps associating with living in France on your own and in French. TI is the best way for you to learn the most.

10. Expectations, and my outcome

I had an overall positive experience. I am nearly fluent in French and feel like the whole experience has prepared me for taking on anything in the future. I suggest that you be realistic about your expectations, and realize that it takes time to learn French, to learn how to navigate the social scene, academics, and administrative steps. Just as I was about to leave, I felt confident about what I was doing. It is a learning process, and take it as that. When else in your life will you be able to live abroad, meet individuals from all over the world, and travel to nearby countries? An academic year abroad at the UPV is a privileged moment in your life when you can do all of this.

If you have any questions, or would like to talk about Montpellier, the University, etc. do not hesitate to contact me:

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NOV 02 2010

Year-Long Direct Exchange to the Université de Montpellier III Paul-Valéry
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I. Arrival:

- a. I arrived the day of the orientation at Montpellier. So, I stayed in the housing that was provided with the orientation. If you want to get there before the orientation, then I'm sure you can stay in the youth hostel in Montpellier, or, what I would recommend much more, you should do Couchsurfing.
- b. The three-week orientation period that marked the start of my year-long stay in Montpellier included "intensive" French courses and cultural excursions. This orientation is no sort of integration into life in Montpellier, but, I suppose, a very effective way to meet the other Americans in Montpellier, for better or for worse. So, if in this three-week period, you feel on the outskirts of society in Montpellier, I would tell you that it is normal and you should be patient.

II. Academics:

a. Comparison of instruction at the University of Montpellier III Paul-Valéry to instruction at the University of Washington: This depends if we are speaking about the instruction in the RI courses, which are only with other Americans, or if we are speaking of the regular university courses. The RI courses, I am tempted to say, are very relaxed courses and do not seem to involve much work in general (for this reason, I don't really recommend them). The size of these classes is rather small, and you know your professor quite well and he or she is very approachable (probably because it is understood that everyone participating in the class is English-speaking). The grading in these courses seemed to be much easier also, but it's important to note that the grading scale is higher for these classes when they transfer to the UW. The regular university classes are entirely different. The classes can be much bigger or much smaller, and often you can be the only foreign student in the course. Also you don't automatically have a relationship with your professor; it's up to you to establish a relationship with your professor, if that is what you would like. It's possible that your professor won't ever know your name, because professors often do not take attendance. And this is a big difference from the UW: very few professors will notice if you come to class or if you skip the class. Consequently, you really must motivate yourself to attend the courses, if you want to understand the material. In general, you must be self motivated to do well in the classes at Paul-Valéry. Unlike the UW, you often have no official work until the last week of the semester. However, you must force yourself to start studying the books and the material much further in advance, without any direction from the professor.

The administration at Paul-Valéry is also very different from that of the UW. In truth, it's rather disorganized. Often, you are told that some important document is due the next day, or that you had already missed the deadline and it's up to you usually to fix the problem. But the international relations office in Montpellier (not in Seattle) is very, very helpful, although often quite disorganized, and will always offer any help

necessary to resolve any problems that may come your way with the administration of Paul-Valéry.

Libraries and other resources are not as available as at the UW. There a small room where you can use computers, but there was no printer (you have to use one off-campus). The few libraries at the Paul-Valéry are nice, but they are only open until 7 at the latest and are always closed on the weekends and holidays. These sorts of differences can really be quite difficult for a student coming from the UW where there is a library open 24 hours.

b. Like at the UW, I think the quality and content of instruction depends on what courses you take. You can take the RI courses, in which the quality and content of the instruction, is rather easy and not so fulfilling. Or, you can take regular university classes that pertain to whatever you are studying, and they will be more difficult, but I really think you have a better chance of getting something worthwhile out of the course. I took many philosophy courses, and I found a few of them to be as challenging as the philosophy courses at the University of Washington. That is to say, I wasn't only improving my French in the courses, but I was also exploring a subject that interested me. However, the quality of instruction can also be quite low, but I think it is similar at the UW. Not every professor is engaging and is interested in helping you explore a subject.

c. Of the RI classes, I would only recommend the phonetics course, if you have never studied phonetics. I would take this the first semester, because it is really very helpful! Of the regular university courses, many students, including myself, took French literature with Madame Seguin and I think she was a very good and understanding professor and easy to talk to. Of philosophy courses, I would recommend Mme Touboul. She is rather intimidating, but she a wonderful professor and is really interested in her students. I also had one communication professor who was an incredibly engaging professor – Mme Bouyon. These are professors that I found to be actually interested in my understanding of the subject, but not necessarily the nicest or easiest professors you can find at Montpellier.

d. The first semester, I took two RI courses (which are French courses) and so this did not relate to my coursework at the UW. Besides these two courses I was able to take philosophy and communication courses, which is what I study at the UW. With this direct exchange, you are open to choose almost any course offered at Paul-Valéry. So, if you talk with your departments at the UW, you can often find courses that will transfer and count towards your degree at the UW.

