Studying Abroad Alone (Kind Of)

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Ava Godsy, center, is spending the semester in Rouen, France, at NEOMA Business School.

Most Tulane students who study abroad in France have probably noticed that there aren't very many of us. There are nine Freeman programs in France, but usually only a handful of people actually decide to go. The idea of letting go of all familiarity can definitely be frightening, but I would argue that it has completely shaped my experience abroad.

I've never been the type to avoid going off on my own. When I came to Tulane, only two other people from my high school had ever gone (shout out to my Kirkwood girls, Madison and Bridget!!). Upon my arrival at Tulane, I found that I quickly connected to the Tulane culture because I had no other group to fall back on. So

when I was deciding on my study abroad program, it was only natural that I believed the best way to connect with the French culture was to go off on my own again.



Some of my best friends and I on a trip to London

I won’t lie, it was intimidating at first. All of my initial interactions were with French people, so there was of course a communication barrier, and oftentimes I tried to figure out my own problems because I shied away from asking — really only because of the language barrier. For example, when I moved into my residence, I remember the administrator who gave me a tour mentioning something (in French) about paying for my electricity. I had already told her so many times that I didn’t understand something she said, so I didn’t ask for clarification. Well, apparently I was supposed to call a company to pay for my electricity, but I didn’t, and currently my electricity is shut off. Oops.



A dinner organized by Culture Connection, an association of French students at NEOMA who throw events for international students. We all brought a dish typical to our countries.

After my first week in Rouen, however, I really found a community here. A big part of this was meeting other international students in my classes and attending social events alone (scary, I know, but worth it). NEOMA has a robust association of French students, called Culture Connection, who put on events *all the time*. It was weird to show up to a bar alone, but it turned out that everyone at these events was also a little scared and just as eager to make friends. I made quick bonds with so many people this way, and it was so great to know that I was far from the only one going through all the challenges and joys of studying abroad alone.



Another event organized by Culture Connection, a trip to Versailles in Paris

I firmly believe that studying abroad alone is a very different experience from going with friends (neither better nor worse, but definitely different), and I don't regret my decision for one moment. It has forced me to practice my French, it has put me in situations I wouldn't have otherwise been, but most of all, it has led me to amazing friendships with people from all over the world.

Ava Godsy (BSM '21) is a double major in management and sociology. She is studying abroad at NEOMA Business School in Rouen, France for the spring 2020 semester.