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***Academics***

1. *General academic structure:*

If taking the English track, most of the classes are taught by foreign professors. Therefore, the classes are held for 2 ½ days and then are done for the semester until you have the final. There were a few French professors when I was there, but I think in the future there won’t be any French professors. Not all courses have a final test at the end – many have final presentations on the last day of the class. If the course is for 2 ½ days, you have class from 8:30-16:45 for two days, then 8:30-12:00 the third day. You get a break every 1 ½ hours and a 1 ½ lunch, so don’t worry about getting too burnt out! It’s very rare that we had class every day of the week. It’s kind of confusing to explain the schedule, so if you’re interested, I can send you mine. Also, there is usually a week of vacation each month – perfect for travelling!

1. *Classes taken/how they compare to courses here:*

Since the credit system is different in France, I ended up taking 12 classes. Everyone has to take a French language course, but you take a test when you arrive to test your level. There are also optional classes you can take, some of which are in French. So if you’re brave enough, you can take a few classes in French. ☺ The classes are quite basic compared to the classes in Carlson since there isn’t a lot of class time. Also, since most people aren’t native English speakers, the classes and the finals are relatively easy. I went after only having three classes in Carlson, but I think if you’ve already taken a lot of courses in Carlson, the courses in Bordeaux won’t have any new material or be very challenging. When taking the finals, you get an ‘International Student’ sticker so they grade you more easily, which is nice if you decide to take optionals, which are usually more difficult because there are mostly French students in them.

1. *Advising:*

I didn’t have to use the advising very often, but when I did need help, they were usually helpful. Sometimes it seemed as if it was very disorganized, but most things in France are! You just need to have patience and you’ll get what you want or need. They also have a site online, similar to WebCT, where all the courses are listed and you can find all the information for the classes. General information is also listed on the site.

1. *Surprises/comparison with academic environment in the U.S:*

Absolutely everyone brings their laptop to class! It was interesting since I usually take notes in a notebook in the U.S., but since almost every professor puts their slides online before class, it’s easiest to take notes on the slides in PowerPoint. The best part is that there’s rarely ever homework! A lot of the courses have group projects based on case studies, but they are generally very simple. There are a few papers, but if that’s the case, the paper usually replaces a final.

***Logistics***

1. *Orientation/Arrival:*

The student group at the school, Melting Potes, is very helpful with your arrival and orientation. They had someone pick me up at the airport and bring me to my apartment and help with my luggage. They also plan a lot of events for the first week after people arrive, since classes don’t start until after one week. Every night there was something different to do – we went ice skating, to a bar, the movies, took a trip to a winery, etc. It was a great way to meet all the other international students and see a fun part of Bordeaux.

1. *Housing:*

I had an apartment in the city center, which Melting Potes helped me find. I had a German roommate who went to the Bordeaux Medical School, but her semester ended in March, so I lived alone after that. Most of the apartments in the city center are very nice. They’re in old buildings, but the interior is usually quite modern. There is student housing next to the school (DomoFrance), but I don’t recommend living there. Its nickname is Alcatraz and for good reason. Living next to the school is nice because you can roll out of bed and get to class in less than 5 minutes, but since there are rarely classes, it’s not worth it. The trams stop at midnight during the week and 1 a.m. on the weekends, so people who lived there always found it difficult to get home after a night out. Also, there’s not a lot to do outside of the city center, so people living in Domo always found themselves coming downtown anyway.

1. *Meals:*

There is a cafeteria at the school for when there are classes, but it can get expensive buying lunch there all the time. There is also another cafeteria at the Arts et Métiers tram stop, which is cheaper and had better food. I usually just brought a sandwich or fruit to lunch to save money. For dinner, I usually cooked at my apartment, went to friends’ apartments, or we went out to eat. There are a lot of really nice restaurants in Bordeaux and a large variety of foods served. I recommend going to ‘La Raclette’ – it’s kind of pricey, but very good!

1. *Transportation:*

If you live in the city center, you can get a free bike for six months from the city. Otherwise the tram runs quite frequently and there are a number of buses you can take. As I said, the tram stops at midnight during the week and at 1 a.m. on the weekends. Otherwise it’s about an hour walk from the city center to the school/DomoFrance. You can also call a taxi if you don’t want to walk. There are multiple options for buying transportation tickets. However, most people ride without paying and just get off if they see the checkers. I usually walked to the school or got a ride from a friend, so I didn’t buy many tram tickets.