III. Housing

- a. My housing options were the following: the university residence, a homestay (though I am not sure if this is really possible), and finding an apartment.
- b. The director of English-speaking programs at Paul-Valéry, Judith, told me about a woman who rented out rooms in her apartment, and so I took this opportunity. I wanted to live in an apartment but I was told that it was often difficult to find an apartment in Montpellier.
- c. I think I would recommend either living in the university residence or finding an apartment yourself when you arrive. Although the university residence can be quite anti-social, I had many friends that stayed in the university residence for the

whole year and met many of their friends there. For example, at Triolet, the rooms are quite small, but it seemed to me that there were always opportunities to meet others in the kitchens or the hallways. If not, I think you should look for an apartment when you arrive. I had many problems with my roommates in the end, and this got to be very difficult after a year. If you wait until you arrive, it will be more stressful but you can meet your roommates before you say yes to the apartment and you can also see if you like the location. Everyone told me that this was very difficult to do, but I knew many European students who were able to find an apartment within the first week of being in Montpellier. There are internet sites and agencies in Montpellier to help you also! So, if you are brave, you can really find a nice housing situation for your year at Montpellier.

IV. Program/Exchange Site

Montpellier is a small, small city in comparison with Seattle. If you live close to the center, you can walk anywhere. In the center of the city, there is not a single large office building, and in reality "the center" is a square with a fountain, called la place de la comedie. The center is a beautiful area that is actually pedestrian only. It's filled with small windy streets and cafés. The center is certainly the most beautiful and lively part of Montpellier, but I found Cours Gambetta, more or less the Arab quarter, to be the most interesting part of Montpellier. So, if you go to Montpellier, you have to make sure that you don't forget to spend a little time there!

The university, Paul-Valéry, is outside the center of the city, about ten minutes in the tram. There are a few cafés around the university area but in general it is not so interesting, and it is nothing like the U-district. I think this is also because all of the different faculties are in different places in Montpellier (Paul-Valéry is at St. Eloi tram stop, the faculty of law is at Louis-Blanc, and the faculty of economy is on the other side of the city at the tram stop Rives du Lez). So, there is no mass concentration of students like at the UW. The Paul-Valéry campus, however, I think is quite nice. It's much smaller than the UW campus, of course, but there are lots of grassy areas and places to sit outside. So when the weather is nice, all of the students are outside just hanging out on the grass. Also! I think Paul-Valéry has perhaps the best university restaurant and this was a place where I met many, many people. I think it's thanks to this cafeteria that I was really able to create my own little culture at Paul-Valéry, even if it sounds strange to say.

V. Health safety

Honestly, I found Montpellier to be a very safe city. There are strange people in the streets, but if you do not talk to them they leave you alone. Previous students who had participated in the exchange had said that you should never walk alone at night and you should never walk alone on Sundays. The first part could be true, but I always walked home alone at night and never had any problems. The second part is not at all true; Montpellier is not dangerous on Sundays. In my opinion, the only dangerous part of Montpellier at night is in the direction of Mosson, but that is quite far from the center, and it is unlikely that you will find yourself there at night. Like in Seattle, I think you really just have to be smart. If a man begins to speak to you, either you don't respond and keep walking, or tell him *thank you but you do not want to talk* and

keep walking. Of course, it is always better to walk home with someone, if possible, but I will just say that I never did and I never had any problems. I also never experienced any incidents of theft. I think, in this area, you also have to act similarly as you do when on vacation: you should never leave anything valuable unattended or hanging out of your pocket.

VI. Cultural Aspects

- a. For me, after the first month, integrating myself into the culture seemed to happen quite naturally. But I don't think it is always so easy, and during the first month it wasn't easy at all for me. I used the university and my classes there to integrate myself as much as possible into the culture in Montpellier. I think clubs and extra-curricular activities would actually be more effective for most people, even though I never really participated in these things. If these sorts of organized activities do interest you, there is a fair, the third week I was there, with every club and association in Montpellier and there you will be able to at least 50 clubs that interest you. I imagine that this would be a very good way to meet French people and create your own little niche in Montpellier. But, as I said, for me, I met most of my friends at the University in classes and in the university restaurant. To be honest, I would recommend searching for other foreigners in the beginning, not Americans but Erasmus students or other foreign students (because at Paul-Valéry there really is an enormous population of foreign students!). This can be a good way to become more comfortable with the language and with the French culture in general, even if you are not only with French students. If you stay with Americans, you may let yourself remain isolated from the rest of the culture in Montpellier. Ah and also, I recommend taking several different classes in the same department and in the same year. That is to say, I recommend, for example, taking several different 2nd year philosophy courses, because this way you are with the same group of students for these several classes, and it is easier to meet people, I think!
- b. I think the best way you minimize culture shock upon arriving at Montpellier is to limit your expectations as much as possible. Of course, this is very difficult, but I think it helps you to not judge the culture before you are able to understand it. It may seem stupid, but I think the cultural difference that was hardest for me in France was the lack of resources for students. For example, there is only one single library in all of Montpellier that is open Sundays and it is open for only 3 and a half hours. I had to organize my time much differently than in Seattle in order to get any work done. With libraries and with many other things that may seem illogical to an American student, I think you can be quick to say that *Montpellier ought to be like this or like that*, but this is really a judgement that you should avoid as much as possible because it only makes adjusting to the culture more difficult.

