TEAM FRANCE
Onsite Perspectives in International Education Management in France
Middlebury Institute of International Studies
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INTRODUCTION
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Onsite Perspectives in International Education Management, affectionately nicknamed, “Team France” whose primary objective was to allow MIIS students to engage with the French host community and French Middlebury Schools Abroad staff, faculty and students to better understand the onsite perspectives of managing education abroad for U.S. college students. We explored and evaluated a variety of international education organizations through visits and observations with various study abroad programs, French universities and local entities who engage with US students and partners to gain a deeper understanding of international education and professional practice in the French context. This was a project-based course that provided us with opportunities to design and implement our own pre-program trainings and to complete partner projects related to the management of education abroad from a host community perspective for organizations on-site in English or in French.

This paragraph has been adapted from the course syllabus for IEMG 8661: Onsite Perspectives in International Education. This course was led by MIIS IEM faculty member Professor David Wick.

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We explored and evaluated a variety of international education organizations... to gain a deeper understanding of international education and professional practice in the French context.
SUMMARY OF DELIVERABLES

I have completed several deliverables to demonstrate my learning with this immersive learning course and share to share my learning and experience with others.

**MIIS Instagram Takeover**
I organized and hosted a “MIIS Takeover” for the Middlebury Institute Instagram. This takeover allowed our fellow IEM faculty, peers, and the greater MIIS community and beyond to follow our adventures while we were abroad. I was originally scheduled to host this takeover for 10 days during the program and this was reduced to 4 to accommodate other J-term experiences but I was still able to share many great photos with captions that explained what we were doing and learning in Paris, and with which partners.

[https://www.instagram.com/middleburyinstitute/](https://www.instagram.com/middleburyinstitute/)

**MIIS Website Materials**
I collaborated with the MIIS communications department to provide photos from our program along with a statement summarizing how the program enhanced my learning here at MIIS personally, professionally, and academically.
This collaboration was featured on the Middlebury Institute homepage for the first several days of the new website launch. It is currently featured in an article about immersive learning opportunities on the website. You can find this article at the link below.

https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/news/winter-term-opportunities-students-span-globe

A third deliverable is the report I am providing below to document the professional, cultural, and personal reflections I have upon my return to MIIS thanks to this program.

TEAM LEADER

A significant part of my learning during this program was enhanced by my role as a Team Leader. Martha Levin and I were the two team leaders for this program and this role was unpaid, non-for-credit and spanned the entire fall semester and January term.

Martha and I supported David Wick with the design, planning, and logistics pre-during and post. We learned so much about program design and structure throughout the process, as well as how to facilitate a
pre-departure orientation, and how to lead student groups while on-site.

I also served the role of event-planning for opportunities we would have while in Paris and I organized an alumni networking event as well as a recruitment event for prospective students in the Paris area.

**PROFESSIONAL REFLECTIONS**

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I hope to work in the field of Onsite Education Abroad in France, so this course was ideally suited to my needs. I feel that my knowledge of this profession, of the field both generally and specifically was expanded during this immersive learning opportunity.

It was such a privilege to be able to meet with and learn from the wide variety of organizations that graciously invited us into their offices and centers and presented for us, allowed us to observe, answered our many questions, and in some cases partnered with us to let us gain experience creating projects for their organization. When marveling at how many of these organizations
pulled out all the stops to welcome us so warmly and give us such deep insights, I remember Professor Wick telling me that they did this because they consider us colleagues in the field and they are happy to collaborate with us.

I must say, I was a little surprised, but incredibly pleased to realize this--it’s true that even as graduate students in International Education Management, we are considered in this way. And one of the themes I was noticing about the field of International Education, and Education Abroad specifically, is the truly beautiful collaborative spirit that exists. Organizations were truly happy to share their ideas and plans with each other to the benefit of all students who come to France as a part of their education and/or career path.

I noticed many other trends in the field, and I’ll discuss a few here...

● Role of Evolution/Innovation for Increasingly Diverse Students & Needs
● Increased Value for Reflection in the Post-Program stage of the Education Abroad Continuum
● Conflicting Opinions on the Role of Language in Education Abroad

Role of Evolution for Increasingly Diverse Students & Needs

I think the first time I really started remarking on this change was when we visited the CEA study abroad center in Paris. Alexandra Mitchell, the director at the center talked a lot about the field and how important it is to her team and CEA that they are always looking to adapt and do something new. The discussion around adapting their structure and programming to suit students with increasingly diverse needs and goals etc. was really interesting, and the director of student affairs at CEA talked about how she is using her professional development to learn more about how she can support her students with their emotional well-being while they are abroad.

Education Abroad professionals are thinking about how they can be more inclusive of more diverse students and that is in all areas from
well-being to underserved populations, to students with different linguistic levels and goals (more on that piece later). Directors at Middlebury Schools Abroad and ACCENT both mentioned their interest in professional development in the area of diversity in education abroad, and their plans to attend the Diversity Abroad conference this year. The professionals in this field learn from each other and what issues their students are facing and what solutions may be working for them. This goes back to that collaborative spirit I mentioned that I appreciate so much in this field.