1. *Student activity groups****:***

There are a lot of groups at the school and a wide variety of groups to choose from. There’s a wine club, sports club, surfing club, marketing club, etc. The clubs plan events throughout the semester, which are always fun! For a small fee you can attend the events they plan, usually a night at the club, and it’s a great way to meet other students! There is also a student group called Execution that will help you find jobs if you want to earn some quick cash. A lot of the jobs are handing out surveys at the movie theater or the supermarket. I did one job where I called hotels in Asia and asked for contact information for their F&B manager, which was good because it was in English! I earned about 67 Euros after working 8 ½ hours. I also joined the sports club. If you join the sports club, you pay one fee and can play as many sports as you want. They have handball, tennis, soccer, rugby, volleyball, and basketball. I ended up joining the basketball team and it was a lot of fun! It gave me a chance to really practice my French and meet new people. We had practice once a week and at least one game every week. There was a ‘Challenge Ericome’ weekend where 6 other schools came to Bordeaux to compete in a sports challenge. It was a lot of fun, especially since girls’ basketball won (woo!!) and the school won overall! So if you get a chance, stop in the sports bureau and check out the trophy. ☺

#### *French Culture*

1. *What were some surprises or insights you had into the culture of your host country/school?*

The French culture seems quite different than the American culture. It is a lot more slow-paced than life in America. Meals often take hours and workers in banks, the post offices, university, etc. are in no hurry to help you with what you need. It can sometimes be frustrating when you need something done, but I quickly got used to the slower life style as it was easier to relax and enjoy my time in Bordeaux. There are also a lot of smokers in France and the rest of Europe. Even in clubs, where people are supposed to smoke outside, some would still smoke inside. There were many strikes in France, sometimes upsetting normal daily life. While I was there, SNCF (trains), the public transport, and many others went on strike. When public transport went on strike, trams ran very infrequently, some lines not running on some days, and would stop by 7 p.m. This caused a lot of problems for people living in Domo that wanted to come out at night, but the strike only lasted one week, so it wasn’t too bad. The French love to be outside. The park and riverside were always full of people and many people run, bike, and rollerblade near the river. The French are a lot more willing to help when you speak French with them. Even if your French isn’t great at least attempt and allow the French person decide when it’s time to switch to English.

1. *What are your recommendations for ways that other exchange students can learn about and become immersed in the culture?*

Become friends with French people. It’s really easy to just hang out with the internationals, which is a great way to learn about their cultures, but if you really want to learn about the French, you have to seek them out. Some of them can be hesitant to become really good friends with you since they already have a good friend base and you’ll only be there for six months, but most are willing to hang out with internationals. They’re as interested in the American culture as you are in the French culture and it’s great to learn from each other. Also spend time in Bordeaux. A lot of people spent a good chunk of their time travelling around Europe, then regretted not staying in Bordeaux longer.

1. *Did you have the chance to learn a second language? Why or why not?*

I already knew quite a bit of French – I took 3 semesters in high school and 3 semesters at the U of M – but I found that my French was not as good as I thought it was. It was difficult at first to get used to the accent and to constantly think in French. Playing basketball and making friends with French people not in the English track made it easier to practice my French, learn a little more, and increase my confidence when speaking French. A lot of the internationals didn’t know any French, so we usually spoke English. If you want to learn French, you really have to put forth the effort.

***Social Life***

1. *How would you rate your integration with other students from the host university?*

There were a lot of parties at the beginning of the semester, which were great opportunities to meet other students from the University. Joining the school groups is also a great way to meet other students. I found most students to be very nice and welcoming to the internationals.

1. *How would you rate your integration with other international students?*

With the help of events planned by Melting Potes, it was very easy to integrate with the other internationals. There are a lot of international students at BEM from all over the world. There weren’t very many Americans, which I found interesting, but there were a lot of people from Asia, Mexico, Canada, and other parts of Europe. There were also a few Brazilians and Australians. I thought all the exchange students were very friendly and open to meeting everyone and learning from each other.

1. *What were some of the best ways you found to make friends and meet people at the host university?*

Joining student groups is one of the best ways to meet French people and sometimes other international students. Another great way is to attend the parties that student groups plan at clubs or students plan at their apartments. I was still meeting people at parties at the very end of the semester and found it as a great way to meet people at the beginning of the semester as well. After meeting someone once, be sure to say “Salut!” to them when you see them in the hallway or at the bar. It usually starts a conversation and increases your chances of becoming better friends.