VII. Financial

- a. I think the best way to get cash from the United States is to use your American credit card in an ATM. However, if for your apartment or your dorm room, you must pay with checks, then you will have to open up a French Bank account (They will help you with this a little during the orientations). All foreign students,

I think almost without exception, use the LCL bank. And to get money into this bank account from your US account, I think it is best to do large money transfers (they must be large amounts, because there is often a large fee accompanied by each transfer.)

- b. I think how much money you spend each month will depend entirely on your financial situation in the states. I recommend making a budget one of the first weeks that you arrive, after you have seen how much your eating and drinking habits cost. You can buy a tram pass for the whole year for around 275 euros (I think, not sure) , but if you live at all close to center, I don't recommend it. This is a lot of money and Montpellier is really quite small. If you live close to the center, it is a better idea to walk everywhere and buy a tram ticket when you need it. If you don't live so close, I recommend buying a bicycle!
- c. I don't think I expected transportation to be so expensive, and after I had bought the year-long pass, I actually regretted it. I also lost my passport, and that was a very expensive problem to fix, But besides these two things, I don't think there were so many unexpected expenses.
- d. I did not receive financial aid for my year in Montpellier.

VIII. IPE Office:

To be honest, any real help that I received for my study abroad experience was from the International Relations office in Paul-Valéry. They were incredibly helpful and personable. In the end, I was a friend with everyone in this office. I really did not find the IPE office to be as helpful. My advisor was very difficult to reach and did not seem so interested in how everything was going in my experience.

IX. Program/Student type:

I think the direct exchange in Montpellier is a well-suited for very independent people, who are really interested in integrating themselves into the French Culture. To get the most out of the program in Montpellier, you really must be motivated!

X. Overall Experience:

Overall, my experience in Montpellier was absolutely wonderful and without a doubt the best year of my life so far. Nearly all of my expectations were completely wrong (and it is for this reason that advise future students really to avoid making expectations.) In the end, I was able to succeed in the French University system as any other French student and I lived in Montpellier as though I had lived there my whole life. I think, in the end, this was my goal and so I am very, very satisfied!

PH✓

AUG 13 2009

University Paul Valery; Montpellier, France Direct Exchange
Academic Year 2008-2009

1. ARRIVAL OVERSEAS/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

- a) Upon arrival, we were placed immediately in student dorms with all of the other foreign students.
- b) There was a three week orientation for this program. It was very helpful since it introduced us to all of the different things we would encounter throughout the year. There were three weeks of intensive French before we began actual classes in the French university which was very helpful. There was a grammar class, a French culture class, and a class about Montpellier and the surrounding region. This was very useful since it helped us orient ourselves in the foreign city. The orientation helped us open a bank account in France and showed us how to apply for our residency permit (carte de séjour). The orientation also planned nearby trips within the region which introduced us to the history and the culture of where we would be living. Overall, the orientation was very helpful in adapting to living in France.

2. ACADEMICS:

- a) The University system in France is very different from the United States. It is extremely disorganized, but it is manageable once you figure out how everything works. Since French students pay very little to attend university, there is little funding so there are very few luxuries that we have available to us at UW. The classes are very basic. There is little student/teacher interaction. The teachers usually have a few pages of notes which they simply lecture to you throughout the class period. People rarely ask questions during class, so everyone sits, listens, and write down word for word what the teacher is reading out loud. Grading is also very different. The grading system is out of 20 points, but beyond a 15 is rarely heard of. 10 is the average, and French students are very happy with that. The teachers grade fairly hard, but they grade hard for everyone so the average is lower. The administration at Paul Valery is also disorganized (comparing to our standards), but the people who work in the international student office are very friendly and willing to always help, although it may take a while. French universities love to strike, and it is very common to do so every spring. During this time no classes are held until the issue is resolved. The library at Paul Valery has many books and computers available to students, however the technology is not as new or advanced as ours at UW.
- b) The instruction was fairly good. The lectures were usually pretty clear and they would emphasize every assignment we had to do. They are also very lenient with the quality and also turning in work, in comparison to UW.
- c) I enjoyed the 17th century literature class about Moliere. It related a lot to the history and culture of Montpellier, so I found it very applicable to where I was living at the time. The class 'géographie de la France' was also very interesting since we focused specifically on the Languedoc-Roussillon region in addition to the rest of France.

d) There were many French literature classes offered at Paul Valery, which apply to the French major. I also took a few history courses and a geography course which apply to my European studies major.

3. HOUSING:

a) We could either live in the student residence near Paul Valery or find an apartment on our own.

b) I lived in the student residence since I was told it is extremely difficult to find an apartment in Montpellier. It worked out very well because it was extremely inexpensive. It was only 250 euros a month for a room with a mini-kitchenette and a bathroom (in the room). The French government subsidizes university housing as well, so if you apply for the CAF (a student aid that anyone is allowed to apply for) it ends up being around 120 euros a month for that same room. I met a lot of other international students in the dorms, but not very many French people. French people are very reserved and they don't see residence halls as a social place like we do in the US.

c) I would recommend staying in the residence halls if you would like to save money and be near school. However, living in an apartment would be nice if you prefer being closer to town. The dorms were about a 15 minute tram ride from town (25 minute walk) which isn't bad. The apartments in Montpellier are all gorgeous, but usually fairly expensive.

4. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE SITE:

The campus is about a 15 minute tram ride from town. It is a fairly small campus (in comparison to UW) and fairly old. It is very manageable, as you can walk across it in about 5 minutes. The surrounding area is pretty residential. There are a few cafes and restaurants nearby, a bank and a grocery store, but the majority is in town.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Healthcare in France is easily accessible and inexpensive. There are pharmacies on every corner where you can buy medication. Montpellier is a fairly safe city. There are a fair number of homeless people on the streets but they are harmless. It's not very safe to walk alone at night (as in any city) just because the city gets very quiet around 2 AM. I did not have any experiences where I felt unsafe in Montpellier.

6. CULTURAL ASPECTS:

a) It is very difficult to meet French people. They often keep to their selves and aren't very interested in going outside of their social circle. Also, since Montpellier is a city filled with international students, it is not as exciting to them to meet foreigners. I frequented the cafes, wine bars and the pubs, which was an opportunity to meet the French.

b) While Americans tend to be overly-productive, the French tend to be the opposite. They will get to the point when they absolutely have to. Nothing is done quick in France, which takes some getting used to. There is a lot of administrative bureaucracy which we don't encounter in the US.

7. FINANCIAL:

a) I transferred money to my French bank account simply by withdrawing at the ATM and putting it in the French bank. If you have Bank of America, the French chain BNP Paribas is a partner and does not charge the withdraw fee from the ATM. It is also possible to wire money between the two accounts.

b) I would recommend about \$700 a month for food, transportation, housing (if in the dorms), ect.

c) At the beginning, you will need to pay about 200 euros for social security (which gives you healthcare), 200 euros for the yearly tram pass, about 30 euros for a telephone (plus about 30 euros per month), 135 euros for the carte de sejour.

8. PROGRAMS/EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION:

a) The IP & E was extremely helpful in advising me for this program. If I had any questions during my year, an advisor at the IP & E was very quick to respond to my emails with the answers.

9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE:

This program is very good for an independent student who can handle the cultural differences of living in a foreign country. There is a lot of confusion as well as disorganization at Paul Valery, so the student must be confident handling these problems in a foreign language. I would suggest going for the entire year because a semester is way too short in this amazing city!

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

I highly recommend the Montpellier program to any student confident in French. Through all the disorganization and slowness of the south of France, this was the best experience I could have asked for. Although the French university was on strike for the majority of second semester, I learned more than I think I would have learned in class. I was living in the real world, experiencing French culture first hand. Organizing your life in a foreign language in a foreign country is one of the most difficult things someone can do, and it is a major feeling of accomplishment once you have. Once you get passed the shock of the little things that are different, it is an incredible place to live and learn. I had an amazing time and would recommend spending a year abroad in Montpellier to anyone.

DH✓
DEC 15 2008

Program Evaluation: Montpellier France 2007/2008

1) Arrival

The arrival in Montpellier is well planned. There will be someone from the program waiting for you at the airport or train station when you arrive. If you arrive early, as some of the students did, check out www.couchsurfing.com to find a safe reliable place to stay in the city. Because Montpellier is a destination for many students from all over Europe this should be easy to accomplish.

Your first order of business, after having dropped off your bags in your dorm room, should be to pay Jacques Louisin a visit. It is good to introduce yourself first thing (and Jacques usually has leftover supplies from the previous year's students).

Remember to bring copies of your passport and passport photos with you at all times during the first week, it will make the paperwork so much more efficient for the carte de sejour and your French bank account.

If you like your dorm room, be sure to pay the secretariat at your cite-U (the dorms) a visit immediately so that you know if you're going to be able to keep it for the year. In the beginning you are going to be with a large group of Americans who are all in the same situation, Enjoy it!

- 2) The Pre-Stage was a three week intensive grammar boot camp that is essentially revision for a UW student. Do Not Stress about the placement exam at the beginning of the Pre-Stage. The Pre-Stage provides the students with a base, time, and resources necessary to acclimate to the French mode de vie. It is a necessary evil. The Pre-Stage is comprised of three subjects, Grammar, Phonetics, and Civilization. The field trips on the weekends will give you an idea of where you are, the history, and geography of the region. It is good to participate in these as you will meet the other students, and this part of the program is essentially paid for by the Minnesota program. The goal of the Pre-Stage is to ground the students to their new surroundings, while increasing your capacity for the language skills that you already have. At the end of the Pre-Stage, Jacques and his associates will be available to help you choose and find the courses that you will be taking for the first semester. Note- as a University of Washington student you are not required to take the Grammar/Phonetics/Civilization classes any farther than the Pre-Stage. You may sign up for any University course that is offered, some courses that you will be interested in will be difficult to find, but that is why you will have the help of the International Program's staff. My suggestion is to take 3-4 fully integrated classes each semester minimum. You will get UW credit for everything that you do overseas and you will be

an Etudiant Pluridisciplinaire which means that you have more freedom of movement in the French education system than even the French students, Profites!

