

Summer Language Study in Avignon, France

Esteban Tarazona Guzman, 2025

This summer, I traveled to France to take part in a 6-week study abroad program, the Bryn Mawr College Institut D'Avignon. In this program, I took two classes, and I attended each class four times per week. Apart from taking part in these two very academically rigorous courses, I also had some time to explore southern France through program-sponsored excursions. Above all else, however, I was able to fully immerse myself in a francophone country and improve my French speaking and writing as well as learn more about southern French culture.

The first class I took was called: Se Faire Connaître en Images (Making Oneself Known through Images). In this class, we learned how to deeply analyze all types of images and how to think critically when looking at images. One of the most eye-opening things I learned in this class was the fact that the author of an image can be biased when choosing what is to be expressed in the image. I used to never think much about what an author did when producing an image, but after this class, I learned that I cannot take images for granted and there is a lot more depth to images than one might see at first glance.

The second class I took was called: Introduction à la littérature et au cinéma québécois contemporains (Introduction to Contemporary Quebecois Literature and Cinema). In this course, we studied Québécois literature and cinema and learned the history surrounding Québec and how that history led to specific choices being made by authors and directors. We wrote about and discussed themes that were present throughout the literature and films.

One of the coolest things I learned about southern France culture was the difference between Parisian France and the rest of France. During my free time, I liked to hang out with some French journalists who were living in the same residential area as I was. They told me about how many people in the north around Paris were very proud of their very public and well-known Parisian identity, but that people from the countryside feel that Paris is a very touristy place which is made to promote a certain vision of French culture that is not true to the “real” soul and culture of France. The journalists told me about how, in their opinion, the French countryside and smaller, quieter, towns better reflected “true” French culture.

Overall, this experience was groundbreaking and formative since it took me out of my comfort zone and I learned that if I put my mind to something, I can achieve it. I have been taking French for 5 years now, but before beginning this journey, I never thought I would become proficient enough to live alone in a francophone country or even make French friends. Through this program and the very generous funding from Bowdoin, I am proud to say that I was able to make massive strides in my French and gain the confidence necessary to take on challenges and succeed!

Faculty Mentor: Katherine Dauge-Roth

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