

Eliza Mast

Marie Louise Vermeiren Jackson Scholarship Beneficiary

My semester in France was an extremely formative period for me, and I am so thankful for the Marie Louise Vermeiren Jackson's scholarship that made it possible. Using the funds, I was able to participate in the Acces Study Abroad program for the fall semester of 2025. This program allowed me to take a full course load of classes at the University of Strasbourg, lodge with a host family for the four month period, and go on several excursions to experience France more richly.

I took all my classes through the foreign language department (IIEF) of the University of Strasbourg. My classes were all in French, which pushed me a lot. I was able to test into the B2 level upon arrival which was a good fit and challenged me appropriately. In my grammar classes, I was able to go over foundational concepts I had learned previously as well as build upon them with new structures and more complicated rules. In my options classes, I was able to explore different topics like history and music in French which widened my vocabulary to new domains. In addition, all the students had to take two French culture classes, in which we learned a lot about important French political figures and current events.

The classroom was a great place for structured learning, but I learned just as much outside as in. Living with a host family was a great experience for me, and allowed me to apply the concepts I learned in class in an actual real life context. I boarded with a retired couple who only spoke French, so we were forced at times to find creative ways to work around our language barrier. We only had to use Google translate for a few tough words, like parsnip, so I'd say it was a success. We shared every week night meal together, which was a great opportunity to have conversation practice and learn about them. They also invited me along on some cool cultural activities such as a wine tasting and mass at the Strasbourg cathedral.

Additionally, I was able to get involved in several other regular activities that stretched me even further outside my comfort zone and led to a lot of growth both in language skills and personally. I volunteered at a local non-profit cafe every Monday morning, working behind the counter taking client's orders and serving them. This helped me build my confidence in interacting with native speakers; on my last day there I was so much more comfortable handling client requests and making small talk than I was on my first morning there. I also joined the university choir for the semester, attending weekly rehearsals, and participating in three concerts. I was thankful for this opportunity to meet French students and form some relationships with my peers. I was able to learn a whole new way of speaking from these young people than I used in conversations with my host parents and professors.

Each one of these experiences was unique and taught me something valuable, and the combined weight of all of them really helped me progress in all four competencies of French.

I hope to be able to continue practicing my French as I settle back into life here in the states. Upon graduating with a BSW and a minor in French next year, I plan to combine my two interests of social work and the French language to get an internship assisting recent refugees and immigrants from French speaking countries. I would like to sincerely thank the generous donors that made this scholarship possible. I feel so blessed and lucky to have been able to have had this rich and transformational experience in France, and I wish you all the best in continuing this program in the years to come for other students like myself to benefit from.