Academics

- a) There are many significant differences in the structuring of Academics in France, which are going through significant changes as well, versus at the University of Washington. It is helpful to remember that the UW is not dependant on direct funding from the state for its infrastructure. In France, all funding for all programs and teachers salaries comes from the government. An institution like Paul Valery is a Fac des Lettres and it does not receive as much funding as the Fac de Science, Medecin, or Droit. The campus may seem small and unorganized at first glance. We had the impression of being at a community college, when we first arrived. Spend some time exploring where the different departments are, the different building, and the best places to relax on the grass between classes (there are several). The biggest difference in the Academic structure of the University is that French students follow a very direct/strict course program. They must follow the prescribed courses for their year and their semester in their school (i.e. Lit, History, Art, Communications, etc), with only 1 or 2 options for electives. But the actual classroom structure is similar. Show up to class, introduce yourself, sit close to the front, and take notes. The professors will not generally provide a syllabus for the course, they are not going to have office hours, but if requested they will provide an email address if you have any questions, and under some circumstances they will provide help above and beyond their job descriptions. The exams will be based upon the material covered in class and the readings that they have assigned, and will generally be a 4hr test at the end of the semester that counts as your grade. It is my suggestion that the foreign students participate in the final exam, instead of completing an alternate work to validate the course- like a commentaire compose or a dissertation, which will be offered by some professors. Taking the exam will give you much more flexibility in the grading process; just remember to mark "Etudiant Etranger" at the top of your finished work. It is in my opinion that it is in the students favor to take the final with the rest of the students.
- b) Anything administrative that has the potential to be confusing for the student can be handled by Jacques and his office. Do Not Hesitate to pay Jacques a visit or call him if you have any questions, problems, or concerns. The trick is not to catch them during lunch time 12pm-2pm. Jacques is always available to help the student resolve the stress of a potentially confusing situation.
- c) According to resources, the student has several options available to them. There is the foreign library in the I.E.F.E, which has computers available on campus. I found that this library was the most accessible to foreign students, and it was the one that I used the most. There is a Library in the Antigone- a media tech, which a lot of the other American students found hugely accessible for films, and books, and good study areas. I did not find the library on campus very accessible for computers or information, it seemed that you always needed to ask someone how to accomplish a task, and the information was difficult to find. This is not the University of Washington, where at a click of a mouse you have all the resources for research at your fingertips. The benefit is that there is free WIFI on campus, anywhere, and in the cafes at the cite-U.

d) The quality of instruction was of the highest academic standard in my experience. The subject matter was focused and easy to follow. The teaching styles direct and well presented. Time is not wasted in the classroom, and all of the material is relevant to the course. The trade off is that one final exam is the only measure for passing or failing a course. Students are given the responsibility to strive further for their education, rather than fighting to keep up with all the busy work and information regurgitation. There is much room for interpretation and development of ideas in the French method of teaching and pedagogy. I found that the education that I received in Montpellier was influential, exciting, and of the highest quality even compared to "University of Washington" standards.

e) In choosing which courses to pursue at Paul Valery, I suggest that the students trust their first impressions of the course in order to find the best suited to them. The first week of class, it is advised, to go to as many classes that you can possibly fit into your schedule. This is time consuming and confusing, as classroom locations are sometimes obscure. This method ensures that you don't get stuck in a class that you are not compatible with. Always ask the instructor if they mind having you in the class, their response will be a good gauge of how willing they will be to work with the students. I showed up to a class first semester and was immediately intimidated by the professor. It seemed to me that she couldn't be bothered with foreign students, and came across as rather rude, so I didn't take the course. Second semester, however; I did take one of her classes, and it was one of my favorite. Having a greater proficiency for the French language built my confidence enough to face a challenging professor.

f) I have found that my study abroad coursework has made a significant impact on my UW education. The relevance of an international education is invaluable. I find myself referring to the education that I received at Paul Valery as much as I refer to the life lessons that I learned abroad. This experience has been highly influential upon my academic and personal evolution.

Housing

- a) Housing options are readily available to American students. Apartments are shared by foreign students all over the city, and invariably someone is looking for a "colloq". Students may request to be placed with a "famille d'accueil"; this is one of the more expensive options, but it ensures that the student will neither be hungry, nor alone on the holidays. Foreign students also have a right to live in the Cité-U (student dorms).
- b) I chose to stay in the Dorms, unlike any American dorm situation, because it was the most cost effective at 250€/month for a studio dorm with a personal bathroom and a kitchen. When I started to receive the CAF, rent became 160€ each month. There are less expensive dorm rooms as well, which have shared bathrooms and kitchen. These are also very comfortable. I found that this was the best option for meeting and other French students and integrating into French university life. The Cité-U are very social environments. They are secure; they have a 24hr guarded front desk, and special entry keys. They all have little cafés for snacks, coffee, baguette, or change for the washing machines. There is WIFI in the café at my Cité-U (vert-bois). I also had an internet connection in my room for 6€/month. This is much less expensive than trying to set

up a new apartment, and I appreciated the social aspects and the individual freedom that is part of University life.

c) Vert-Bois- a summary of the neighborhood.

