Summer 6-24-2020

My Time in France

Morgan Harsh
mharsh@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects

Part of the International Business Commons

Repository Citation
https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/477

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@BGSU.
My Time In France

Honors Project

Morgan Harsh

Dr. Bruce Collet

Dr. Steve Koppitsch

June 24th, 2020
HONORS PROJECT

MY TIME IN FRANCE

MORGAN HARSH
# Table Of Contents

**Introduction**  
5

**Preparing To Go Abroad**  
6  
Paying for School  
6  
Getting the Visa  
6  
Buying The Plane Ticket  
7  
Packing  
8  
Arriving in Europe  
8  
The City of Strasbourg  
9

**Reflection: Part One**  
10

**September**  
12  
My Dorm  
12  
French Phone  
13  
Tram Pass  
14  
Orientation Week  
15  
Culture Shock  
16  
Meeting New People  
17  
Start of Semester A  
18  
School Restaurants  
20  
Getting Food Outside Of School  
20

**October**  
21  
Travel Apps To Use  
21  
Visiting Basel, Switzerland  
22

**Reflection: Part Two**  
23

**November**  
24  
A Visit to the European Parliament  
24  
Visiting Nancy, France  
25  
Christmas Market Opening Weekend  
27  
Thanksgiving in France  
27

**December**  
28  
Finals Week and Strikes  
28  
Trip to the Movie Theater  
29  
Visiting Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany  
30

**Reflection: Part Three**  
31

**January**  
33  
Visiting Heidelberg, Germany  
33
Start of Semester B

February

- Visiting Brussels, Belgium
- Visiting Brugge, Belgium
- Visiting Amsterdam, Netherlands

Reflection: Part Four

March

- A Change Of Plans
- Heading Home Last Minute
- The Switch To Online Classes

April

- Online Finals and Finishing The Academic Year

Reflection: Part Five
Introduction

My first trip to Europe was in the summer of 2015 when I was 16 with my family. The vacation involved a two-week itinerary to visit Rome, Vatican City, Florence, Venice, Pisa, and Paris. Two-weeks was too short to become involved in the European culture and the trip was heavily focused on tourist experiences. Even though the trip was a great experience as my first trip to Europe, it was missing the cultural aspect that you can only receive by spending an extended period of time in Europe. Due to this experience, I knew I had to get back to Europe as soon as possible.

The program I applied for was the BGSU in France: University of Strasbourg Business Exchange for the 2019-2020 academic school year. By completing the program, I would receive my Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a Specialization in International Business from BGSU and a Bachelor of Arts in European Management from Strasbourg. This program is exceptional since the participants are able to get two degrees for the work and price of one all while exploring Europe. The program was one of the main factors that led me to choose BGSU so no one was going to get in my way to get accepted into the program.
Preparing To Go Abroad

Preparing to go abroad involves a completely different process than going to a school 2.5 hours away in the same state. Students only have to pay tuition for Bowling Green but have to pay Strasbourg for housing and other miscellaneous charges. Not to mention applying for a Visa and buying a plane ticket. Even packing is different because you can't just overpack your parents car and bring everything you want.

Paying for School

I had paid for the BGSU tuition using the University Freshman Academic Scholarship, the Honors Experience Study Abroad Fund, the Misamore International Studies Scholarship, the RING Fund for Study Abroad, the Edgar Emerson Scholarship, and the John Blevins Business Scholarship. All of these scholarships were given because I had joined the program and filled out the general scholarship application. I already knew I had the Freshman and Honors scholarships, but all the others were nice surprises that completely covered tuition. My residence, necessities, travel, and other miscellaneous expenses were covered by part of my college fund, savings from working, and gifts from family members. This allowed me to skip taking out any loans my third year of college. For when abroad, I created three different payment methods. My first was a prepaid card to pay for rent and use at ATMs without receiving any bank fees. The second was a debit card connected to my checking account that used to pay for my phone, tram, and other online charges. Finally, I had my credit card so I could pay for train tickets, hotels, and have it for emergencies. I also gave my parents access to these accounts so that if any issues happened they would be able to fix them and get help from the bank.

Getting the Visa

When applying for the Visa, there is a tedious process to follow. The first step is to create a Campus France account where you verify the school you were accepted into and personal information. Then, it costs $190 for the information to be sent and reviewed in a 3 week period. It costs more than that for a 3 day review period. After receiving the confirmation email, the real fun begins. I was in the process of requesting a long stay Visa that would be valid from August 15th 2019 to May 15th 2020. Campus France provides a link to schedule
a Visa appointment with VFS Global that costs about $30. I ended up choosing to go to Atlanta over Chicago to make a little weekend vacation out of it and I had already been to Chicago multiple times. When at the appointment there are multiple documents needed and they are as follows:

- Campus France Confirmation Email (printed)
- Visa Appointment Confirmation Email (printed)
- Electronic Version of Visa Application (printed)
  - This is still needed even though it’s filled out and turned in online.
- Valid Passport with space for Visa Sticker
- Scanned photocopy of Passport
- Proof of French Residence
  - I used my dorm confirmation email and it was accepted.
- Proof of Financial Means
  - These can be recent bank statements or college savings accounts
- Smaller than Passport sized photo
  - If you bring a Passport size photo then they claim it’s too big and charge you for retaking it at their location.

Although the people working there are very nice, somehow it’s worse than the BMV if you do not have your documents together and have to do the biometric information (fingerprints). I did end up receiving the Visa about 1.5 weeks later which was very quick and came well before I had to leave for Europe. More charges come later when you have to buy the electronic stamp to verify and confirm the Long-Stay Visa which was about 60 Euros. Costs do add up when getting a Visa so it’s important to budget enough funds for all the required steps.

**Buying The Plane Ticket**

When buying a plane ticket, I originally got a round trip ticket from Indianapolis to Paris through Delta for the dates August 30th 2019 to December 21st 2019. Since my program went until the end of April, Delta did not have a schedule for flights in the beginning of May. I got a round trip ticket because it was cheaper than buying two one-way tickets. Just one one-way ticket could cost about $2000 through Delta. However, my grandma had lots of
travel points to give out so my plane ticket only cost $60 rather than $1,200 for a round trip ticket that had the option of having dates changed. A roundtrip ticket that didn't have an option to change my return date would have been $800. Once the May flight schedule was released, my Dad and I changed my return flight to May 2nd, 2020. The change charge was $300, so my total round trip ticket only cost $360; without the travel points it would cost $1,500.

Packing

I traveled with my Dad during the trip over to Strasbourg, which was nice because it gave me a sense of security and extra space to bring necessities to Europe. We both had one suitcase, one carry-on suitcase, and one personal item that we used for our backpacks. In my suitcase and carry-on I only packed clothes for the spring and winter seasons, suitcase locks to use when traveling, and other small personal items. In my backpack I had my small purse, Laptop, iPad, and chargers. I only packed items that I would want to keep and bring back home and still have room for any souvenirs that I would like to bring back. In my dad's suitcase and carry-on, I packed items that I could use in Europe. These would include items I wouldn't find over there or didn't want to buy new and throw away at the end of the year. These included some winter shoes, thin sheets, school supplies, and other items that I was familiar with from the US. Since my dad would only be in Europe for a few days, he was able to fit all his clothes and necessities in his backpack.

