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Fall 2015, UNH Dijon Program Celebrates 50 Years

Jim Parsons

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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UNH Global

UNH Dijon Program Celebrates 50 Years

Monday, November 30, 2015

In the fall of 1965, ten undergraduate French majors from the University of New Hampshire journeyed to France to undertake a full academic year of immersive language study at the Université de Bourgogne (UB) in Dijon. Fifty years later, the UNH Dijon Program continues to thrive. The Program has gone through many developments over the past five decades, evolving with the changing landscape of higher education and study abroad, but today it still functions as the primary language-intensive study abroad experience for students of French at UNH and as a dynamic Franco-American academic exchange between the two institutions.

To mark the anniversary - the longest between UNH and any institution abroad - UNH Dijon Program Director and Professor of French, Claire Malarte-Feldman, organized a celebratory reception on the Durham campus which took place on October 23. Nearly seventy individuals took part in the celebration, which included remarks by Interim Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Professor Mary Rhiel and Dean Ted Kirkpatrick from the College of Liberal Arts. But beyond



Participants in UNH Dijon Program and guests at the 50th anniversary celebration



Alumni of the Dijon Program reconnecting

simply recognizing the historic partnership, the event served to gather together past Dijon Program participants for an opportunity to exchange memories and celebrate their shared study abroad experiences. Over forty Program alumni were in attendance, including two from the very first 1965 cohort.

Ms. Diane Dingle, one of the 1965 alumni in attendance, provided colorful recollections of her journey to France 50 years ago as a naive New Hampshire twenty-year old, setting sail from Montreal across the Atlantic for France—the most affordable means of travel at that time. Her comments speak to significant change that has transformed the UNH Dijon over the past fifty years; a change reflective of broader trends in education abroad over the same time period. The Program started through the personal collaboration between UNH and UB faculty, and was initially structured as a traditional junior year direct enrollment program for French majors with an emphasis on language immersion. Starting in 1968, UB also began sending annually one student to UNH to serve as a Teaching Assistant within its French Program—establishing the reciprocal nature of the Program. Beyond this early addition, the Program structure remained very much unchanged for decades. And in an era before the pervasiveness of education abroad administration and student support, the UNH Dijon Program offered students little guidance, once in-country. "Students were essentially left to their own devices," described Prof. Malarte-Feldman.

But much has changed over the years. The UB Teaching Assistant role has formalized into an on-site student support position once the student is back in France. UNH has created more academic options over the semester and summer for students looking for alternatives to the full year abroad (while still maintaining a focus on language immersion). And more institutionalized support in-country is available to help coordinate academic, homestay, and daily life logistics.

Hundreds of students have participated in the exchange since its creation in 1965, and the UNH Dijon Program experience continues to inspire students of French, exposing them to life in one of the country's most iconic regional capitals.



Claire Malarte-Feldman,
UNH Dijon Program Director & Professor of French

Jessica Barret, who studied in Dijon in the spring of 2013, is now back in France teaching English. She reflected upon how her experience affected her: "Dijon really forced me to stretch the limits of my comfort zone in terms of experiencing aspects of a culture that are foreign to me...When you are living the culture and are immersed in the language, you either sink or you swim, and this program really helped me to swim. We had a lot of independence and we had a lot of responsibilities that we had to take care of on our own, but we also had help when we needed it. Had I not studied abroad, and had I not had the amazing experiences that I had in Dijon, I likely would not have returned to France, and I surely would have missed all of the experiences that have led me to where I am today."

The UNH Dijon Program hopes to build on its first fifty years and continue to provide rich language and cultural immersion experiences for students of French. "The longevity and vitality of the Dijon Program are not only evidence of its high academic quality, Prof. Malarte-Feldman remarked, but also of the passion and energy of all the people at UNH and UB-Dijon who have managed it over the past 50 years." We look forward to many, many successful years ahead."

~ Contributed by Jim Parsons, COLA Study Abroad Coordinator

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