In the summer when you arrive, nothing will be open. The area will be deserted and desolate, dry and ugly. First impressions of this area are deceiving. By the time autumn arrives, and the Universities come alive with students and businesses, the neighborhood seems to come alive. Workers return to clean the streets and manicure the lawns and trees, there is a constant flow of students between the tram stop and the universities, people sitting in cafés seem to pass the day in the sunshine. The area is quite nice, and safe! Paul Valéry is a campus where the artistic students go. There is a lot of activism, and graffiti, and people who are rallying for change. The area is the center of University life in Montpellier. The fac de Science is right across the street from the fac des Lettres. It takes 15-20 min to arrive in the center of the city by tram. There is a small supermarket and several cafes and boulangeries not far from campus. The least expensive place to eat is the Resto-U on campus (Vert-bois, Boutonnet, and I believe Trioletto has a resto-u as well).

Health and Safety

- a) In regards to Health, if you are not feeling well or something is wrong, go to the Doctor! It is relatively inexpensive. You pay for the insurance, Use it! There are doctors' offices everywhere, ask a friend, or ask the director of your program at Paul Valéry. Another manner of finding a doctor is to go to a local pharmacy and ask them where the nearest doctors' office is. Remember that pharmaceuticals are regulated differently in France, and you will need a prescription for almost everything, Tylenol and Aspirin are regulated as well, so you can find those things behind the counter at a Pharmacy. While I was there, I went to the doctor twice and the dentist as well. We even had to take one friend to the emergency room because of a cut that he got from a broken bottle. It is important to know that it may be stressful and confusing to go to the doctor, they are familiar with foreign students, and will try to help with anything that they can.
- b) In regards to Safety, be aware of your surroundings. Be safe and remember that you automatically attract more attention than other students.

Cultural Aspects

- a) It was difficult for the American students to integrate with the French students. Living in the dorms is the most accessible environment to meet students. There are going to be people that are interested in speaking with you, but will be shy or intimidated by the language barrier as well. Be patient with them, with yourself, and others will be patient with you.
- b) The largest cultural difference between my friends and I, was my age. I turned 27 in the beginning of my year abroad. I would always receive shocked expressions when I would tell people how old I was. Most people in France do not go to school after the age of 25. I was therefore, very self-conscious of my age. On my side, I found that I wasn't used to being stereotyped based on my age. I tried to be less sensitive about the issue.

Financial

- a) It is expensive to transfer money from an overseas bank account, and it takes about 2 weeks until you can access that money. Most major banks, have a sister bank in Europe. I used a credit card for food and phone. Mobi carte is not the least expensive option.
- b) The total cost of my trip, \$31,000. This is a very expensive endeavor.
Most of the monthly costs were manageable with financial aid and the CAF. The problem is always in the beginning, the tram pass, insurance, deposit, carte de sejour expenses, etc...
- c) I had to have a root canal which cost 260Euro and was reimbursed for the majority. I had computer problems and had to ship my computer back to the US.
- d) Financial Aid and Emergency student loans got me through the year.

Programs and Exchanges Admin.

- a) Very effective and helpful. Especially with the scholarship that they signed me up for.
Communication was available, when needed.

The type of student required to participate in this program is independent, works hard, and is committed to spending the year in France. The University is very diverse, especially with all of the Erasmus students. There are students from all over the world in Montpellier, Profites!

I feel that I exceeded my expectations in going to Montpellier. The program was fantastic; the people were warm and welcoming. It has been much more difficult to reintegrate upon my return because I really let myself get integrated into the culture. My studies have vastly improved. I'm already making plans to do the Assistant of English program next year.

I went to Montpellier to learn how to speak French, I returned confident in the language and myself.

IP&E Program Evaluation Outline

APR 06 2009

Montpellier, France
Autumn quarter, 2007

Upon arrival, dorm rooms will be provided for you for the orientation period (you can chose to stay in the dorms during the school year if you choose – staying in the dorms will definitely expose you to more native French students). The orientation will be helpful in introducing you to more conversational French, but it can also be a trap for making new American friends. This “trap” can be good (i.e. creating a support network – which will be necessary), but it can also be harmful to your French experience because of the tenancy not to branch away from this new group of American friends.

When taking classes with other French students, you can expect the courses to be very free-flowing and seemingly unstructured. All of the courses will consist of a professor lecturing at you, and the teacher-student relations are much more formal than at the University of Washington. The most important contribution my coursework abroad provided to my education was a deeper, intuitive understanding of how the French educational system works and, by extension, how the larger French bureaucracy operates.

For housing, living in the dorms is by far the easiest option and provides the most social benefits for interacting with and meeting French students. I chose to find an apartment off-campus, and it was unbelievably difficult. No one wanted to rent to me because I did not have a cosigner who lived in France for the lease. I was able to secure an apartment only after securing a bank account with a years worth of rent that the landlord could withdraw from should I ever fail to pay rent. This option is generally not available to students, so I would recommend searching for a roommate situation on France's version of craigslist: www.kijiji.fr I met many foreign students who found great living situations through this website.