Arriving in Europe

Traveling involved a lot more work than it did getting to BG. My dad and I had a 2 hour drive from Cincinnati to the Indianapolis Airport. Checking in and getting through TSA Security went faster than expected. We spent a few hours getting dinner before our flight
and finding our gate. During the 8 hour flight, Delta offered a variety of movies and T.V. shows to pass the time. I was supposed to be sleeping since it was an overnight flight but ended up catching up on some Disney movies while my dad was catching up on Marvel movies. Upon arrival, retrieving our suitcases was stressful since my dad’s suitcase showed up 20 minutes after mine. Once all the luggage was accounted for we went to buy train tickets from Paris to Strasbourg. These were not bought in advance because I couldn't predict if there would be any delays and how long security would take. We ended up with first class tickets because the second class seats were filled before we arrived. After waiting a couple hours for the train to arrive came the task of figuring out how the train worked because seats were assigned. Luckily, there were a few passengers who spoke English and were kind enough to point us in the right direction to find our seats. Finally, we were off on our 2.5 hour train ride fighting to not fall asleep.

The City of Strasbourg

When we first arrived in Strasbourg, navigating the train station was easy since my dad was there. I will admit I was still half-asleep because I fell asleep on the train, so navigating the train station was very quick. I spent the night of August 31st in Hotel Ibis which was just across the street from the train station. My dorm wouldn't be ready until September 1st, so we used our spare time to explore the city.

The city of Strasbourg has a history of switching between being a part of France and Germany. Walking around the city, it is apparent from the architecture and atmosphere of the influences of both countries. Strasbourg is also home to a beautiful Cathedral, the seat of the European Parliament, and the most famous Christmas market. There's also plenty of food to try like tarte flambée, Choucroute garnie, and kugelhopf. There are also a variety of
shops to explore from a small tourist shop to more expensive brands. Whenever you need something, there is a pretty high chance that you’ll find it in one of the many stores. During our exploration we got pizza and gelato while walking around the main city of Strasbourg. Afterwards, I fell asleep early since I was still dealing with lack of sleep and the time change.

Reflection: Part One

*What was it like preparing to go to a University in Europe vs Bowling Green State University?*

During the process of preparing for university in Europe, it felt like there were more steps and required more involvement on my part. When applying and packing to BGSU, my parents were more involved and confident in their help in the process of preparation. I was able to heavily rely on family members for help. When it came to applying abroad, my parents were still involved financially, but it was more on me to figure out where I was staying, scheduling appointments and figuring out how my classes and schedule were going to look in France. Extended family members also became involved differently when I was preparing to go abroad. Beforehand, the majority were very upbeat and supportive of going to BGSU. When I brought up studying abroad they began to speak more negatively. I had to listen to their opinion about the dangers and if I was sure if I wanted to go for a full year. Everytime they would say something discouraging, I would say something encouraging or just ignore it. I had to realize most of my relatives have never been and most likely will never have the chance to explore Europe. I had to realize everyone has an opinion, but you don’t have to acknowledge it. When preparing I learned to filter out the negative opinions and just focus on preparations for me and on the new adventure ahead.
How was it dealing with the upcoming stress and excitement about going to a different country?

Dealing with stress, at first, was easy because I tried to focus on the excitement of what I was going to do during my time in Europe. However, the most asked question was “are you nervous about going abroad? Because I would be.” Honestly, I was never nervous until this question was asked and I was very annoyed because everyone had to ask. I would have preferred to be asked “are you excited to go abroad?” I eventually realized to stop letting it get to me. When the last few weeks approached, my parents made me focus on my Law School Application Essay because they tried to distract me from being nervous. That didn’t work and my feelings really hit me the day before and the day that I left. I was so nervous that I wasn’t able to eat an entire meal for at least a week while I was trying to get into a routine in France. I just had to work through those emotions which were very similar to what I felt when I first started at BG and my parents left.

Did you have any assumptions of France and the French Culture before you went?

Honestly, many of my assumptions came from the brief time I spent in Paris in high school and from hearing about stereotypes. The first was the refusal of speaking English or being rude to those who speak English. I know that the French are very attached to their language and when I first went to Paris it was very hard to communicate if we weren’t at a tourist location. Another one of my experiences was that there was no tipping or very limited tipping at restaurants. Gratuity is either included in the check or they were put in with the cost of the meals so this caused service to be very limited compared to the U.S. Prevention of the customization of meals was also something that I presumed is what happens in all restaurants in France. Waiters weren’t very happy that you would order something and wanted to exclude an ingredient and would sometimes just say no. So I would have to order something with the majority of ingredients that I liked. I also had assumptions that involve the French and their hygiene and sanitary standards. My dad said he saw a woman carrying bread that wasn’t wrapped under her arm during the summer. So I figured I would have to be careful of where I got my food. Finally, my assumptions about the school would be about disorganization and laziness. I know the French don’t have the same belief about “time is money” and may not be as rushed to get anything done. Not to mention that the French also participate in strikes and are too focused on taking breaks and vacations.
What were my assumptions and/or worries regarding the French perceptions of Americans?

My main assumptions about how the French perceive Americans mainly involved us being too loud or obnoxious and our inability to speak French. I was so self conscious about my French ability that I bought a $4 French phrase tourist book from Half Priced Books. The first few days, I was afraid I would be immediately judged for not knowing how to speak any French and stand out easily because of my voice. When I was grocery shopping or exploring the city, I did everything to not have to open my mouth and speak because I was so nervous to have people judge me for not knowing French.

September

My Dorm

I applied for housing through a Google Survey Document sent by the EM Strasbourg International Office that opened at 9:00 am Eastern time and I filled it out in 30 seconds and had four choices for housing picked. A couple weeks after, I had to email the International Office about my upcoming Visa appointment and they replied that I got my fourth choice. When I asked the other two BGSU students going to Strasbourg, they said they did not get offered a dorm and ended up finding apartments which were about double and triple the amount I had to pay. Since I got a dorm, I didn't have to worry about filling out and figuring out applications for a French apartment. I did have to pay $60 for French housing insurance for 12 months even though I only had to stay for 8 months when I was emailed the contract.

I checked in on Sunday, September 1st into the Alfred Weiss Residence. To get my keys, I had to pay rent for September and a security deposit before I left for Europe by using a wire transfer. It was 263 Euros, the same as the deposit, a month for my own room and bathroom which would average around $285-$300 per month depending on the exchange rate when I went to the secretary office to pay with a prepaid card. I started off paying rent month by month, then figured out the secretary accepted more than one month at a time and just paid off 4 months at once to last me until the end of the program. Air conditioning also didn't exist in my dorm. Even though I had a heater, I never used it because it would
get too hot. Instead, I had to leave my windows open all the time, even through the winter, to allow air flow and keep my room cold the way I like.

