**Personal information**

Name: Connie P.  
Major: International Agriculture and Rural Development  
Period/Time of Exchange: Fall 2014

**Practical information**

**Visa**
The French long term visa process is unnecessarily expensive, complicated, and long. The video explaining the process and how to fill out the paperwork may or may not be more confusing than the process itself. When you go to the consulate make sure to bring extra copies of everything and that your pictures fit the requirements. You pay around $100 to the French student organization whose sole purpose is to confirm that you will study while in France, and an additional ~$60 to the French consulate during your visa appointment. When you get to France you will have to go to the office of immigration in your city to provide additional paperwork, pay some more money, and have a short doctor’s appointment. They contact you via mail and ask you to bring 58 euros worth of stamps that can be bought at a convenience store. You’ll need to bring another picture too (France is big on pictures). A large sticker is put on your passport at the conclusion of this appointment as a reward for surviving the French visa application process and correctly taking your passport photos. It also supposedly aids you in leaving the country, but no one ever looked at or checked mine.

**Packing**
Lyon was quite hot during the summer and I regularly wore shorts of modest length for which I was not ostracized or looked at oddly for. This can change by region, as I’ve heard that people in Paris did not wear shorts, ever. December was cold- in the 30s and 40s- and I was glad to have packed a winter jacket and gloves. I brought a business formal dress and dress shoes that I never needed. If you need an electrical converter you can buy one at the local department store (Carrefour) for ~$9.

**Arrival**
My passport was stamped at my layover in Iceland (check out Iceland Air for your flight, they’re great and relatively cheap). When I flew into Paris I walked down the steps of the airplane and right out the exit-no security, no immigration line, no visa check. From Paris I took the train to Lyon which I did not buy beforehand and could have saved myself $40. When you buy your flight, also buy your train ticket at snclf.com. Trains are reasonably priced if you buy your ticket months in advance and are exorbitant if you buy the day of.

I was assigned an exchange buddy who was really helpful in both trip preparation and initial arrival.

The orientation program was not very useful but was a great opportunity to meet new people.

**Academics**

**The University**
ISARA-Lyon is located in a residential sector of Lyon, France. It is one large building that houses a library, 4 computer labs, 2 large lecture halls, a number of classrooms, a small sandwich bar that is open between 11am and 2pm, and a coffee machine. There is also a courtyard outside where students socialize and student union building with a cafeteria area. The building has reliable WiFi.

The international coordinator-Sigolene- is the most helpful and kind person I met at the university. She helped me with any and all problems related to housing, cellphone plan, banking, courses, grades, etc.

The university hosts a few student-organized parties throughout the year. It was difficult to get involved in student clubs and sports due to a number of communication obstacles. My class, however, was made up of half French and half international students which facilitated a very friendly, inclusive, and social atmosphere.

**Courses**
The international coordinator enrolled me in all of my classes. The five classes listed are called Modules 1-5 and are taken one at a time over the course of the semester (module 1 lasts for the first 3 weeks, etc, then module 2, etc.). Each module consists of a number of lectures about the module theme (aprox.5-6 lectures a week for 3 hours each) and an individual or group project, essay, or presentation. Each module is graded individually and is based on the module’s project. The final module has a short oral exam.

There is no homework, readings, or syllabi. I did not find classes academically difficult. Students have the freedom to choose projects on topics they are interested in. Group projects include very practical work that impacts an outside
region or organization—an aspect of the classes which I enjoyed immensely.

**Life Abroad**

**Language**

I really recommend taking at least 1 semester of French, or just brushing up your high school French before you go. I had never taken French in my life and ran into significant difficulty communicating at my internship and with the receptionists in my dormitory. The initial French class offered was not useful and neither was the course offered during the semester. What I learned was from speaking with my internship family and French friends. I had no language problems with the faculty or other students (classes were in English).

**Banking**

I did open a bank account with Credit Agricole which was easy, cheap, and only took one appointment. Having a bank account made it easier to get a phone plan and cheaper to take money out of ATMs. Make sure to close it at least one week before you leave though.

**Housing**

The student housing is conveniently close to the university and grocery store, is super cheap (250 euros/month), and was okay to live in for 4 months, but I would not have spent more time there than that. I got bedbugs (twice), so I strongly recommend taking precautions against them; feel free to contact me for advice. There is a communal kitchen which was often dirty and did not have an oven or microwave which was probably the worst part of it all. I bought pots and cooking utensils off of an exiting exchange student for 15 euro and cooked all of my own meals. If you’re okay in a shoebox of a room, closet sized bathroom, don’t bake often, and are tight on funds, then you too can survive through the student residences. If not, find an apartment and brag to all of your friends in the student residence about how great your kitchen is.

**Transportation**

Public transport is amazingly convenient and cheap (28 euros for a month pass of unlimited rides if you’re under 30 years old). It includes a tram, bus, and underground metro. There are also city bikes available for rent at stations all over the city. They are cheap and especially useful for getting home late at night.

**Health and Safety**

Most areas of Lyon are safe. I almost never felt nervous walking alone, even late at night, and never had any problems with theft. Just be smart. Catcalling is common but is not a major problem if you just ignore it.

**Overall exchange experience**

*The best thing about my semester abroad was:* The people and the conversation! I had a great time in class, and even though I didn’t find the lecture material all that stimulating I enjoyed debating with students inside and outside of class about all sorts of subjects.

*The most challenging things about my semester abroad was:* Language (during my internship), and differences in opinion/culture.

*How did your semester abroad change your perspective?*

I learned to better communicate my thoughts, especially those on agriculture, and gained more knowledge of French agricultural markets and cooperatives. Additionally, of course the international experience improved my open-mindedness and understanding and acceptance of other cultures.

*Tips for future students*

Say yes to as many opportunities as you can, don’t take things too personally, and look on the bright side. The less you complain about the small stuff the better time you’ll have.