Major/Minor: English and French (double major)  
Country: France  
Program: Lyon  
Term & Year Abroad: Year 2010-11

Instructors
- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?
  Instructors are much less hands on and class is focused around lecture rather than discussion. Professors will not prepare study materials or hand outs. They will occasionally respond to email and some hold office hours (“heures de permanence”), but it is better to check with them on a case by case basis.

- Could you call them by their first names?
  Never. Always Monsieur or Madame Smith.

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?
  The relationship is much more based around a rigid student/instructor structure. Most professors don’t have an interest in interacting with students before or after class. The relationship is mostly confined to the formal “vous” address.

- Were they available for help during office hours?
  Some hold office hours, although none of them will make this known at the beginning of the semester. If you need to speak with a professor outside of class, it is best to ask them after class when their office hours are. Keeping this communication face-to-face is important as professors do not usually respond to emails in a timely manner.

Courses
- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?
  Courses are much easier in the sense that the coursework is lighter. Unless you are taking literature courses, the grade will be determined by a final exam. The primary difficulty will be the language barrier. The French system is also designed around a theoretical framework, where as the US system of education is much more hands on and focused on practical application. French students are very well versed in theoretical ideologies, so understanding these references can be difficult.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?
  The grading system is based on a 0 to 20 scale, with 10 being a pass and 20 virtually impossible. A good grade is usually around a 12 or 13 with anything around 16 being exceptional. Whereas the idea of the “C” here is not appealing, French students are very happy with 10’s because the French grading system is not as inflated as in the US. That being said, professors are very vague on their grading criteria. There are no score sheets or rubrics for exams (which are mostly written and very rarely multiple choice), so the grading process seems very subjective.

- How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?
  The courses are structured around a single final exam which is almost always written. Very rarely are there papers or projects. Some classes have sections or “TD” (“Travaux Dirigés”) which might require an expose or presentation. Literature classes usually have a supplementary paper in addition to a final exam.

- Did you have oral and/or written exams?
  I took only literature and art courses and the exams were always written.
- **Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?**
  Very inflexible. Unless you are doing a double major (which even if you are, as a foreign student the university will not recognize this), the final exam date is inflexible. Professors will treat conflict dates on a case by case basis, but even when I had a conflict, they would not change the date. I had to finish one exam extremely fast and dash off, late, to the next one.

- **What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?**
  If you approach professors and ask to go to office hours, generally they are willing to help you. Most professors are very keen on the fact that a majority of foreign students do not keep up with the coursework and instead use the language barrier as an excuse. For French professors, this is particularly applicable to the American students. It is important that you keep up with the reading and go to office hours with a list of specific questions. Professors do not want to have a discussion during office hours, they want to answer concrete questions. In terms of grading, if you can show that you have done the reading, they are fairly lenient with errors of language.

- **Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?**
  The French school system does not embrace teacher/student interaction like it does here. If you want any contact with your professor outside of the “Hello, I’m a foreign student from California,” you have to speak with them outside and after class. Professors will not seek you out and ask to speak with you.

- **Was classroom participation expected?**
  No. In fact, I found most professors would rather not hear you speak if you have difficulties with the language. This held for the majority of my classes, although I did have a few small sections in very advanced literature courses that demanded class participation. I think this is because they were third level courses and required a certain level of specialization. But generally in first and second year courses, no.

- **How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**
  They are structured around lecture and theory, not interaction and practical application of the learning material.

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
  Classes are usually once a week within a two hour “creneau” or time slot. Usually they are about an hour and a half.

- **What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**
  Though the teacher/student relationship is much more formalized and rigid in France, the lecture atmosphere is much more relaxed. Students talk and eat and are generally quite rude. Professors often have to stop lecture to discipline. People come and go as they wish, usually with little reaction from the professor. Education is seen as something that the student determines by his or her participation, and the professor is not there to facilitate that learning, rather just to read their notes and go home.