**French Phone**

I had two phones to use while I was living in France. Before going to France, I turned on wifi calling on my iPhone so I would be able to contact friends and family back home so it would remain on airplane mode until I returned home. I also planned on using my phone as a camera since it had good photo quality and 128 GB of storage. I brought my old phone to add a french SIM Card with a french number to the phone. Originally I went to FREE but they didn't offer SIM Cards, or at least that's what the representatives claim. I didn't go to ORANGE because of a recommendation from others who have used it because of their difficulty with the company. So, I ended up getting a rechargeable SIM Card from SFR which cost 20.99 Euros every 30 days to recharge. This way I didn't have to pay Verizon over $100 a month for an international plan or mess with my iPhone by combining it with a French number. I also wouldn't have to open up a French bank account and deal with that process as well. On my French phone I downloaded all my travel apps and Whatsapp so I could contact family back home without wi-fi and be able to talk with those who I met at school to schedule trips and for group work conversations.
Tram Pass

The “Compagnie des Transports Strasbourgeois” or CTS building was located at the Alt Winmark Tram stop in the main city/tourist area. It took 1.5 hours to get through the line even though my dad and I thought we got there early. I asked for the Badgeo Card form, which is a plastic card that electronically holds the trams and bus tickets, and then filled it out while waiting for my number to get called. I believe I was number 198 or 298 but they were calling tickets in the 40's when we arrived. There was the main crowd that was completely unorganized but when your number was called you were asked to go into a 20 person line, then they would let you in at about 5 people at a time to wait in a line inside. Afterwards, you were finally asked to approach an available counter for service. The conversation involved a weird mixture of broken French and broken English because I did not practice. The service representative scanned my passport picture so that my ID could be added to the back of the card and I wouldn't have to carry around a passport sized photo. At first, all the payment cards kept declining, something was wrong with their machine because the cards worked everywhere else. I had to pay with cash instead, and luckily my Dad had enough cash on him to cover the amount. It was 27.50 Euros for the unlimited monthly pass that needs to be renewed every month at a tram stop and a one time charge of only 5 Euros for the creation of the card. The tram and bus pass was an investment well worth its cost. The convenience of the tram was amazing because I had a tram stop, Aristide Briand, right by my residence. I could easily get to school, the city center, the train station, and Germany all in 20 minutes or less.
Orientation Week

On September 2nd, I met a group of girls from Ireland who were staying in my residence and were in France to study law. That night I was invited to go out for a drink with them, which I was excited about. While they ordered wine and beer, I got a fancy bottle of Coke. I had to get up early the next day, I wasn’t 21 yet and didn’t want to break that streak, and my dad was still in town during this point. The next day, there was a meeting with all the English speaking exchange students at the movie theater in Strasbourg. During this meeting, advisors introduced themselves and we had to watch an EM Strasbourg Business School Promotional video. Afterwards students received their student IDs. There was an issue and only those with last names that started with A-K or L were able to receive them. Everyone else had to wait almost two months before they were able to get their IDs printed. Even though I got my ID, it was our first introduction into the French school system. Wednesday was the most boring part of orientation week. The advisors covered all the general academic information and online platforms. At the time, I had to use E.N.T (now
called Ernest) to create and view my schedule, Intranet to see my registered courses, and Moodle. Moodle is very similar to Canvas at BG but doesn't show any grades and can be displayed in English, French, and Dutch.

This was also the last day I saw my Dad since he had to leave early Thursday morning. When he was saying goodbye he had a little tear in his eye and I don't think he's cried since dropping me off at BG. So, I had to call my Mom right when it happened because I knew he would deny it.

The last day of orientation took place on Thursday September 5th and the school had scheduled a mandatory French Placement Test. When I got there and the amphitheater was crowded, it was announced that if students have no experience with French, they could just sign their name and will automatically be placed in the Complete Beginners course. At least half of the people in the room, including me, were not going to take it and signed our names and left. Classes didn't start for another two weeks after that, so my time was spent meeting new people and becoming acquainted with the city.

**Culture Shock**

My biggest culture shock I faced and should've been prepared for since I had been to Europe before was smoking. People smoking can take place anywhere. It was worse at tram stops and building entrances. For example, students would do it right by the entrance to the school and it felt like I had to hold my breath until I made it safely inside. France actually has restrictions and high taxes on smoking and cigarettes, however, these restrictions aren't heavily enforced which is why smoking seems heavily prevalent. One thing I didn't remember was that a majority of stores and restaurants closed on Sundays. I referred to it as the Chick-fil-a complex when friends and family back home would ask about it. I was so used to stores being open on Sunday and seeing people carrying on about their day in the U.S. However, in Strasbourg, some areas would turn into a ghost town. There were also a few little things that shocked me but weren't as significant. I had to change my French phone to display Military time so I could stay on schedule for classes and school meetings. There are also no screens on windows. So to keep air flow in my room, I would open the window without any defense against a bug trying to fly into my room. Next, I had to get used to reading the day before the month. When professors would
give out important dates, I had to do a double take to actually understand what the date was. My final culture shock was my first experience with strikes. I hadn't even been in France for a month and classes barely started before I was notified of the strike through a Facebook post. The post was phrased very nonchalant but that didn't stop me from being freaked out about getting to class on time. Luckily, it all worked out but I still wasn't onboard with the idea of strikes.

Meeting New People

There are a variety of benefits that come from a cross cultural friendship, especially within a foreign environment. I became more aware of my cultural self by being exposed to a variety of cultures instead of being sheltered in American culture. By being exposed to a new environment and new people you start to question and explore your beliefs. For example, why do you believe what you do? Explore finding new ways of thinking or work on solidifying your beliefs. Then you find out who you are as a person and work on new friendships. Finding new friends in an education abroad experience makes it easier to adjust to a new environment when you have people who understand you and are going through what you are going through. Once you've made one friend, it does get easier to talk to more people and make more culturally diverse friendships. I made multiple friendships during my experience in France, but there are a few that stood out to me the most and who I still maintain steady contact with.
The first friend I made was Anna from Germany. She was in the first class I had and we sat together and talked since we both arrived 15 minutes early and no one else was there. She became one of my best friends and we would explore Strasbourg and even go on day trips together. She is still one of the main people I talk to now that the program has ended, thanks to Whatsapp. Dominic, from San Diego, California, ended up being more of a classroom friend. Since we were both from the U.S., it was nice comparing our different experiences and having someone to relate to from back home. I didn't meet Ayano until the second semester. She was originally from Japan but had gone to high school in Hawaii and went to college in California. Though we grew up in different cultures she had some understanding of people from the U.S. and that may have been why we got along quickly and would end up exploring Northern Europe together. Without meeting these few people, I think my experience would be very different and I'm glad I still talk with them after the program.

Start of Semester A

Registering for classes at Strasbourg is not at all like it is for BGSU, but at least all the courses are taught in English. I didn't get to choose what times my classes were because students are put into one of four groups for the three core classes. These included Business Negotiations, Introduction to European Economic Policy, and Cases in International Marketing. I got to choose two electives through a Google survey, which were Basics in Strategy and Innovation Management. Again, I did not get to choose the times for those classes. Finally, my 6th class was French titled Complete Beginners I (A0) which I liked to joke that it was level 0 French. I was placed here since I opted out of the French placement test because I thought it was a good idea to study Spanish when I was younger.
Classes are scheduled so that they meet only once a week but can last anywhere from 2-4 hours. Luckily, they included “coffee breaks” which were just short 10-15 minute breaks where students can get up and walk around and use the restroom. Classes are advertised at a certain time, but always have the possibility of changing times, days, and room location. At first, I wasn’t a fan of the idea but I decided to roll with it since it was only 9 weeks of classes. The format of most classes relied heavily on group work, which I’m not even a fan of at BG. Grades heavily rely on the final exam grade, which for me would be up to 80% of the final grade. The French grading system follows a 1-20 scale with anything higher than a 10 being passing, and all class grades are also averaged together so that if the final grade average is over 10, then students will get their degree. I was made aware that the students will not find out their semester grades until mid-february because they do not record grades like they do on Canvas at BGSU. So, students will be halfway into the second semester before finding out what their scores are.
School Restaurants

At the University of Strasbourg, they don’t offer meal plans even though they have multiple student restaurants. Instead they connect the student ID to the app Izly, where the student decides how much money they want to upload and when they want to upload. I mainly went to the Resto U’ Esplanade because it was closest to the EM Strasbourg Business School and in between the tram stops “Observatoire” and “Universitaire”. The building had a to-go area, or as they call it take away, with premade sandwiches, sides, and bottled drinks which was nice if you wanted a cheap meal and only had a short time between classes. There was also a sit down area where you could choose a grilled (my personal favorite) fish, vegetarian, pasta, or international dish of the day. These meals were perfect because you could get an appetizer, entree, dessert, and bread roll for a total of 3.30 Euros or around $3.70 depending on the exchange rate. The locations also had pitchers to use at a water fountain. It was the perfect amount of food and very cheap compared to the Oaks and Carillon at BGSU where I never ate that much. BGSU food always felt expensive and like I was wasting a swipe or falcon dollars.