1. *What kinds of after-hours and weekend activities would you recommend for other students?*

There are many parties planned by students, which are always a lot of fun. Otherwise, there are a lot of bars and clubs that you can go to at night. Often, we sat in Victoire (a plaza) at a bar Friday nights and just hung out. Café des Sports is always a fun bar to go to for soccer and rugby matches. For weekend trips, there are many small towns in the area, either near the beach or wine towns. I recommend getting a ‘Carte 12-25’ from SNCF, which will make the train tickets a lot cheaper. Arcachon and Dune de Pyla are about one hour from Bordeaux; otherwise Biarritz (a great surfing spot) and St. Sebastian (Northern Spain) are a little further away. St. Emillion is a wine town many people visit.

***Other***

1. *Budgeting: how much would you recommend students take with them? How much would you say would be the monthly living expenses in the city you lived in including rent/food/misc. expenses?*

Depending on how much your rent is, I would think that a budget of 400-500 Euros per month for all expenses should be enough. It also depends on how much you want to travel, but there are a lot of cheap airlines you can use – I was usually able to travel for a week or more with about 200-300 Euros or less. When travelling, I used couchsurfing.com, which is a website where you can find people to stay with. You stay in their apartment with them for free and they usually cook you meals and take you out at night. I found it to be a great way to save money and meet a lot of new and interesting people.

1. *Do you have suggestions on the types of students who would be well suited to this program?*

The student should be very open-minded and independent. It’s also best to know what you want from studying abroad, as it is easy to just stay in your comfort zone and not experience new cultures or learn anything from the experience. You will meet a lot of different people while in Bordeaux and it’s best to be very open to the cultural differences.

1. *Did you need a visa to enter the country? If so, how did you apply for one and how long did it take to receive?*

You do need a visa to study in France. You first need to register with Campus France and make an appointment with the embassy in Chicago. Make sure to check online for all the documents you need when you go to Chicago. The visa should be ready about 3 hours after the appointment, so you can get the visa the same day.

1. *What recommendations would you give to other CSOM students going on this program (to bring, to wear, etc.)?*

If staying in an apartment, ask the landlord what’s already in the apartment. Mine already had towels, bedding, and everything needed in a kitchen – it made it a lot easier to pack. For girls, I would recommend maybe buying a hair dryer once in France. The electricity flow is a lot stronger there, which causes American appliances to overheat and break. Bordeaux doesn’t get very cold, so you probably don’t need a big jacket. However, it rains a lot, so bring an umbrella that you can easily carry in a backpack or purse – just in case! The French wear a lot of black in the wintertime, so if you really want to fit in, dress as they do!

1. *General recommendations for study abroad:*

Be ready for anything. No matter how much you plan ahead, there are situations that will arise that may surprise you. Ask students who have already gone for tips or contact the Study Abroad office to see if anyone from Bordeaux is currently studying in Carlson. Don’t be afraid to try new things – many people want to share the customs from their country – and some of them are quite different from what Americans are used to! It’s easiest if you speak at least a little French. With internationals you’ll usually speak English, but to get along in everyday life, it’s best to have a good base.

1. *What resources did you use to plan your trip or semester travels that you think other students should know about?*

For my flight tickets, I just searched online for the cheapest I could find; although it’s probably easier to use STA travel on campus. There are many options for semester travels. RyanAir has cheap tickets, but you have to take a train to Paris to get on the plane. EasyJet flies out of Bordeaux, but to limited destinations. Trains are usually relatively cheap, especially with the Carte 12-25. There is also a bus line, Eurolines, which leaves from Bordeaux. The sooner you book the tickets, the cheaper they are – and the prices change quickly!

1. *Did you receive a scholarship for your study abroad program? If so, can you tell us about the award, how you found it, and the details of the application process?*

I did receive scholarships. I received a scholarship as a freshman to use while studying abroad, which was awarded when I was accepted to Carlson. I also applied for the scholarships from Carlson and Learning Abroad Center after I was accepted to the Bordeaux program and received one scholarship from that. I also tried contacting the Rotary Club from where I went to high school to see if they could sponsor me or give me a small scholarship, but I didn’t contact them early enough for them to help me.

If you would be willing to be contacted by prospective students to this program, please let us know how we can reach you! Your preferred e-mail (for student contacts), and address/phone (for our office) would be much appreciated!

Email to:

Kirsten Alexejun, International Programs

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