When I initially applied to the study abroad program, I expected to finally obtain the full cultural immersion that I have been missing since first starting my study of French. I knew that as a language learner, there is only so much being in a classroom can teach you and to become truly proficient in a language one must live or at least travel, to a country where this language is the national language or at least commonly spoken. Furthermore, as a participant of this exchange program, a couple of my expectations were to better my verbal communications and to acquire a stronger connection to the French culture. When I got there I was awarded with just that; and managed to see and experience the home of Marianne.

I had heard tales of how cultural enriching France was: the multitude of museums and palaces, the delicious food (most particularly the crepes), the plethora of people coming from all over the world, cheap flights to other countries a part of the
The administrative steps it took to get me there was one of the most arduous and challenging experiences of my life; both at Georgia State and at UVSQY. After writing two essays, giving a list of all the French courses I have taken plus a complete transcript, uploading my passport information, filling out and submitting the application for the exchange program and having an interview with the Program Director; I was finally notified that I was accepted into the exchange program.

However, the process did not end there. I had to make sure all of my immunization and health forms were complete, enroll in GSU’s mandatory HTH Worldwide Insurance, meet with Financial Aid Advisor, apply to scholarships (specifically the Global Experience Scholarship and the IEF Scholarship, both of which I received however I was only allowed to keep the one with the larger sum), pick courses and have them approved by my Program Director to be sent to UVSQY, and then lastly sign a waiver of liability from GSU.

After completing all of this, I was pleasantly surprised by a third administrative process consisting of obtaining my visa from the French Consulate in Atlanta, applying officially as an international exchange student to UVSQY, applying for housing on campus, notifying my home bank institution and my insurance company of my travel plans (I already had a membership to a health insurance company but GSU insisted that I enrolled in one of theirs, as well as give them a little bit of my soul - just kidding, they wanted all of it).
As for the process while in France, as soon as I arrived I had to figure out the transportation system tout de suite. The day before I left to go to France, I found out that there was a miscommunication and the school would not be providing a pick-up service from the airport to help us get to our apartments. So the entire night, I spent looking at France’s train system website and mapping out my way from the airport to my apartment. Before leaving, my mentor warned me not to look like a tourist or someone would surely take advantage of me. So by the time I got off the plane I had the route memorized and luckily I safely managed to navigate my way without having any issues.

The entire journey took about 2 hours. Once on campus, it took me another 30-45 minutes to figure out how to get into the building. The doors to the building were entirely locked and there was no sign mentioning a call number to buzz in. I ended up going into one of the classroom buildings and bumped into a French girl after explaining to her my issue (in French of course) she then escorted me to the Student Life office. The director there, a nice Guadeloupian man named Denis, and then helped me get into my residence building. Once in, the Director of my dorm and Head of Housing notified me for all dorms with the University that I would not be allowed to move in until I acquired renters insurance from a local bank. Thankfully, Mr. Denis escorted me to the nearest bank LCL or Le Crédit Lyonnais located in the shopping district near campus. Here, he helped me set up an account (French Me Up, a group on campus dedicated to helping international students assimilate into French culture actually set up an arrangement with this bank so that the international students would receive 20 euros automatically for creating an account and would receive free home insurance which can typically cost up to over 100 euros.) After getting my home insurance, I was able to go back to the dorm and check in.

Moving in was a relatively easy process, the only pitfall was that I had to wait to receive a username and password for the wifi. Until I was able to get a French sim card and cell phone provider, I limited the amount of calls on my American phone. Later on that day my friend who was also doing the program with me, arrived and we located the nearest restaurant (of course it was a McDonalds). Thankfully, the McDonald’s in France also provide free wifi to their customers so over the next week or two weeks while I wanted on access to the internet in my dorm I would have to go to McDonalds or other restaurants to use their wifi to call home (thank the Heavens for FaceTime and Skype!)
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Schengen Area, etc. But I had no idea as to the extent of it all. Not to mention the fact that being enrolled in a French school enabled me to get the perks of being an European student; meaning I was able to visit the majority of cultural places for free or at very reduced prices. This was also true in other countries I visited as well (I went to Amsterdam and Barcelona).

In the end, this program greatly ameliorated my communicative and writing in French as well as increased my awareness and understanding of their culture. Furthermore, I feel like it may have tightened the Franco-American relationship. I met a lot of Francophone people, and more than a few of them remarked how I was not like the Americans they saw on reality television. Hearing this was one of the highlights of my journey in France, knowing that I was able to help correct a misconceived notion about us.