Sciences Po has been evolving their internationalization plan for years and it was incredible to see what changes and implementations they have been able to make. They have really made efforts to adapt to the needs of their incoming international students and this was clear in their welcome programme in which they try to promote awareness of all the resources and organizations available to the international students, they oblige all of their own students to go on a mandatory year abroad, they have recently joined the Mastercard Foundation and they are always looking to build meaningful partnerships for exchange. I will say that despite these innovations, there is still much more than could be changed. I think we were all surprised to see the lack of real mentoring and intentionality in the third year abroad program. Even though they said they were interested in their students coming back with the outcome of this “international mindset”, it doesn’t seem like they are doing any formal assessment of how the students may or may not have made ICC gains, or have developed new attitudes. There is so much more to say, but my main takeaway here is that even if there is still room for improvement, the field is aware that evolution towards increasingly complex student
needs and profiles is necessary, and it’s good to know that they are largely happy to do it and leaning on each other for advice.

**Increased Value for Reflection in the Post-Program stage of the Education Abroad Continuum**

I was so pleased to notice how much our partners in France were thinking about the entire education abroad continuum, including that last phase after students return to their home country. CEA mentioned their Reflections Abroad Student Conference, I know McKenna Hughes (an MAIEM ‘17 alumna) recently designed some re-entry activities for the Centre Madeleine at Middlebury Schools Abroad. I really enjoyed hearing about the way that EUSA Paris approaches the continuum in a way that will support reflection throughout that the students will benefit from after. The director of EUSA--- Jon Hutchison--- was saying that the students who are interning in Paris with EUSA are expected to keep an intern journal and they all have a Personalized Learning Object Toolkit that allows them to visualize and check off the skills they are gaining throughout their experience. I think this is a fantastic tool to get the students reflecting throughout the experience, and this kind of introspection is going to empower them to naturally and easily connect their internship to their ongoing education/career.
Conflicting Opinions on the Role of Language in Education Abroad

Before coming on this program, I had a vague knowledge that there were different programs out there with different opinions about language. I was surprised to see in person just how many variations in opinion on there were on a subject that generally divides up into two schools of thought--*Language is a key to culture and a successful education abroad OR language exposure and goals may be important objectives for some, but not all and everyone can have a meaningful experience anywhere, regardless of their proficiency in the host country’s language.* I am thinking about this trend in Education Abroad to minimize the importance of language to improve accessibility and it really makes me wonder about education abroad advising. Sending higher numbers of students abroad every year should not be the goal if we aren’t being intentional about what they are doing and how their experience is going to fit their goals and challenge them to grow. I’m not trying to suggest that the latter school of thought I mentioned is not worried about the students’ goals because they absolutely are. CEA is a great example of this. But I am just thinking about how wonderful of an opportunity I think the Centre Madeleine is for students who really want to make linguistic and cultural gains, as is EUSA. And I just hope that despite the rise of English as the “international language”, there will always be awareness and respect for programs like these.

Upon my return to MIIS, I had many follow up questions on this topic, and in discussing it with my colleague in IEM, Juliana, and she said something that really helped me understand something we had learned during our debrief of the IDI. We were told that research shows that there isn’t necessarily a correlation between language acquisition and intercultural competence, and I have been struggling to reconcile this with my strong opinions that it does. But Juliana told me about a quote she had learned that says, “a change in knowledge does not necessarily mean a change in behavior”. I think this quote perfectly explains the relationship between language and intercultural competency--*just because one knows a language, that does not mean they know the culture or become interculturally competent. To make
those types of gains, one must actively engage with the host culture (and reflect about and making meanings of these interactions). So while I know many people who spoke French in TAPIF, I also know that many of them spent no time with French nationals and subsequently they still have some stereotypes and generalizations in their minds about the French. I had to do more than just speak French to learn about the French-- I had to spend time with the French, ask them questions, try to understand their values, participate in their traditions. This is just one example of the many ways that my learning from this experience has continued since I returned from Paris.

The Centre Madeleine and EUSA Paris made very strong impressions on me because of their commitment to language acquisition and authentic cultural discovery and appreciation. I think more than ever now I am realizing that although I agree with both schools of thought I presented, I still feel much more connected to the first. And knowing this--and after many talks with Professor Wick-- I feel that I have refined my professional interests to focus on environments that consider language and culture to be significant aspects of their mission.

CULTURAL & LINGUISTIC REFLECTIONS
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I knew coming into the program that I would learn so much from an educational and professional standpoint. I knew that meeting with and learning from all our different partners in Paris was going to give me a more in-depth look into the different education systems in France and the States, the different types of study abroad organization, the aspects and challenges distinct to on-site education. While I will say that I learned even more than I expected in those areas, I was already expecting quite a lot.