The campus and surrounding neighborhoods are dramatically different from the UW. It is a filthy campus because the university has no money, and students have put graffiti all over the walls (note, though, that it is mostly comprised of political statements and is a reflection of the student culture in France).

For health concerns, you will be able to buy into the French health system (and, in some cases, required to buy into it). This will dramatically reduce all medical costs (it will almost certainly be much, much cheaper than your medical expenses in the US). As far as general safety is concerned, you MUST be aware of your surroundings at all times. I was almost mugged on a street in the center of town on a weeknight, with plenty of people around. There just happened to be a cop car coming up the street, cause the perpetrator to back away from me very quickly (he was still arrested, and I had to give a statement to the police). Chances are, nothing bad will happen at all – and if anything does, it will most likely not involve violence. However, you should always trust your instincts and act appropriately.

sonally, interacted with the gay French community through websites like citegay.org and com. I met a few friends there with whom I am still in contact. I also met other people in my

apartment building who showed me around. If you are outgoing and demonstrate awareness and respect for French culture, then you are likely to be well-received by French youth.

As far as money goes, you can plan on your housing being somewhat subsidized by the government. You may have to do some research into this yourself, but the program is called C.A.F. Even when cooking for yourself, you will probably spend more money on food than you expect because you will be excited to explore what France has to offer for the pallet. If you plan to travel a lot, you should purchase a youth travel discount card from the train station that will allow you to purchase cheaper tickets (you can always purchase cheaper tickets this way, but without the card [carte 12 à 25], you will get a fine when the controller comes through the train to check everyone's tickets).

The most frustrating aspect of my study abroad was the fact that everything seems to take a long time, and it seems like nothing is going to get done administratively that way I would like. My biggest piece of advice is to relax – everything will work out the way it is supposed to in the end. Definitely stay on top of your stuff (i.e. getting your student visa → which is required for applying for the C.A.F., ect.), but don't stress about it all.

This program can really be suited for any type of student because you make it what you want. It is not very structured, but there is a way to follow a more structured path if you do not want to make a huge effort (i.e. stay in the dorms to avoid the intense headache of finding housing off-campus, take the courses for foreigners rather than integrated courses with other French people). If you are looking for more of a challenge, then do the opposite of those suggestions.

My overall experience was very enlightening. I learned a lot about myself: my fears, my dreams, what I really wanted out of my life, and how I wanted to live my life. As cliché as it may sound, this experience can really be a life-changing one if you explore all the mixed feelings that your experience abroad will bring up. Living in a different culture, even another western one, will force you to confront aspects of yourself that normally go unnoticed in your day-to-day life in America. This can be a good thing if you are open to learning from it.

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Montpellier, France - Spring Semester 2008

1. ARRIVAL OVERSEAS/ON-SITE ORIENTATION

I made sure that my dorm was confirmed for my arrival date so I could settle in as soon as I came into Montpellier. This was beneficial, because I did not have to move around all my heavy luggage multiple times. I would suggest this to anyone else arriving in Montpellier. A couple friends of mine came a little early and had to stay in a hostel for a couple days, which was not a terrible idea, but it was a hassle moving all of their luggage around, especially with the amount of walking in Montpellier.

My program did not have an orientation. There was a "prestige" offered which focused on intensive French grammar. This however, did not help me "adapt" to being in France. When it came to figuring out how to get things done in the city, no one was specifically assigned to help me. I got the contact information of another UW student who had been there since the Fall and she was nice enough to show me around the first day.

2. ACADEMICS

I took two courses with the Relations International department, Civilisation du Sud and Vie Politique. These two courses were with other American students and a professor who taught us in French on different topics related to French culture and politics. The other two courses I took were with the university itself, Biologie and Hygiène, so these classes were with French psychology students. Generally, every class had the professor lecture for the entire amount of time while students took notes and repeated all the information on the final exam. The Civilisation du Sud class had an additional midterm. The Biologie class had regular quizzes and the lecture and quiz sections were separated, which made it very similar to UW classes. In the courses with the Relations International, the class size was smaller so it felt more personal. They were also with other Americans, so the professors taught at a slower pace, which I felt discouraged the students from being challenged and many of them left hardly improving their French. Even though it can be intimidating, I introduced myself to my professors of the university courses, and surprisingly they remembered me for the rest of the semester. At the end of the semester, they allowed me to take the final early and graded me a little bit easier.

It was a little hard adjusting to the French grading system. They grade out of 20 points, however it is nearly impossible to receive a 20. A good high grade is around a 16. I received a 10 in my Hygiène course and that transferred as a 3.1 on our grading scale. Clearly, this is an

advantage to UW students, which is a little hard to understand at first when one only receives half of their points.

The most frustrating obstacle I experienced was the administration in France. Getting anything done in France took significantly more time than I was used to. When it comes to choosing classes, grading and general academic advice, I had to be very persistent and sometimes a little pushy. It is better to assume that other people will not get things done for you and so you must do it yourself.

