Hello! My name is Juliana. I am a student at the University of Northern Iowa working towards my French 2+2 degree. I came to France as part of this program in September 2019 and have had a blast ever since. I will be telling you a bit about the town and my experience living in Besançon as well as the program of studies that I chose to do here. Essentially, as we get here, we can choose between a degree in “sciences du langage” or “lettres modernes” (which should be the equivalent of linguistics and modern languages). I chose the degree in modern languages given that the classes seemed closer to the program given to me at UNI. Before coming to France, I finished a B.S. in Chemistry, a B.A. in Mathematics and a B.A. in Philosophy at UNI.

Program

Check out the document “Fiches_Module_Lettres_Modernes”. In this document you will find a detailed table with the classes offered in the modern languages choice as well as the description of the classes you have to take.

Homestay

One of my favorite experiences and best decisions before coming to France was staying with a French family. During this experience, I was able to be truly culturally immersed into the French culture. I woke up to practice French as we shared breakfast and at the end of the day of classes, we shared dinner. This gave me
the opportunity to practice a more familiar French. I was also able to share other experiences with them as we went together to various events and trips. It was due to this experience that I was able to considerably improve my French very quickly and gain confidence in the language. I would say it was especially nice for me to share some time with them during my first months in France due to the company they gave me during the cultural shock phase. They were a big company during this time and helped me tremendously to conquer my understanding French bureaucracy and mostly, finding patience to withstand the amount of senseless paperwork you have to do when you get here! But no worries, it will be ok. I will try to walk you through the process!

**Paperwork Chaos**

When I arrived, as an international student, I had to activate my Visa online. However, some people lead me to believe that I had to go directly to the prefecture to get my paperwork in order. Nevertheless, this was an unnecessary step. It was through this attempt to activate my titre de séjour that I lost a significant amount of time in between the “DRIF” (Direction des relations internationales et de la francophonie), the Scolarité des lettres, the SAWE (office responsible for making an appointment with the prefecture), the prefecture and of course, in public transportation! This is just a small example of the crazy bureaucracy in France. Do not expect efficiency. It is true, sometimes it feels like you need 20 signatures and approvals to get something done and that it takes forever to finally get it done. And when you think it is done, of course, there is a mistake! At the end, all of this motion was senseless since all I needed to do was to activate my titre de séjour online! However, all of this paperwork normally needs to be done to renew your titre de séjour for your second year.
As an example of how long some paperwork takes, it is now August 2020 and I am still waiting for my correct transcript of grades from the fall semester 2019! Yes, it is right, they’ve managed to get it wrong not once, nor twice nor thrice, not even four times but actually five! And on my fifth attempt, I am still waiting to receive the correct and complete transcript of grades! French bureaucracy is a true exercise in patience. This was a very strong cultural shock for me at the beginning. Even though I knew I would go through this stage of cultural shock, everything truly looked gray and way too difficult at times. Sometimes, I just wanted to go back home. However, having the support of my homestay family was always nice. I knew that at the end of the day, I would feel like home.

### Historical Sites

As for places to see in the city, the undeniable attraction is the citadel constructed by Vauban. You can also find the house of Victor Hugo, the center of the city “centre-ville” and the quartier Battant are a must do, the music conservatory, contemporary art museum, concert halls (kursal, la rodia etc) and many other interesting places to visit. One of the first things I learned was that it is very easy to go to museums in France, it is cheap as you can always count on having a student discount or a free ticket if you have your “carte d’avantage jeune”. In Besançon there is the musée du temps and the musée des Beaux Arts and with a 20 min drive from the city you can see a museum with traditional houses from the region. There is so much to see here! There is truly something for everyone!

### Outdoors

This is probably one of my favorite points as I love the outdoors. The most beautiful thing about Besançon is most certainly the green spaces! If you live in the center of the city (which is where “la fac des lettres” is) you will have a 10 min walk to “la gare d’eau” which is a beautiful parc right under the
citadel where most people get together for the “apero” in the evening. It is absolutely beautiful to be so close to the center of the city and to nature at the same time! An absolutely gorgeous experience. There are also 3 other forts that are a walking distance from the center and that make a pretty good hike (Bregille, Chaudanne, and the Citadel).

Besançon is really a city of forts and you can find remnants of its medieval and more modern history everywhere. There are also quite a few caves that you can explore near the city (The region of Franche-Comté actually has more than 9000 caves to explore) as well as really nice rock-climbing sites. For me it was also exciting to take bike trips to towns near the city and find some abandoned buildings that used to be factories and have been converted into parks. There is really a lot to do here if you like the great outdoors.

Trips nearby

✔ Franche-Comté
✔ Alsace
✔ Bourgogne
✔ Germany
✔ Switzerland

Student Engagement

One of my favorite things when I got to Besançon was the activities proposed by the ESN (Erasmus Student Network). Not only do they propose trips to explore the city and other cities in the region and sometimes in other countries but also a lot of events like...
movie nights, theater nights, competitions, kitchen clubs (where you get to cook delicious food from other countries around the globe and eat together with students that come from those countries! In fact, you can also propose a recipe of your own where you and other people from your country can cook together with the students that want to attend and enjoy some cultural exchanges). They also propose a conversation partner program and other events on campus and downtown (next to the faculty).

Perhaps my favorite activity with ESN was to get involved into the association to help other international students as they were coming in. They also proposed a sort of class that you can actually get credit for where you get to do some volunteer work with multiple associations and work with multiple groups of people (old, young and handicap people) which I found was one of the best things I did when I got here. It was through this experience that I got involved with other associations that care about the environment, propose activities for old people and do other work that I am personally passionate about. Through this volunteer work, I feel I got very much involved with the community here and the different problems different parts of the community face. It was an extremely rewarding experience through which I gained many friendships that I will forever cherish.
Work

This aspect was not in my original plan, but the opportunity arose, and I took it. I started teaching at a college-lycée for only a couple of hours a week and it was through this work that I got an enormous amount of practice in the use of everyday French with young people. You know, the language of academia used by your professors is extremely different than the one used in the streets and every age group talks and communicates differently as well. It was through this work experience that I got to learn the French spoken by kids and at the same time, try to explain various complex ideas to kids, which is never an easy matter! This has been yet another truly wonderful learning opportunity that I have been blessed to have.