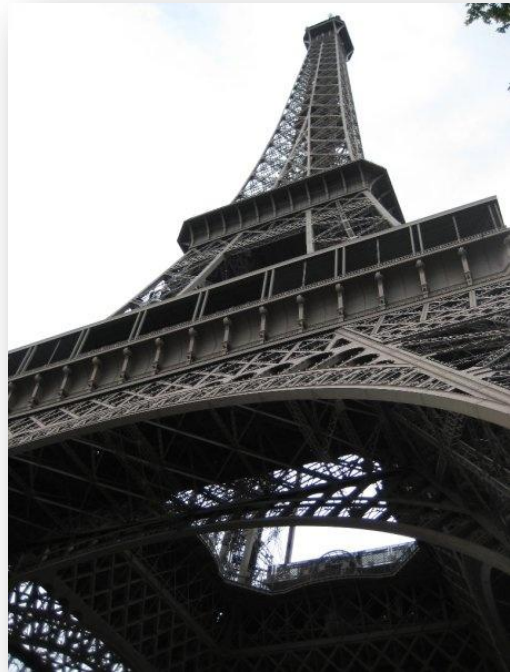


I boarded a plane at the Buffalo-Niagara on a warm July morning not knowing what to expect. My final destination would be an ocean away on a continent I had never stepped foot on. Touching down at Charles de Gaulle airport some 12 hours later it felt as if I had been thrust into a different world. I didn't know this place, its people, or its culture. However, one important thing I would come to know after a harrowing metro journey from the airport to my hostel was to travel light. Two 70 pound suitcases do not make for the best traveling partners. After getting settled into my room and taking a step onto a bustling Parisian street any sense of apprehension I still had seemed to fade away. I knew I would love my time in France. There was such a sense of energy and vibrancy throughout the city. From the tourist-swarmed destinations like Le Tour Eiffel and L'Arc de Triomphe to the small stores and cafes tucked away from view on the many small avenues that spidered their way through the French capitol. Armed with only a pocket dictionary and foldout map I spent two days losing myself in the city, though I could have spent many more.



However, Paris was not my final destination. To reach the school I was studying at I would have to hop aboard the TGV train and travel to the sleepy Mediterranean city of Montpellier. Aside from weather, a balmy 90 degrees almost every day I was there, the city reminded me very much of Buffalo. The arts, the food, the people, just like Buffalo, Montpellier had it all. I met my host family at the train station. From the beginning I realized perhaps things weren't going to be as easy as I had imagined. Neither my host mother nor father spoke a word of English, and although I had several years of French instruction to fall back on, communication between us progressed very slowly at first. Although they may not have understood what I was saying, a smile never left my host parents' face as they showed me around the city. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of this old world city juxtaposed next to modern shopping plazas, high rise apartments, and restaurants, including those ubiquitous golden arches.

Living with my host family was one of the best parts of my experience abroad. The moment I stepped through the door I felt as if I was truly home. As it turns out my host parents were actually grandparents, so I was

lucky enough to meet three different generations of the family and see each one's own perspective on things. Their little granddaughter Sasha loved playing games and upon meeting me for the first time quickly grabbed my hand and led me to play one of her favorite board games. She was also an avid animal lover, so in the best French I could muster I would piece together stories about my dogs and cats back home for her. My reward for a good story was usually a high-five, and for those times when the French language got the best of me, Sasha's laughter seemed to ease the embarrassment.



Classes in Montpellier were some of the most exciting and interesting classes I've ever taken. Although the basic structure of the classes were very similar to the structure of my

classes at UB, interaction was a key principle in every lesson. The best example I can think of was from a class where we were learning different aspects of everyday French life. Instead of just reading out of a textbook or

running exercises in class the teacher had us actually create a French alter ego. We all were laughing as we made up hysterical background stories for each others characters and participated in different everyday situations. Besides living with my host family I also felt as if I had grown to have a second family at school too. Meeting students from countries like Japan, Spain, Belgium, Croatia, and Senegal, just to name a few, allowed me to gain an international perspective on many issues that were facing all our countries. It was interesting to see how quickly we became attached for how diverse our backgrounds were. There was never a dull moment in Montpellier with a world class art museum and opera, open air markets, street performers, the many parks scattered throughout, and of course the beautiful Mediterranean beaches that were just a short tram ride away.

I truly believe my undergraduate experience would not have been the same without this study abroad program. You can study class after class on a topic and never get the same understanding or appreciation for it as you would actually living it. I would have not been able to have such an amazing opportunity had it not been for the help and support of the Social Sciences Interdisciplinary Program in addition to the honor of receiving the IDP Travel Abroad Scholarship.