**Language**

- **In which languages were the courses offered?**
  English and French

- **In what language did you take your courses?**
  French
- If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.
We arrived in the summer and took placement exams to be sorted into groups according to level. After the summer program, everyone, regardless of level, was able to take university courses in French. There was a methodology program sponsored by the university for foreign students which was according to level. This course was taken alongside a full university course load. Lectures are difficult to follow, not so much because the professors speak so quickly, but because of the noise that comes from other students. French students are happy to lend you their notes if you have trouble following, although be wary: the French handwrite EVERYTHING and their handwriting can be rather unintelligible to Americans, so it’s better to ask one of the few students who bring computers.

Host University
- How large is the university? Student enrollment and approx campus size (smaller than UCSB)? Is it an urban campus with many tall buildings or just a few building?
Lyon 2 has two campuses. The first campus, “The Quai,” is an urban campus in the middle of the city, in a neighborhood that is in the process of gentrification, but can still be a bit dicey at times. There are five main buildings (in the neoclassical French style) organized around a quad, about the size of a city block in total. The second campus “Bron” is on the outskirts of town in a dilapidated sixties-style building. It’s about a thirty-minute tram ride between the campuses assuming there are no strikes or gas line explosions as there often are. It’s right next to Ikea to give you a general idea about what kind of area.

- Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?
French students tend to stay in their cities to go to school, so there are a good number of students who live at home. A lot come from rural French areas and so they live off-campus. Others live in student residences where a lot of foreign students from the EU also live.

- If not located in the city center,
  o How far or close is it to the city?
    Bron: 30-40 minutes from city center
  o What type of public transportation could you take – cost?
    Metro, then tram.
  o Could students take cabs -cost?
    It’s very rare. I imagine it costs at least forty euros.
  o How long would it take to get to the city center?
    30-40 minutes

- Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?
French students do a lot of sport activities as well as comedy and improv and theatre club type things. I recommend joining the sports program (ballet, tennis, fencing, volleyball, rock climbing, etc) as a good way to meet French students.

- Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?
I believe there is a bookstore on campus, but most students just buy books from Gilbert Joseph which is a bookstore in the city centre that distributes the books from the university. Professors usually distribute reading lists, but very rarely does a student read all the books. Literature courses usually examine 2-3 works of fiction PER semester, which is considerably lighter than most UCSB courses. Professors supplement this with a lot of theory readings, which you can find at the library.
- **Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?**
  There is a computer lab with printers, but a lot of students bring laptops.

- **What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)**
  The neighborhood around the Quai is a vibrant neighborhood that used to be primarily North African immigrants, but is changing into this sort of hipster and student hub. There are tons of cafes and bars and little shops, but be a bit wary at night. The Bron campus is in a bit of an industrial-commercial sprawl wasteland. There is IKEA, McDonalds, KFC, and massive chain retail clothing stores.

**Housing**
- **What types of accommodations are available to UC students?**
  After an initial three-week stay in a dorm, you have to find your own housing.

- **How close are they to campus?**
  Students live all over the city.

- **How did you find your housing?**
  My cousins knew two French girls living in Lyon, so I moved in with them.

- **Where did you live and with whom?**
  I lived not far from the Quai campus with two French students.

- **If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?**
  It wasn’t difficult for me, but I heard horror stories from other students. Start looking BEFORE you leave.

- **Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?**
  The rooms are so much nicer and so much less expenseive than in IV. I paid 50 percent less rent and had my own room. The apartments are better maintained. Additionally, the French government offers year-long students a stipend for housing each month.

- **Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?**
  Before the government stipend, about $375. After the stipend, about $220.00

- **How/who did you pay for housing?**
  I paid my landlord through a French bank account.

**Food**
- **What was the food like?**
  Very delicious and very French.

- **Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?**
  Restaurants are exhorbitantly expensive in Europe, for both American and French students, so mostly you eat at home. French students organize little parties around this fact. Usually you have dinner then go out for a drink or to dance. The university cafeteria is a very affordable option for lunch.
- **How much was an average meal?**
  In the university café, about 4 euros. At a restaurant, anywhere from 10-20 euros. At home it’s much cheaper.

- **What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?**
  Lunch is usually around 1 pm. Dinner is at about 8 pm.

- **Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?**
  Not really. There are tons of fresh vegetables available. In restaurants maybe, but there are always salads and fish options.

**Travel/Safety**

  - **If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?**
    There is a bus system, metro, and tramway, as well as a public bicycle rental.