There was one main library on campus. Computers were scarce. The library had a few, but the main place to get on the internet and study was the Pavillion Informatique. The hours were limited and the internet was slow, but there were a nice number of computers available. Printing was mainly done at a small copy center off campus. I brought my laptop and left it in my dorm and was grateful because I still had internet access after 7pm. I recommending bringing a computer, because when it also comes down to typing an essay, the French keyboard is a little different and it was slower to use the French computers.

Overall, the quality and content of instruction was a little dry for my personal taste. I took courses that were not in my major, so it was different being out of my comfort zone. I took the biology classes to fulfill the Natural World requirement and the Relations Internationals classes related to the Area Study requirement for the Certificate of International Studies in Business program. The Civilisation du Sud class, however, was very interesting because it was material regarding the region I was living in. Learning about French culture is also very fascinating. I highly recommend this class.

3. HOUSING

The two main housing options were to find an apartment on my own or to live in the dorms. I chose to live in the dorms because I did not want to deal with all the hassle of finding an apartment in France. I recommend the dorms for many reasons. First, the rent is extremely cheap. It is also easier to meet new people, especially other international students because there are many in Montpellier. All of the living details such as cleaning, internet, etc are taken care of by the administration office. Also, each student lives in an individual room and it would be hard to find a cheap studio.

4. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE SITE

The Paul Valery campus is smaller than UW and not as beautiful. Building updates are not as important in that university, because they are one of the poorest universities in France. After a while, however, a fondness begins to develop. There are multiple places to eat on campus. One day a week, the university had a live band play in one of the theaters. There are a few places to eat nearby off campus, but the main commercial place is the comedie.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Going to the doctor in France is much easier than I expected. I got very sick while in Montpellier, so I called the doctor, went in the next day, paid 22 euro, got a prescriptions and paid 10 euro for the medicine. It was so fast and inexpensive! There are doctor's offices and pharmacies everywhere. Montpellier is a little more dangerous at night, especially if you're a female because the boys tend to be more aggressive. I would suggest never being alone after dark. Theft was not a big issue while I was there, of course that does not mean I was not careful with my belongings. I always had my laptop locked in my dorm room, hid my passport and never took it with me unless I knew I was going to need it. I dropped my cell phone in the comedie and the girl was nice enough to text my friend and I got it back the next day.

6. CULTURAL ASPECTS

To integrate into the culture and meet members of the community, I found an amazing bible study called Agape (Campus Crusade of Christ). I made many friends there, French and American and was forced to speak French and thus my French improved exponentially. The university also has a website where students wishing to learn different languages can pair up and teach each other. Some of my American friends I made met other people, so I met a lot of international people that way too.

One big challenge was the fact that the French do not like to open up. They love to talk and discuss various topics except when it comes to their personal life and experiences. Another difference, which I found refreshing, was the way the French handled their alcohol. I found that in France people do not act crazy when drinking. Alcohol accompanies having a good time, and does not control it. Again, I would like to stress the importance of taking one's time in France. Meals are a lot longer and can take up to two hours because a lot of the time is spent conversing.

7. FINANCIAL

Because I was in France for five months, I decided to get a French bank account. It was convenient because there were no fees, because it was specifically for students. European debits cards are different than American ones, so it was handy using it to buy things. My bank only charged me a few dollars for international transactions, so every few weeks I would withdraw large sums of money from my American account using any ATM machine and then deposited it into my French bank account. Including rent, food, transportation, etc, I would recommend at least 600 euro a month. The majority of this money is spent on food, because it is harder to cook meals due to the different items offered at grocery stores. I did not have any unexpected expenses because my finances were constantly updated.

I used Financial Aid to fund my entire program including spending money. While I was abroad, I did not experience any complications. The IPE was even kind enough to divide my semester tuition between Winter and Spring quarters. I chose to enroll in Summer quarter after

my return and it was then that I experienced a small complication. Because I was gone for Winter and Spring quarters, my summer aid did not disperse at first. This is because I did not have any classes recorded on my transcript yet, seeing as I had not even received the transcript from the French university. Fortunately, everything was solved quickly.

8. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION

The IPE administered my program in Montpellier. I personally felt the office's services were very effective. My coordinator helped me choose the right program for me, gave me all the information I need and pointed me in the appropriate direction for the next steps I needed to take. The only drawback is that it was a little difficult meeting up with my coordinator because the hours were so limited.

9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE

This program is best suited for those who are independent and aggressive because it takes a lot of work to get stuff done in Montpellier. He or she should be comfortable with being by himself or herself and exploring places because it will take a little time to make friends. The student should also be very patient. The French way of living, especially in the South, is at a lot slower pace than in Seattle.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Before studying abroad, I did not have many expectations because I had no idea what to expect since it was my first time leaving North America. I knew it would be a little stretching, because of the warnings given to me by the IPE coordinator, so I was prepared for the worst. Though it was difficult being immersed in an area where people speak a different language, it strengthened my character. I learned how to succeed on my own and find resources by myself. It was amazing being able to see the fruits of my labor. Successfully living in Montpellier made me realize I could live successfully anywhere. I was able to adapt well enough to a different academic experience. Having a nine-hour difference between me and my family and friends was the most testing experience of my life, but in the end I would not trade this experience for the world.