Getting Food Outside Of School

Grocery shopping is the obvious option of getting food outside of school but you have to be careful of where in Strasbourg because of prices. The cheaper places to go to and where some food can be bought in larger quantities are at Lidl and Aldi in Kehl, Germany which
are accessible by using tram D. Those stores are the better option for buying produce at cheaper prices than stores in Strasbourg. If I didn’t have time to go to Germany, I would go to Auchan or Carrefour since they were between my room and school. They are the best options to get prepared meals such as sandwiches or salads along with other grocery items. There are also quick and easy places to go out to eat with friends in between classes for when you don’t want to go to the student restaurants and still maintain a college student budget and be near the school. Boston Pizza, which is a tram stop away from the school, has a medium Margherita (cheese) pizza that only costs 5.50 Euros. Domino’s, which is right by the school, has a medium original pepperoni pizza for 5.49 Euros. Finally, Millennium, which is just a block away from the school, has French Tacos. French Tacos are filled with your choice of meat, veggies, sauce, and fries. At Millennium they are also served with an extra side of fries and drink for only 6 Euros on the student menu and are my personal new favorite food.

October

Travel Apps To Use

I ended up using three different travel apps and I do recommend having these apps. The first being app for the airline you fly with. Mine was Delta, which let me keep track of any
changes to my flight and allowed me to check-in online and choose my seats. The second being Oui.sncf, a France Trainline, app. This is compatible with the “Carte Advantage Jeune” which is a student discount ticket to be used on travel routes in France. If you plan enough trips, then the discount ticket pays for itself. The final app is the Trainline app, which can be used for trains and buses in different European countries. Trainline compares the cheapest options for trains and buses. These apps can be changed to be shown in English which makes them easier to use. There are also different Airline apps, such as Ryanair, for extremely cheap plane tickets within Europe. With these apps, it’s easy to save money for traveling.

**Visiting Basel, Switzerland**

This day-trip was my first time outside of Strasbourg and my first time to Switzerland. However getting to Switzerland had a bit of a rocky start. The morning of, the city center was shut down because of a race. The tram wouldn't go through the city so I had to take the tram as close to the train station that I could. After that, I had to walk to the train station the rest of the way, which was about 20-25 mins. Not the way I wanted to start my morning. The trip took place on a Sunday, involved a 1 hour and 45 minute train ride, and it was the first trip I took with my friend Anna. The city of Basel is located right at the tip of Switzerland, so if you went to a certain area overlooking the river, you would be standing in Switzerland, but looking at France and Germany. Since Anna and I went on a Sunday, not much was open so our time was mainly spent exploring the town and taking pictures outside. Since we missed breakfast, we decided to get brunch at a waffle place. I was shocked when one waffle with mixed fruit and a bottle of water was 11 Swiss Francs. At the time, 1 Swiss Franc was equal to 1 US Dollar, which hurt my wallet. But when we went for an Italian dinner, a margherita pizza was 16.50 Swiss Francs and was the cheapest meal on the menu. The waiter only spoke German, so Anna had to help translate so I could understand what was going on and be able to order. At the end of the day, I didn't get to buy a magnet because the only tourist office closed before we could return. Luckily, my parents found a Basel, Switzerland magnet on Amazon and ordered it for me. After my experience in Basel, I will probably never go back to Switzerland until I have a high paying job because it was a little
too expensive for me. My French phone also didn’t work over there because Switzerland is not part of the EU so we had to navigate by map only.

Reflection: Part Two

What have I learned about myself in these first two months and how have I changed?

I have learned that I am more independent than I originally thought. I can keep up on paying monthly bills such as rent, French phone bill, and renewing my tram subscription. Usually I would rely on my parents to keep track of bills and make sure college housing is paid in advance. Knowing I can keep up with monthly payments was a little bit of a confidence booster. I’ve also learned more about my budgeting skills and how to improve them. I can't go to the student restaurant every day like at Bowling Green and I can't rely on leftovers from my parents house. So, I've learned how to manage money when going to the grocery store and buying food that I know I won't waste or don't need. Budgeting is also necessary when planning trips and souvenirs to get. When it comes to train tickets factors such as departure time and length of time affect the price. Sometimes bus tickets are also cheaper than train tickets but require an extended amount of travel time. It's about weighing the pros and cons of each travel method when planning a trip and determining what I want to invest my money in. When it comes to souvenirs, I decided to only buy magnets that are priced around 3 euros. This is because they are durable for travel and take up a small amount of space. Being independent and able to budget are skills I had but I was greatly able to improve on them as I started my experience in Strasbourg.

What were some new situations, challenges, opportunities and how were they worked through?

I have experienced a variety of new situations and challenges so far in Strasbourg. However, there are a few that stand out more than the others. The biggest challenge I have faced is the communication barrier. During my first few weeks here, I would wander
around Strasbourg exploring the city. While I was standing at the tram stop or heading to a store, I would get approached by others in what I assumed were them asking for directions. I would have to explain that I was unable to speak French and understand them and became so self-conscious because it seemed like they gave me a judgemental look. But the new situations and opportunities outweigh the challenges. I have been exposed to more group work and new schedule planning. Group work has never been my favorite thing in the world and I was skeptical about having a majority of my classes focus on group work. Even though I am still not a fan, it has led me to meet and become friends with new people and work towards becoming a better person within a group.

**November**

**A Visit to the European Parliament**
The visit to the Strasbourg European Parliament was for my Introduction to European Economic Policy class. I was heavily disappointed that it was a history class of the EU and not an economics class like I have taken before. The professor expected the U.S. exchange students to memorize important people's names when we could hardly memorize those in the US government. Not even people who live in the EU recognized some of the names that the professor would bring up. However, the one thing I looked forward to during this class was a trip to Parliament. To start the role play game, as part of our class and tour, the class was supposed to be allowed in at 9 am. However, the information that the security gate had said we were supposed to have our professor there and the class size was registered as 50 students instead of 25 that were actually registered for the course. My class didn't get in through security until 9:50-10:00 am because we had to convince the security guard we weren't a class of 50 and that we couldn't get a hold of the professor. Finally, our professor, who was the assistant professor and not the main professor, arrived at 10:30 am and tried to put the blame on us and security for not getting in on time and having to wait for her. So we weren't very enthusiastic to see her or deal with her for the next 3 hours.

When we finally entered the building we were taken to a cartoon version of the European Parliament room so that we could see a very simplified version of how the process works. Students were divided into the four political parties of the European Solidarity, Ecology, Liberty, and Tradition groups and into countries. I was chosen for the Ecology Group and was a representative of Denmark. We were told to vote for issues that were in line with our
political party and not the country. The issues involved new water pipe infrastructure and microchipping of EU citizens. After an hour and a half, the majority of us started taking it as a joke because the process kept dragging on and we wanted to get to the tour of the building.