Feedback on Dorms

My dorm was located directly on campus so luckily I did not have a long nor far commute. Within a 5 minute walking distance was the shopping plaza where I found the McDonald’s, as well as could have all of my basic needs met (I could go grocery and clothes shopping without even having to take the bus or train, or walk miles). Also, if I wanted to go exercise there was a lovely and fairly large park right behind my apartment connected to campus. My actual apartment was a moderate size. I had one roommate and we shared the downstairs area consisting of a living room/kitchen area (and separate refrigerators) and a full bathroom but we had separate rooms.

My room was a bit smaller than hers because she had a full balcony whereas I just had a window. In all honestly, the size of my room was still comfortable enough to live in without getting claustrophobic plus there was a large desk with a chair, a bookshelf (which actually was for organizing your clothes), a bed and a radiator. I did get a chance to visit a friend of mine in his single dorm room in another dormitory called Lamarck located in Elancourt; and was kind of relieved to have my housing arrangement. His room was a single room with a bed, and desk squished in together, and not too far from his bed was the kitchen area and even closer to the kitchen area was his bathroom. When I visited I found it was a tad bit small for two people to navigate comfortably and afterwards we agreed to just meet at my place.

Quick Facts!

Before leaving, my mentor warned me not to look like a tourist or someone would surely take advantage of me. So by the time I got off the plane I had the route memorized and luckily I safely managed to navigate my way without having any issues.

1. It is safe to say that I quickly became addicted to the daily made fresh bread and the delicious cheese.

2. One very important fact that I learned was that the French never work on Sundays.

3. I actually encountered a lot of people who did not mind me practicing my French with them.
Some cultural facts I discovered in France

One very important fact that I learned was that the French never work on Sundays. I recall hearing this echoed in the movie Amelie, but I had no idea to what extent it was true. If you had to do anything on Sunday you had to do it very early because the French really view Sunday as time to be with their families. While over there, I also discovered that the common perception of French people loving bread, cheese and wine was in fact true - and for good reason!

It is safe to say that I quickly became addicted to the daily made fresh bread and the delicious cheese. Every time I went shopping I tried a new type of cheese and unfortunately, I only touched about 2-5% out of the overall cheese population.

As for the bread, one of my proudest moments was finally figuring out how to keep my bread fresh and soft after the first day (I have no idea why but the French bread hardens quickly the longer it is left out without properly sealing it in an airtight bag).

Concerning the wine, the French people seem to truly value it but not in a bad way. If I had make a comparison, I would say to them wine is more so like the nectar or ambrosia from the gods instead of being just another alcoholic beverage like beer.

Ways to make the best out of the experience!

To make the best out of studying abroad I say, do not be shy to meet with the French people. I actually encountered a lot of people who did not mind me practicing my French with them. And for some of them, I actually helped them practice their English. We would talk entirely in French, or they would talk in English to me while I would talk in French to them, or vice versa.

Another tip is to keep in mind that the French people tend to value time a little differently than we do in America. Several food restaurants and banks would be closed for about 2-3 hours a day so their workers could go home for lunch, or pick up their kids, etc.

Also the city where the campus is located (Guyancourt) is very small so the stores tend to close quite early (like around 9 P.M.). Concerning money, I would say always take out large amounts instead of repeatedly taking out small amounts, so as not to have a ridiculous amount of fees taken out of your account.

Try to meet other international students. This cultural exchange can expand to beyond just that of the French domain. My roommate was Korean, on my hall lived several Brazilians, a girl from Lithuania, a couple of Turkish girls, and so many other nationalities outside of the Francophonie.
Lastly, concerning obtaining a French phone and sim card; it would be much easier to have your phone unlocked by your service provider before leaving. That way once you arrive in France you could just use your regular cellular device without having to purchase a new French phone. I purchased my sim card from Free Mobile (the website for them is [http://mobile.free.fr/](http://mobile.free.fr/)). All I had to do was set up an account with them online, pick the plan I wanted and they mailed me my sim card within a week. Their plans are really cheap and I ended up spending 2 euros a month on unlimited texting within France, 2 hours for calls within France and internationally (but the recipient of your call still had to pay their regular cellular providers international rate) and 50 MB for the internet. The 2 hours for calls did not bother me because I knew that I would not need to make that many calls on my phone.
My next step after my GSU graduation

My eventual career goal is to become a translator and I believe that my Linguistic and French background plus my experience during this exchange program would be able to provide me with the cultural enrichment necessary to become a successful translator.