

Anna Lipke

## Study Abroad Paper

I studied abroad in Montpellier, in the Occitanie Region of France, through the University of Minnesota's: Language and Culture Immersion in the South of France program. I stayed with a host family while taking classes at the University of Paul Valery and completing an internship at Les Aramants Foyer, a local assisted living facility for people with mental disabilities. My goal for studying abroad was to improve my French speaking and comprehension skills and my global consciousness. At the end of my time in France, I felt I had accomplished these goals and gained exponentially more experiential knowledge.

The experience of language acquisition in another country was the most significant personal shock. When I arrived, I was dismayed that communicating was tricky and understanding fluent French took time. Even after all the academic courses and years I had studied French in the classroom; I felt unprepared. I discovered that language comprehension and speaking skills do not progress linearly; instead, in stages, with periods of exponential growth, then plateau. After a few weeks, I understood that making mistakes and being able to laugh at them was also part of the process.

My host family was enormously influential in helping me with my speaking skills; I learned the most at our weekly full-house family meals every Wednesday. They were welcoming and gentle about correcting me and always created space for me to join the conversation; I will never forget their hospitality. My host mother was a grammar teacher at the local school. When she and I got COVID-19 together, we had extensive conversations about various contentious topics. Not only was I learning how to articulate increasingly abstract ideas in my non-native tongue, but I also value the relationship built from these conversations. Living with a host family

meant actively learning all the time, and it was the single most significant contributor to improving my French skills.

My study abroad experience enriched my academic knowledge by improving my French, communication, and leadership skills. I interned as an Assistant Teacher/Care Facilitator at Les Aramants Foyer, which meant I assisted in teaching movement therapy classes to residents and assisted residents in completing their activities of daily living. On my first day, I felt out of my depth, relying on my non-native language skills to get through conversations and classes with the other teachers and foyer residents. The pressure of that situation, mainly eating lunch with the residents, flipped a neurological language switch. My comprehension and speaking skills steadily improved as I progressed through my internship. My sense of self-efficacy grew as I made meaningful connections with residents and teachers, successfully led classes, and learned new teaching methods.

Resilience in Childhood Psychology, taught by Professor Dandache, was one of the most influential and instructive courses I have taken in my college career. Professor Dandache is a practicing psychologist working with the area's young children and refugee populations. She spoke from experience, frequently asking for our perspectives on her previous cases before telling us how she had proceeded with treatment or accessed the root of childhood trauma. Learning exclusively from case studies made the information feel relevant and applicable; it felt like a mentorship in therapeutic practice. As a final exam, my class collectively designed and treated a hypothetical patient's mental neuroses, using what we learned.

Studying abroad was a crucial period of learning and growth that I feel very privileged to have experienced. I will carry these experiences and knowledge with me throughout the rest of

my life. Spending a semester in Montpellier, France, was the highlight of my undergraduate career and will have a lasting impact on all my future endeavors.