According to the European Parliament webpage, Strasbourg was originally used for the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1942. Throughout the years the Council of Europe began to host plenary sessions at the ECSC location which later turned into an official seat of the European Union along with Brussels and Luxembourg. Towards the end of 1999, the European Parliament's Louise Weiss Building, which is the location of the hemicycle for plenary sessions, in Strasbourg was opened. It currently houses the Parliament's Debating Chamber and the offices of the MEPs. Throughout the year, parliament meets twelve times in Strasbourg for at least four days a session and conducts voting in order to still include Strasbourg as one of the three locations.

**Visiting Nancy, France**

I decided to take an early morning day trip with my friends Isheeta and Aru. Nancy, France was a 2 hour train ride away that followed the same route to get to Paris. The total time spent on a train would be about 4 hours. We decided to visit on a Sunday and as a result the city wasn’t as busy as it probably would have been on another day of the week. Our first stop was a tourist shop so I could get a magnet and not have a repeat of what happened in Basel, Switzerland. Afterwards we took a stroll around the main city square. It was in the beginning stages of being set up for Christmas so we got to see an undecorated giant christmas tree but other than that, there were not many christmas decorations. Our
next stop was to the Musee de Beaux-Arts, an art museum full of older paintings and sculptures. Tickets were only 4.50 euros and we spent at least a couple hours there. Even though it was a Sunday, our group managed to find a street that had many different restaurants open. Aru and I were starving, so we found an Italian restaurant that wasn't very busy. We each got a 9.50 euro margherita pizza that was huge and well worth the price. Since Isheeta was from India, she decided to only get a dessert and coffee because she doesn’t eat pizza and didn’t want to try any pasta. We felt bad at first, but there were plenty of other restaurants and little grocery stores open where we took her so she could get food she liked. Our next stop was to a local church. One of my favorite activities is to explore inside the church and just admire the architecture. Near the church was the Parc de la Pépinière. During the time we were there, a carnival was taking place. It stretched all the way down the main path of the park and was just fun to walk through. There were still cotton candy stations and cheap rides like a U.S. carnival, but they also had lots of Nutella crepe and waffle stations which we couldn’t resist. Finally, we spent the rest of the evening wandering through the city looking at the Christmas lights that had been set up while waiting for our train departure time to arrive and then back to Strasbourg.
Christmas Market Opening Weekend

On November 22nd was Strasbourg's Christmas Market opening weekend. I decided to go and walk around on the first Sunday that it was open since it was the only place open. Before I entered the area, I had to go through increased security. Tram stops near the market were passed by the trams so that individuals had to get off at the stop right before the market to go through security. There were plenty of police officers and security personnel to check bags with hand held metal detectors due to the incident in 2018.

One of the first Christmas Markets date back all the way to the 12th century, and have changed greatly over the centuries. Strasbourg's history is known for changing between belonging to France and the Germany Rhineland location. This is why a French city has a German style Christmas Market and is bigger than any other French Christmas market. The market used to be a place to get provision supplies for Christmas, such as food and small decorations, while today the market is more commercialized and tourist based. Today the market is open for well over a month whereas centuries ago it would be open only for a few days. New stalls kept arriving and before anyone could realize, multiple marketplaces were full of stalls with a variety of products. Finally, in 1992, Strasbourg became Capital of Christmas.

Thanksgiving in France

I spent 20 years celebrating Thanksgiving with my family, so it was a little hard when I could only talk to them through Facetime and didn't get to have the classic Thanksgiving food. I instead spent Thanksgiving with Anna at Christmas Market since it's not a holiday celebrated in Europe. After class, which was my first time having school on Thanksgiving, we decided to go exploring the city. We mainly had fun taking pictures of all the
decorations and the stalls. The amount of details that were involved in the booths was amazing and really gave the city its Christmas spirit. One of the staples of the Christmas Market is hot wine, which could be either red or white. I wanted to try it so Anna let me have a sip of the wine she got. When it first hit my tongue it didn't taste bad, but when the aftertaste hit I realized I didn't like it. Turns out I'm still a hot chocolate person but, at least I can say I tried it. Throughout the market, I enjoyed trying the different German food which included fried hash brown pancakes, sauerkraut, and sausage. At first, Anna was trying to explain sauerkraut by calling it cooked cabbage but was struggling a little finding the words to explain it. When I said “oh like sauerkraut,” she was shocked that I knew the word for it and we had a laugh that the only few German words I know involved food. Finally, we finished off the night with Nutella crepes and enjoyed the Christmas tree lights since we still had to be up early for class the next day.

December

Finals Week and Strikes

Even though there is an official finals week at the end of the semester, exams are spread out over the course of 3 weeks. Some classes had a final group presentation during the final session of class so that there wasn't a written final exam. Before starting the exams, student IDs were checked and sometimes kept in order to check out of the exam. Some proctors, who weren’t the original professor, would try to give instructions in French, not realizing that these courses were taught in English or that we were beginners in French. The exams took place in a few different formats. The Basics in Strategy, Business Negotiations, and French exam were a short answer handwritten essay. The Cases in International Marketing exam was a 40 multiple choice scantron questions, while the Intro to European Economic Policy was 35 multiple choice questions on an iPad. Finally, the Innovation Management exam was a group presentation that was worked on throughout the semester.
The exams got off to an interesting start, since my first scheduled exam was French and fell on the start of what would be the longest transportation strike in about 50 years, lasting until January 29th, 2020. All transportation was not running so I had to walk 40 minutes to my French final in the cold because there were no trams running the way I had to go.

Trip to the Movie Theater

I had not been to the movie theater for a while in the U.S. and wasn’t planning on going to the movies while I was in Europe. However, when Frozen 2 came out, my friends and I couldn’t resist the chance to see it. There is a two story movie theater called Cine Cite Strasbourg at the Winston Churchill tram stop that I pass on my way to school. The theater is huge with a full sized restaurant and a concession stand lined with treats and snacks. Since it was a French movie theater, my group was worried about not being able to understand the movie. However, after some research, we discovered that if a movie falls under the category “V.O.” or “V.O.S.T.F.”, which are used interchangeably depending on the theater, then the movie will be shown in the original language (e.g., shown in English) with or without French subtitles. So we ended up having to see it with subtitles but it was a nice experience with new friends.
Visiting Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

The original plan was to visit Colmar, France with my friend Anna on a Wednesday as a nice day trip to celebrate the end of finals. However, the transportation strike in France was still going on, and Oui.sncf let me buy two round trip train tickets for a train that never showed up. Luckily, since my dad had access to my bank account, I was able to have a dispute filed to get a refund because the train website wanted me to fill out a 5 page form in French that didn't make any sense. Instead of going to Colmar, we had to take the tram over to Germany and buy train tickets to Freiburg for the same day.

