

Lauren Devan
Scholarship Recipient Report
September 26, 2014

As a recipient of the Alexander Von Humboldt Foreign Language Scholarship, the Languages and Cultures Study Abroad Award, and the Mary-Ann Reiss Award, I am grateful to have received funds to allow me to travel and study abroad and experience French culture first-hand. I am pleased to report that the use of the scholarship funds were used in full to help pay for the semester program expenses at IAU College in Aix-en-Provence, France, as well as their Early Start Program that takes place a week before the start of each semester.

The Early Start Program covers outings to local venues that provide cultural knowledge and experience, as well as information on local history. Such venues include Château La Coste, a local winery, l'Atelier des Chefs, a restaurant located in downtown Aix-en-Provence, and an excursion to the famous Mount Sainte-Victoire, subject of over eighty paintings by Aixois painter Paul Cézanne.

The semester program payment covers tuition at IAU College for five-six courses, excursions with IAU faculty to Nice, Marseilles, and the Luberon Valley, and housing expenses with a resident of Aix-en-Provence, as well as expenses for twelve meals per week provided by the host family.

The Early Start Program and the faculty-led excursions with IAU College were wonderful experiences that guided my immersion into the French life and culture while equipping me with valuable cultural knowledge to prepare me for my four months abroad. I was able to meet French students studying in Aix-en-Provence who engaged me in social activities and gave me first-hand experience with their pace of life in the Provence region of France. The faculty-led excursions gave me different perspectives on towns other than Aix-en-Provence, where I saw historic French monuments and learned historical accounts of many of the cities.

The semester program at IAU College also allowed me to live with a host family in the downtown area of the city as another opportunity to gain cultural knowledge. Living with my host mother for four months in her small French apartment was worth more than a semester learning about French culture from a professor in a classroom. Being able to observe and participate in the daily activities of French living really allowed me to see the differences between my own culture and French culture. It was one of my first experiences in France and where many of my cultural faux pas took place. The many conversations over dinner also allowed me to ask questions and talk about areas of French life I still did not quite understand—we talked about anything from politics to movies to religion to sports, only some of which would have been considered polite dinner conversation in the United States.

During my academic semester, there were three classes that I felt were fundamental in understanding French culture, language, and daily life, as well as the culture of my home country as well. My French translation class was extremely important in allowing me to grapple with the French language so I could speak more smoothly, naturally, and less like a foreigner. My weekly assignments introduced me to colloquial vocabulary and expressions I was able to use in daily conversation with shop-owners, baristas, waiters, information services, young French people, and my host family.

My business class allowed me to learn about France's economy from a non-American standpoint and was eye opening in terms of how other countries view economic decisions and power structures. I engaged in meaningful discussions about

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politics, the environment, healthcare systems, and education of both France and the United States. This class also gave me the opportunity to apply for an internship, which I successfully completed after two months at a local travel agency in the neighboring town of Gardanne. I am very grateful for my internship experience abroad and the information I received from my very knowledgeable professor, as I hope to work abroad for part of my career.

The third class did not seem so important until after the semester ended, but I now realize my French Honors seminar forced me to scrutinize my study abroad experience with a more critical lens than just the rose-colored glasses I stepped off the plane with. The French Honors Program forced me to get to know Aix-en-Provence and get to know myself through the lens of French culture and that of American culture. The in-class discussions challenged certain beliefs I held about both countries through the examination of different writers and artists. We also had opportunities to view theatre pieces and art exhibits in Aix-en-Provence to get a real taste for contemporary French art. The French Honors Program was the facilitator of critical cultural dialogue within myself, and the gentle push to bring my findings to life through creative projects throughout the semester.

I am very grateful for the opportunity I had to study abroad and the scholarship funds I received in order to help cover part of the program fees. My experiences abroad will no doubt contribute to my career after graduation from West Chester University and my lifelong quest to understand the vast world outside my own country.