  - **Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?**
    For the most part yes, but it is important to know that men are much more free to make comments on females’ appearance and often people will touch you in public.

  - **Describe the public transportation in your host country?**
    There is a huge TGV (rapid train transit system) that goes all over France, as well as smaller regional lines. The train can be quite expensive, but students usually get 50% off the ticket. It’s better to buy tickets in advance as the prices do increase with time.

  - **Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?**
    Very easy. There is an airport connected to the city by a tram system (kind of expensive, 11 euros each way, but very efficient). Europe has tons of low-price airlines like Easyjet and Ryanair which have super cheap flights all over the continent and even to North Africa.

**Host City/Country**

  - **What was the weather like?**
    Lyon is very gray in the winter, although last year was a bit of a freak year in that it snowed early (December), but not at all after that. Spring started in March and it was the hottest spring ever on record in France. Fall is warm and summer is absolutely insufferable as it gets quite humid with the two rivers. It rains quite frequently, but rarely for a sustained amount of time, usually a torrential downpour and then it’s over.

  - **Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?**
    Lyon is traditionally a very middle class bourgeois French city with similar values. It’s starting to change and become very international, but generally speaking people are socially more conservative than in Paris. I am from San Francisco, so I would say Paris is a more apt comparison. In Lyon, you won’t see a huge variety of people as you will in Paris or San Francisco, but there are strong immigrant communities. The city is very clean and well maintained and family oriented. In terms of a large urban French area, it is pretty affordable.

  - **What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?**
Lyon was the old capital of the Roman Gaulic empire; they were the head of the silk empire; the first ever worker revolution took place in their silk factories; cinema was invented in the city. There are a lot of cultural activities geared to those aspects. Outside of the cultural realm, there is a fabulous park (Parc de la Tete d’or), which is one of the largest urban parks in Europe. Tons of people hang out there, it is basically like a second home. Spending nights on the little boats on the river is quite agreeable and so is hanging out in the medieval section.

- How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?

There isn’t a ton of international tourism, but a lot of people come to see the Beaujolais which is the wine country that surrounds Lyon. Lots of people come from within France to visit. There is a strong North African immigrant population as well as lots of Lebanese and Chinese immigrants.

Culture
- Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.
  - Time & punctuality
    French people are late everywhere.
  - Eye contact & staring
    Do not make eye contact with strangers, they take that as an invitation to talk/harass you.
  - Relationships
    French people are cold and reserved in the beginning, especially in a big city like Lyon, but if you make the effort to talk to them, they will gradually come out of their shells. If you want French friends, you have to take the initiative youself. They will not try to be your friend, you have to initiate communication.
  - More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?
    No one would ever show up to class in sweats or workout clothes. Female and male students dress professionally, for men often button up shirts, rarely running shoes. Women wear tights and stockings and lots of dresses and boots. Women wear clothes much looser than they do here, and men wear more form-fitting clothing.
  - Alcohol consumption
    French people will drink a lot over a sustained period of time, unlike Americans who binge drink in the span of 30 minutes. This enables French people to stay awake later as often you don’t go out until midnight and don’t come home until 5am. Wine and beer are much more prevalent than hard alcohol. People usually start drinking before dinner and continue with wine during dinner, then go out for a drink afterwards. In volume this might seem like a lot, but it’s spread out so that at the end of the night, they can stand up.

  - What culture shock did you go through?

    Getting used to the French reserve was difficult. The school system was a really hard adjustment. The real hard part doesn’t come until November when the initial excitement starts wearing off and you have to face the mundane part of your daily routine. Getting
used to public harassment for females was also difficult, and I don’t think I ever really came to accept that.

- Other?

**Banking**
- **Were credit cards widely accepted?**
  There is some difficulty with the magnetic stripe, but generally credit cards are accepted everywhere.

- **Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?**
  Yes, the EAP liaison helped us and it was extremely easy.

- **If you did not open a local bank account, was it easy to withdraw money from the ATM? Which banks were popular & had low ATM fees?**
  Bank of America has reciprocity with BNP Paribas so there are no atm fees if you use your B of A card in those machines.

- **Were there ATMs on campus?**
  No.