During our exploration of the city, Freiburg had their Christmas Market up and running. The Freiburg Christmas Market isn't the size of Strasbourg's and was more spread out throughout the city. While walking through the different stalls, we enjoyed a powdered sugar waffle and sausages that were so much better than any old hot dogs. After exploring the city some more we found another Italian restaurant to eat at. Honestly, Italian food is my favorite and I apparently eat a lot because I don't get it all the time in Strasbourg. After eating, we started off on our journey to continue exploring the city. During that time, I must have seemed approachable to be asked questions by an older German couple. There is no way I would have come close to even guessing what they were trying to say in German. All I had to do was give a scared look towards Anna and she handled it. She did end up translating that they were asking how to get to the Christmas Market stalls. I explained in English to her and she translated that into German. At least I was somewhat helpful in that situation. Finally, towards the end of the day, we hiked up the hill and were surprised to get an almost 360 degree view of the whole city. I am not a hiker but the view and the trip was worth it.
Reflection: Part Three

*What are the differences between politics in the U.S. and France/the European Union?*

Some general differences between the U.S. and the French politics include the following. France is a typical semi-presidential and semi-parliamentary Democratic Republican country while also being part of the E.U. Even though France has the same divisions of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches, a big difference is that the Executive Branch is divided between the French President and the French Prime Minister. There are also more political parties, so it is easy to come across someone who may have different opinions rather than in the U.S. where there are two main recognized parties. Although France is a part of the European Union, French politics are different from the EU on a daily basis. One of the most identifiable parts of French Politics, while living in France, are their strikes. The French strike at an industry level where all individuals join together. Where on the other hand, American's strike at a company level, so it's individuals against a company instead of a government. Strikes that are from the public sector (teaching, transportation, etc.) are more disruptive in France then the US. The December 2019 pension reform strike of transportation, halted train, tram, and bus transportation in France which gave the strikers an advantage to make their voices heard.
How are politics intertwined in conversation and how do politics affect the everyday culture?

Conversations about politics are more casual between French people and they are open to talking about politics. Whereas in the US, sometimes the topic of politics is tip-toed around as to not cause any angry discussions. The University, for example, was very supportive of the strikes on social media by using emojis and gifs. Since I’m not from France, my perspective was that the University downplayed the severity of how the events could impact the students and their time. In the day-to-day student life, other students and professors were very questioning about what it was like where you’re from. For the group of students from the US, there were a lot more questions (and a little bit of judgement) about the processes and routines. Whenever we were asked questions with even a hint of politics, we shared glances together about if we should answer a question or even be involved. After getting over the initial uncomfortableness of the topics, we became more involved as the months went on to not only share about politics from our country but learn about how others worked as well.

How does the Christmas Market culture affect/influence everyday life as the holiday nears.

As the Christmas Market opened up it changed the atmosphere of the city and the after school plans to end the day. As certain tram stops are skipped during the market getting to the shops around the city is a little more difficult. The security and police presence also couldn’t be ignored as they were increased and maybe a little bit more intimidating. At the end of most days there were a group of us who went to the Market for dinner and to just hang out. Relaxing with a group of friends was something to look forward to after a long day of sitting in classes. During this time I had become more adjusted to living in France and became more of a local than just a tourist. As the Christmas Market approached came a wave of tourists. The city center was more crowded than any normal day. As my friends and I traveled through the Market, it was fun to hear the voices of people from our country and know that they are tourists. The Christmas Market brings a new life to the city and friends closer as the Holiday season thrives.

In what ways did the French culture manifest itself at the university (Curriculum, organization of school, interactions between students, relationships with professors, forms of language/speech)?
In the everyday lifestyle of living in France, French culture does manifest itself into the University. The structure of the curriculum is very focused on group work no matter what class is being taken. I'm not even a fan of group work at BGSU and when people from different cultures are put together there are even more difficulties. Some people don't have the same work ethic or time management skills and that can cause some disagreements and frustration between members. There are also multiple communication issues depending on the level of English members are at. If there are a dominating amount of people from one country, they will speak their home language between each other and leave other members out of conversations. Since the courses are up to 3 hours long, coffee breaks are very popular among professors to give to students. The school had coffee vending machines that would brew fresh coffee in a variety of styles depending on the students taste. I personally don't drink coffee so I would just continue to do work during the breaks or take a minute or two to stretch my legs. The French society's views of time and space are also more synchronous than the U.S. This means that even though they place a high value of punctuality when there are strict deadlines, a lack of strict deadlines will have less value on being punctual. An example would be at the university the professors would claim that the breaks would only last 10-15 minutes and instead they would end up lasting 20-25 minutes. Professors would also show up 5-15 minutes after the class was supposed to start and then would also need about 10 minutes to set-up for the class.

January

Visiting Heidelberg, Germany

My friends and I decided to visit Heidelberg, Germany before classes started after we had been stuck in Strasbourg because of the Transportation strikes. We decided to take a 2 hour bus ride, which was 4 hours total for the round trip, with BlaBabus. Taking a bus took less time than it would to take a train because we could avoid the connections and it was a $25 round trip which was much less than what the trains would have cost. The only downside was that the bus stop was on the other side of town from where we wanted to be, so it was about a 30 minute walk to the main city center. Even though Heidelberg is a college town, it is a must visit day trip from Strasbourg. You still get to roam through all the modern day shops, yet still experience the history of the town. Overlooking the city lies the
Heidelberg Castle which is in ruins. Although there are tours to showcase inside the castle, that costs extra and we decided to put our money towards taking the tram up towards the castle. From there we spent time exploring the grounds and taking pictures. We did get asked by a English sounding family of tourists to take a family picture for them. We think that maybe they asked us because they heard our group speaking English amongst ourselves. As an early dinner, since we skipped lunch, we decided to try Raja Rani, a local Indian restaurant. This was my first time trying Indian food. The waiter only spoke German and Hindi so my friends helped me order since their primary language is Hindi and none of us spoke German. I ended up ordering a Sprite and Chicken Curry with Rice. I was grateful to order the non-spicy version and for some reason it tasted like my mom’s homemade chili. Towards the end of the evening, my friends were very focused on exploring all the shops as we slowly made our way back towards our bus stop. I was just there for the experience and to have fun outside of Strasbourg. It was definitely a day well spent.

Start of Semester B

During the first week of classes it was a much easier adjustment than the start of Semester A because now I knew what I was getting into. I also didn’t have to worry about any of the orientation programs and could focus on relaxing before classes started. This semester, instead of having Wednesdays off, I lucked out with my choices and got Fridays off to enjoy a 3 day weekend. I don’t think I’ve ever scheduled my classes at BGSU to allow myself a 3 day weekend. This new group of classes included Strategic Analysis, Financial Performance Analysis, International Team Management, Organizational Behavior & HRM, Supply Chain Management, and the French Complete Beginners Part 2. As classes started I got to meet the new group of students who were mainly here just this semester. Since I had already been there for 5 months I was the one people came to for advice. I thought that was kind of
funny since I had to explain that some of the worries the new students had weren’t necessary to freak out over. The best new person I met was Will from my Organizational Behavior and HRM class. We were talking about where we were from and it turned out we were both from the Cincinnati area. We instantly bonded over missing Skyline chili and how it was better than Goldstar. I also met Maria from Mexico and she actually lived in the same dorm I was staying at. So we rode the tram back together. However, when saying goodbye they do the one kiss on the cheek goodbye. I was not ready for that and I didn’t want to be rude so I obliged. Looking back I probably made it awkward because I was extremely uncomfortable since I had never done that before. Even though people in France do it I had gone 5 months without having to and thought I could go the whole year without it.
February

Visiting Brussels, Belgium

As the week-long winter break started, my friend Ayano and I decided to plan a trip to the Northern part of Europe. Our first stop and home base of our trip was Brussels, Belgium. To get to Brussels, there is a direct train that takes 3 hours and goes through the Paris Airport. Instead of staying at a hostel, we decided to stay at Hotel Ibis by the Brussels Midi train station priced at $235 total for two people for three nights. This would be the price of one night at a decent hotel in the U.S. and averaged about 33 Euros a night per person.

When exploring the city, the main sight is the big main city square. Going at night is a must because the lights across the buildings are stunning. There are also plenty of “frites” or fry shops which are a staple in Belgium. Due to their popularity, whenever we got fries at a restaurant, the server would offer ketchup or mayo. We were a little shocked that people would eat mayo with fries. I didn’t try it since I wasn’t a fan of mayo, but I might have to one day when I’m brave enough.

