

PARIS Connection

DC Paris Cultural Connection

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Imagine traveling internationally to one of the most visited and amazing cities in the world. Well, that's exactly what happened for a group of Defiance College students, a faculty member, and staff member.

Through DC Imagine Initiatives, a group of 10 traveled to Paris and spent five days visiting the city's top attractions while immersing ourselves in the culture through the Parisian cuisine, shops, and the daily routines of the people.

Mercedes Clay, Director of Intercultural Relations, and I started talking about planning an international trip last March. Our conversations eventually led to the development of DC Paris Cultural Connection, a DC Global trip. Our overall goal for the DC Paris Cultural Connection trip was to engage the students in developing skills and knowledge in international travel, become globally aware of our connections to other parts of the world through cultural immersion, and reflect on their own practice from an international perspective. Through our learning community (discussed later) we engaged the students in international travel and planning, intercultural relations, and research of Paris history, people, politics, and

economy, just to name a few. We were seeking DC students with both an interest in intercultural relations and international travel.

Mercedes and I had prepared ourselves and eight students to embark on a journey to the most visited city in the world – Paris, France. The students were Philip Balla, Toni Ann Boyd, Anastasha Brown, James Buari, Jonathon Collins, Ian Fasnacht, Andrew Senecal, and Abigail Taylor. They comprise sophomores, a junior, and a senior. Their majors varied from Communication Arts to Business. They are all actively involved on campus through athletics or various student and campus organizations.

Two of the students were flying for the first time, four had never traveled overseas, and one student was from Jamaica. Only one of us, Philip, knew any French at all. Of course, it only made sense that he would teach us conversational French. When we landed in Paris on December 12, we were all excited and open to experience Paris! We had planned a very ambitious itinerary that included many of the top sites. We started each morning of our five-day journey at 6 a.m. and did not return to our hotel on most nights until 10 p.m. or later.

In five days, we walked many miles, and miles which included the famous Avenue des Champs Elysees, rode 10 of the 14 metro lines and ascended and descended hundreds of stairs to visit some of the most amazing sites and views of the city. Our journey took us to 18 sites which included the Eiffel Tower, Musee de Larmee Hotel de Invalides, Musee de Rodin, Arc de Triomphe, Basillique du Sacre Couer, Notre Dame Cathedral, Memorial de la Shoa Holocaust Museum, Place de la Concorde, Opera National de Paris, Le Palais Garnier, Jardin des Tulleries, Louvre Museum and Monument, Musee D’Orsay, Musee de Marine, Pantheon, State Roland Garros, Sorbonne, and of course the Moulin Rouge.

We cruised the Seine River at night and watched the Eiffel Tower in lights: we took two different city tours through the busy streets of Paris which were always crowded with people, bikes, motorcycles, and cars. We experienced the French cuisine at cafes, street vendors, and at the Metro station. We shopped at the outdoor vendors on the Avenue des Champs Elysees, and visited popular fashion stores. And, of course, we enjoyed ice cream at Berthillon Ice Cream, one of the best ice cream shops in the city.

The sites, food and experiences were wonderful. For instance, riding the Metro lines always invited a different experience which ranged from the stench and sites of homelessness to the Metro entertainment to learning passenger Metro rules, all in French! Once we were serenaded by a trumpet player, we were crooned by a Parisian singer, and even received a sermon (we think) from a passenger. We quickly learned to use and recognize words like Sortie (which means exit) and other casual terms like Bonjour (good morning), Parlez Vous Anglais (do you speak English), and most importantly Merci (thank you)!

Our food journey was incredible! We enjoyed the most fabulous crepes with chocolate or Nutella, Belgian waffles (we know...in Paris!), French onion soup, Beef Tar Tar, snails, duck, and so much more. As we travelled from one part of the city to another, the change in social landscape was quite visible. For instance around the corner from our hotel was an outdoor soup kitchen and on Avenue de Champs Elysees the streets were lined with high-end stores and cafes. The Moulin Rouge area was a life



mixed with risqué entertainment to pop culture to intercontinental restaurants and cafes. Some of the highlights for our young travelers were visiting and walking the grounds of the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral. They instantly felt the uneasiness of being a minority, the national pride of the Parisians which was exemplified through the preservation of their rich history, and the social ills of poverty which crosses all borders of our world.

Overall, the experience is one that will never be forgotten! We not only learned and developed skills as international travelers, but we learned a little more about ourselves and others.

Building Community

*By Mercedes Clay
Director of Intercultural Relations*

Through our full semester learning community, learning about self and others began to emerge. The concept of using learning communities to enhance the experience of traveling domestically or abroad is not a foreign concept to the Defiance College community. The learning communities set the foundation of building understanding of all the aspects of the travel locations.

In developing the proposal for the DC Paris Cultural Connection, the learning community was used as a way to acclimate ourselves to the Paris experience. The idea of teaching students to become savvy travelers was an important component of the learning community. It was our desire for the student participants to have a full sensory experience in Paris by enjoying the sights, sounds, smells, taste and feel of the culture of the city. We did not want to be tourists; we wanted to engage in the Parisian culture.

The learning objectives for the DC Paris Learning Community were to expand the students' knowledge of the people of Paris by way of the culture, history, geography and social institutions; develop an awareness and understanding of different cultures; and encourage the students to find disciplinary and interdisciplinary connections for personal understanding of intercultural competence. In order to meet these objectives, the learning community met weekly prior to our departure. During this time, the



Students enjoying the sites of Paris included, from left: front, Phillip Balla, James Buari, Toni-Ann Boyd, Jonathan Collins; back, Ian Fasnacht, Andrew Senecal, Tasha Brown, and Abigail Taylor

student participants were encouraged to take an active role in all aspects of the trip preparations. Students formed work groups organized based on their interest in music, food, government and history. These work groups served as the experts in those specific areas and presented their research to the entire group.

The students were also responsible for creating the list of sites to visit during our time in Paris. The city is wonderfully divided into 20 arrondissements (districts). Our collective group desired to visit as much of Paris as we were physically able to see during our five days and was able to visit fabulous sites in 12 arrondissements.

Students were challenged to critically think about their personal awareness of other cultures. The diversity of the participants

opened the door for culturally connected conversations. Paris is filled with people from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The diversity of its people and the beauty of the French language enhanced the opportunity to be a part of the cultural fabric of the city.

The students were also asked to make connections between their research on Paris and their desired career goals. The Imagine Initiatives are great resume boosters for our students; therefore it is crucial that the students are able to speak about their Parisian experience in a holistic way, focusing on being engaged in the culture, rather than as a casual observer. The experience of being able to travel internationally and adapt is a great skill to showcase to future employers.

