

Study Abroad Reflection

During the summer of 2023, I studied abroad in Lyon, France, for two months through the University Study Abroad Consortium (USAC) at the Université Catholique de Lyon (UCLy). Outside of the French courses I took throughout high school and college, I had limited exposure to French culture and people. I was going into a completely new experience, knowing no one and forcing myself to face a new environment, initially all alone.

From a young age, I always entertained the idea of studying abroad or potentially going across the country for college. I have always loved to learn about different places, different cultures, and made an effort to surround myself with a diverse group of people. As I got older, my desire to study abroad faded as I felt complacent with my life and the environment I was surrounded by. It wasn't until college that I realized studying abroad would become my reality after I decided on my major, Language and International Health. Through the major, all students are required to study abroad in a country that speaks the language they are studying for an entire semester, which is how I had the opportunity to study abroad in Lyon, France, during the summer semester.

After studying French for eight years, I still didn't feel very confident about having to spend a prolonged time in a French-speaking country. Upon arrival, I was even more humbled listening to the people around me. One day, I spent some time exploring Parc de la Tête d'Or and was approached by a little kid. He ran up to me and immediately asked me a question in French. As I stared back at him, uttering a quiet "comment?" as I tried to comprehend what he was saying, he replied, "Oh... Sorry!" while slowly walking away. I was on the phone with a friend

when the interaction occurred and felt a strong wave of embarrassment while the friend teased me. Luckily, I made a great group of friends, some of whom were pretty good French speakers and were able to help me navigate France a bit better, helping me avoid awkward situations like that. Throughout my days exploring the city and further experiencing the culture, I did not have many issues and could get by since I spent most of the time communicating with my friends in English. I also did not stay with a host family where I could easily practice my conversational French, but I stayed in a dorm by myself. Looking back, I realize how beneficial it would've been for my French comprehension and how I should've put more effort into progressing in French. However, I find great value in my privacy, and I was able to improve through all my courses, so I still learned a lot.

Additionally, I found it significantly more challenging to understand some of my French courses at UCLy. Many courses were offered in English or beginner-level French, but I instead took classes that required at least a level B2 (intermediate) French. Thankfully, I didn't have much issue with my French language courses. However, the courses that focused on other topics like art and literature, which were taught in French, posed a real challenge for me. After my second year of French classes at Clemson, I started to feel the rigor in the courses as I had to study a bit harder than I was used to. The courses taught at UCLy were even more intense. Towards the end of each of the classes, I had a decent understanding of the content and our assignments. However, I did have to consult some of my friends to ensure we all had the same understanding. Luckily, through these challenging classes, my French comprehension grew stronger than it had ever been before.

After completely immersing myself in the French language and culture for two months, I felt more confident in my French comprehension skills. I was utterly surprised by how much of

an impact being abroad had on me for only two months. I traveled to several places throughout France with my family, who came to visit twice, and some truly amazing lifelong friends. I saw many gorgeous views, ate delicious food, saw one of my favorite artists (Harry Styles) live in concert and experienced some of the best that France had to offer. I have experienced living alone in an entirely new country and achieved a greater sense of independence that I had never and have yet to experience in the United States. Furthermore, it allowed me to further see the beauty of language and different cultures. With the knowledge, skills, and experiences I gained thanks to my major and studying abroad, I am more excited than ever to learn and explore what the rest of the world has to offer.