There are plenty of other foods to try in Belgium but there are a few staples besides fries. Belgian Beef Stew, made with onions and Belgian beer, is a meal that can last anyone all day. It’s very heavy and savory, but well worth the extra calories that it tastes like. If I can’t find a recipe similar to what I had, then I will definitely need to plan a return trip to Belgium. Belgian waffles are also a must. You can’t go to Belgium and not get a waffle from one of the many waffle shops. When it comes to Belgian chocolate, we decided to do a chocolate crawl instead of a bar crawl, because there are so many chocolate shops. I prefered the dark chocolate filled with chocolate ganache, but there are other varieties filled with fruit and caramel. I also now know to be careful where I go because before you know it, the price spent on chocolate does add up.
Visiting Brugge, Belgium

We decided to visit Brugge over Ghent, Belgium because Brugge is farther north and is a smaller and quieter city. Ghent is a mix of the feel of Brugge and Brussels, and the train we took went through Ghent anyway. Brugge is only an hour away by train from Brussels and can honestly be done as a half day trip because of its size.

It is a pleasant little city to walk through with the cobblestone streets and little shops spread throughout. The main sight to see is the main city center where there are plenty of restaurants to choose from and there are even horse drawn carriages. The only downside was since it was a trip in February up north, the weather was a little rainy and snowy. At least it wasn’t as windy as in BG, so it was bearable. Towards the outside of the main city runs a river enclosing the city. There are 3 windmills on the outer north side of the city. It’s a must to find windmills when traveling to northern Europe and it’s fun to take pictures with them in the background. Finally, the souvenir shop was closed for the day even though we went on a Thursday. Luckily, when we went back to Brussels for the rest of the day, the souvenir shops there sold a few magnets of Brugge and Ghent, where we spent the rest of the day.
Visiting Amsterdam, Netherlands

Amsterdam was at the top of my list of cities to visit and since I was already in Belgium, it was so easy to hop over to the Netherlands. The day of the trip there was a rough start. The original train tickets my friend and I bought were for 7:45 am so that we would arrive about 3 hours later. However, because of weather issues, which we were not aware of, our train was cancelled. Since we chose an IC train, the tickets were transferable to the 8:45 am train instead. When choosing train tickets, the IC trains take about 3 hours between Brussels and Amsterdam, while the Thalys train only takes 2 hours.

There are plenty of sites to see throughout Amsterdam. The most well-known location in Amsterdam is the Red Light District. Prostitution is, surprisingly, legal in the Netherlands, but they are not allowed in the streets which is why the Red Light District was created. Though the Red Light District is famous, my friend and I stayed as far away from it as we could because we didn't feel like seeing anything we couldn't unsee. So, we decided to stick with the more Rated G areas. When searching where to take pictures in Amsterdam, there were multiple people who would pose in front of the “I Amsterdam” sign by the Risjk Museum. Unfortunately, we didn't discover that the sign had been taken down because there were too many people taking selfies with it. We instead found a bench with the same slogan and took pictures with it. Next, we decided to go to see the Anne Frank House. We didn't buy tickets in advance so when we arrived they had been sold out for the day. We did get to enjoy reflecting outside the house and just take a moment to take it all in. The best part of Amsterdam is just getting lost walking through the canals. They are perfect for pictures and a nice view and change of pace from Strasbourg, France.
Reflection: Part Four

How was the start of the new semester and how does it compare to the start of Semester A?

Starting this new semester was less stressful and I had more confidence going into the semester, except for everyone freaking out over the Coronavirus but that’s a topic on its own. I didn't have to worry about the rush of traveling and checking into my dorm. I didn't have to go through orientation again and deal with the overwhelming amount of information needed because I was already familiar with how the school worked and the inner workings of the city of Strasbourg. I also knew what I was getting into so I could focus on meeting new people who were there just for the semester and they could come to me for advice about how the classes worked.

How accurate was I in my assumptions about the French Culture/Society?

The French are attached to their language and I was used to struggling with communication. When I went to Belgium and the Netherlands, it was much easier asking questions because the majority understood English and were more forgiving when you couldn't speak Dutch. However, when having to speak French outside of class, people seem more appreciative that I am trying even if it's not completely perfect. That gave me more motivation to keep trying to learn and say words correctly. The French are not necessarily lazy but don't feel a rush to get anything done. That's what still makes me think they are disorganized, especially when we receive information last minute. This was apparent mainly in school because they were delayed in giving out grades and sending information for online work in classes. The school also wanted us to complete the CSR Values online program by the end of the year that was supposed to be sent out in January to start, but we did not get access until the beginning of March. Overall, my assumption about their timing structure had some validity.
What have I missed from home/what am I looking forward to when I get back to the US as the year is almost up?

After six months of living in France, there is a list of things that I miss from back home and am excited to start the countdown. Obviously, I miss my friends and family and even being in the same time zone as them. I’m looking forward to talking to them without having to do it through a phone call or facetime. I even started making a list of plans and things to do when I get back. I’m mainly looking forward to having food that I’m used to, especially home cooked meals. After being at school, and not being able to go home for the holidays, you miss those kinds of family meals. I made sure to give my mom some requests such as green olives (since I couldn't find them anywhere), girl scout cookies, and bacon. I know France is famous for their culinary arts, but growing up with what you like for 21 years, it is hard to change your tastes. Finally, the last things I miss are AC and ice being served in drinks. The only restaurants that serve ice in drinks are fast food places, but they end up charging more than back home, so I've had to limit drinks that I buy in fast food restaurants. When it comes to AC, it doesn't exist in any buildings I've been in. I like having a colder room and airflow in a room, and leaving a window open just doesn't cut it. Especially as temperatures started to rise over the last few months.

March

A Change Of Plans

Late on Thursday March 12th, after my French Class, the French President announced that all French universities would shut down in-person contact indefinitely starting the following week. On March 13th, I ended up spending the day with my friend Anna before she left since she decided to finish school online at home. Anna ended up being the only person I was able to say goodbye to in person before I left. Then, early on March 14th, after I had woken up, I decided to look at my email and saw that BGSU was recalling all education abroad students.

With the rapid and global spread of COVID-19, Bowling Green State University is now recalling all education abroad students to return to the United States. The University will make every effort to assist you with the continuation and completion of your coursework from home. If you are studying on an exchange or affiliate program, we will notify our partners of your required return.

Please make your travel arrangements to return. If you need assistance booking a return ticket, contact BGSU's Travel partner CHRISTOPHERSON BUSINESS TRAVEL. Once you have made your flight arrangements, you are required to notify our office by sending the information to edabroad@bgsu.edu. Finally, if studying in a country that is at a Level 2 or 3, please continue reading the important information below.
I quickly sent this update to my parents and they immediately worked on changing my Delta flight and hotel reservation. I spent the rest of the day buying a train ticket, which was 1st class for about 45 Euros since it was all that was left, and cleaning and packing for my trip home.

**Heading Home Last Minute**

When planning to come back home early I still followed my original plan I had for May but with a few changes. I checked out of my dorm on Sunday, March 15th, and someone was actually at the front desk on a Sunday morning. Since my checkout was very last minute, I couldn't schedule a walkthrough with someone to check the standard of the room, but I did take lots of pictures and videos showing everything worked and was in good shape. As a future reference, a month after I got home, I had to electronically fill out a wire transfer form to have money returned to me. After another month of waiting, I had a month and a half worth of rent returned. I was expecting two months worth of rent but it's not worth fighting over with people in another country. I also got out of the wire transfer fee because my dad is an employee of the bank I use and was on my bank account.

After checking out, I was off to the train station with all my hastily packed luggage. I ended up getting to the train station 45 minutes before my departure and it allowed me time to regroup my luggage and easily find my train seat. Soon I was off to the Paris airport. When I got to the airport, I didn't have to immediately go to find my flight. Instead, I only had to go up a few elevator flights from the train station and check into the Sheraton Hotel. My reservation was for a king-sized room which was about $200 for one night. This way I would only have to worry about getting to the airport one day and navigating the airport the next day. This created a less stressful travel day so that I wasn't being rushed.

Early the next morning, I checked out of the hotel and headed off to find the check-in for Delta. It wasn't very hard to find, although the airport was a little crowded. I did end up meeting someone who was going to be on my same flight and was my age from Columbus, Ohio. We ended up chatting and getting Starbucks together. It was nice having someone to talk to instead of sitting by myself while waiting the few hours before we could board the plane. The plane ride itself was uneventful and a 9 hour flight offers plenty of time to catch up on movies. Soon, the plane landed in Detroit, Michigan instead of my original plan of
Indianapolis, Indiana because it was one of the airports approved to receive foreign flights at the time. Everyone on the plane had to stay seated an extra 20 minutes before we could get approved to enter into customs. Customs was very different from what I had remembered because of COVID-19. There were three different lines that everyone had to pass through and in total it took 1.5 hours to get through. I'm almost confident that if my schedule did not change, then customs would be less than half that time. I was picked up only by my dad instead of the rest of the family since I arrived on a Monday instead of a Saturday. This was also to prevent any unnecessary potential virus contamination. Driving back home from Detroit did allow me to have a quick view of BGSU after being away for so long, which I wouldn't have seen if I had gone to Indianapolis instead. When I finally returned home, I think my Mom was the most excited because she didn't have to worry about me anymore. My sister on the other hand was not happy because that meant she couldn't go through my closet for her next new outfit.

The Switch To Online Classes

After returning home, it took about a week and a half before Strasbourg had a plan of how to organize the final few classroom assignments and exams. I don't think Strasbourg has ever had to teach an online class so no professors were prepared for the change. The main classes that actually had students do extra work were Strategic Analysis and Principles in Team Management. These assignments would include short individual essays, short quizzes, and little group PowerPoints without the presentation part. The rest of the classes were put on hold until final exams or were given non-graded extra reading assignments.
April

Online Finals and Finishing The Academic Year

If I were still at Strasbourg, finals would've finished by April 15th, but instead some exams ended up being delayed so that there was time between them. The first exam was Financial Performance Analysis which was an online multiple choice test on March 31st that was only delayed by a week. Then came Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management as an individual essay that was due April 8th after being open for a week. Complete Beginner French Part 2 was a downloaded Microsoft Word document, formatted like the midterm, that needed to be submitted two hours later on April 9th. Principles in Team Management was a group essay that was due April 17th. The original plan was to have a group PowerPoint presentation, but the format had to be changed into an essay for the convenience of the professor. This was probably the most difficult final because we had to work through communication issues since we were in different time zones. Finally, the official finals week arrived. Strategic Analysis was an online individual essay that had allotted 24 hours to be completed and was due April 28th. The last final was Basics in Supply Chain Management. It was put into two parts; a group presentation through Zoom and an online test that had an allotted time of 3 hours. The professor said that the exam was designed to be done in 90 minutes but I was grateful that she offered 3 hours. Most of these exams would have been similar in context and format if in Strasbourg, but the only difference was the amount of time needed. Then I was off to start the waiting game for June 16th to arrive so that I would know my second semester grades.
Reflection: Part Five

What am I going to miss about living in Europe?

There are many things I'm going to miss about living in Europe, but those are the factors that make me excited to schedule my next visit since my experience didn't have the ending I was expecting. I still had a month and a half left in my schedule yet I had to return home early. I had planned to go to Disneyland Paris, explore Eastern Europe, and more day trips I was excited to go on. However, I had to put those plans on hold until I have time to go back. With traveling, I miss the ease of the public transportation that has been established in Europe. Although I'm fine with driving more than ten hours to go on vacation, there was an indescribable feeling about hopping on a train and crossing into a new country. I'm going to miss the friends I've made and who I didn't get the chance to say a proper goodbye to, but at least social media makes it easy to stay in contact. My new friends made my experience, whether we were in the classroom, grocery shopping in Germany, or going on vacation together. I'm also going to miss the little things about living in Europe. Being able to pop into a bakery for fresh bread with a wonderful atmosphere on my way home from school and taking leisurely walks around the city and admiring the architecture. I went in with the idea that I couldn't learn a new language based on my high school experience, but the challenge of being thrown into an environment where I had the opportunity to really learn, understand, and use a new language was in itself a great turning point. It really was an indefinable feeling living in Europe, which I think I'll miss most of all.

What is it like adjusting back to U.S. culture?

One of the main subjects talked about when participating in a study abroad program is reverse culture shock, where you're unprepared in adjusting back to your home culture. My experience was a little different in that I couldn't really adjust back to the U.S. culture because it had drastically changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Everything was shut down and I was put under quarantine for 2 weeks where I spent my time finishing classes online, reading, and streaming T.V. shows. For me personally, I was fine coming back home because it meant I could have home cooked meals with food prepared the way I like. I did end up buying things on Amazon and once I had everything added up, I was reintroduced to having tax added on at the end right before the purchase. After spending six months being able to calculate my total price exactly, that was shocking. Anyone else who goes through this program might have had a bigger shock had they not gone through being recalled from the program early and forced to stay home. I would recommend taking
advantage of any programs offered to help with reverse culture shock even though I didn’t need them.

**How will these experiences strengthen me personally and prepare me professionally?**

The skills that I have personally learned were more than what I learned my first year at Bowling Green. I've developed my independence by being on my own in another continent rather than living three hours away from home. I am more comfortable traveling on my own and taking advantage of opportunities offered to me. I am also more confident in myself and my abilities than what I've been before. It was traveling abroad that gave me that extra push to have faith in myself and what I can do.

I'm also more open to learning and experiencing new cultures, something I never thought would happen growing up in Ohio. Not only did I have personal growth, but I've developed skills and qualities to help me professionally. I've been able to work with different teaching styles and grow as a student. By working with a different system I could grow and solidify my critical thinking skills and how to problem solve when put in a new situation. I've also been able to enhance my network with people around the world instead of just around the Midwest. I can travel to different states and countries and have someone who I know and have a friendly conversation with. This program and degree can also be more competitive on a resume and used to impress potential future employers. Without this program, I may not have these developed skills and qualities by just staying in the U.S.

**Would I recommend this experience to future students and what is my advice for them?**

I would highly recommend any student thinking about this program, to just go ahead and apply as soon as you can. Don't cut it short with one semester, even if it seems less stressful, but take a chance to do the full academic year. There are some people who regret that their experience wasn't longer when they only do a semester, summer, or winter program. I say live without regrets and do the longest program you can to get the most out of it. You have to expect the unexpected when it comes to a study abroad experience and even be prepared if you can’t plan everything out the way you want. There are different rules and cultural influences to follow, but with an open mind, these differences will be easier to overcome. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn about yourself and learn about the different cultures. You will grow not only as a student but as an individual. Meet new people, visit new countries, and try new things. Grow more in your personality and knowledge. Learn how to better yourself and see what you can do in life and all that is out
there. You'll never have the chance for another experience quite like this, so grab it while you can and get ready for an adventure you'll never forget.