What I was not expecting was how much I would learn about culture and language on this program. It was never a conscious negative thought, but I suppose I just figured my 2.5 week faculty-led program
wasn’t going to teach me that much about culture/language after my cumulative 2.5 years in France. And yet...

**The Intercultural Development Inventory**

I can’t say I was very surprised by the group results or the aspects of French culture that Alemendra (our IDI administrator) discussed with us, but I will say that getting a real vocabulary to describe some of these abstract cultural concepts I had been noticing or wondering about was something that really stuck with me. It did help me to somehow understand the roots of some cultural differences I had just not quite been able to put my finger on.

**Using French: Centre Madeleine & Elsewhere**

The Centre Madeleine (The C.V. Starr Middlebury School in France) is really something else. I felt so privileged to have the opportunity to sit in on and join so many of their sessions and activities. Being able to listen, take notes, speak with students, engage in conversations with faculty etc. in pure French within the center and outside of it was such an incredible opportunity for my French. It was the first time since May that I was able to be that immersed in the language, and I could feel the way some of my language was coming back and improving.

In general at sessions at Paris Diderot, Sciences Po, and anywhere we had
presentations in French I was so pleased to learn more profession-specific vocabulary, and I could was happy to challenge myself to do some interpreting and translating for my peers when necessary. As I mentioned in previous reflection journals, being able to use my French in this way made me feel empowered to use my skill to support others. I can say that I feel even more confident that not only will I be able to operate fully in French at work during a practicum position and beyond, but having that opportunity is really important to me. Speaking French keeps me sharp, makes me feel empowered, and it allows me to feel so much more present and part of the culture and the country.

**Cultural Discovery**

I have to say, the Parisians shocked me this past January in such a positive way. I have always been frustrated with the characterization of the French—and Parisians specifically—as cold and rude. And yet... in some ways it was true, at least compared to the people of province, Parisians were just not as warm. The difference was that I blamed this on their identity as dwellers of a big city where it is hard to trust anyone, much like New York City, rather than blaming this on their culture or nationality.

And somehow the Parisians took me by surprise in three short weeks this past January. Nearly every day I was being showed exceptional kindness and warmth from strangers on the street, commerçants, servers, even the lately at the RATP office by my flat share. I started keeping a little list in my phone of all the
little ways Parisians made me feel not just welcome but like I was just a part of their life and not the young American tourist they saw me as when I studied abroad here. In 2014 servers were rude to my friends and I and nearly always switched to English despite our best efforts. And even when people weren’t impolite, I always felt othered in the minds of the French. I was blonde, wearing bright colors, and had an accent in my hesitant French.

This January I can only point to one unimportant security guard at Sciences Po as an example of the way I was treated in Paris in 2014. I puzzled over this with Martha and asked her, and myself, has Paris changed this much or is it different because my French is stronger and I’m more confident? Martha was sure that the difference is the French appreciating my level of French as a foreigner.

Maybe I am making a mountain out of a molehill with this example, but it was remarkable to me, and it confirms my connection with the idea that speaking the language of a host country gives you access to some of the best parts of its culture. Le Mans too was truly an incredible place with really lovely people. Without a decent level of French, my life in Le Mans with many French friends who were not proficient in English would not have been possible.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The goals I had set for myself before participating in the course in Paris were to gain experience and knowledge in the field of onsite Education Abroad, and to start building a network that I can use when searching for a practicum and afterwards full-time employment. I am realizing now that I have not only met those goals but I learned even more about myself, and as I mentioned above, French culture and language too.

Talking to and seeing different organizations and the French institutions really allowed me to envision myself in this career I have been planning for through my studies at MIIS. I learned so much
about the field that truly excites me for this career. Being at Centre Madeleine and being able to engage with the students at the beginning of their semester in France and hear about their own goals, fears, and plans made my shift from student to soon-to-be-professional feel more real and more exciting.

I also can’t express how much it meant to me to be able to design and prototype a cultural activity for the group and present my report in French to the Centre Madeleine! This kind of hands-on experience makes me feel confident in the path I’ve chosen and how I can use my strengths, personality, and passions to succeed.

Just as education abroad, and education in general, should be designed to accommodate all students and identities and personalities it should also accept all personalities and identities of faculty and staff. While I believe that my extroversion, energy and enthusiasm can be appropriately leveraged and channeled to make my work in the field better, that isn’t to say that someone completely different from me wouldn’t have their own unique set of skills that support their students. After returning to MIIS, during my Design Thinking class in Design & Assessment, I was asked to think of three people who are my people in life, who have influenced me or who support me in a significant way. I, and others I spoke to, found three distinctly different people who made an impact on our lives. Students also need faculty to look to and learn from who bring different skills and attitudes to the table. And I feel like there is a place for mine in education abroad.

I certainly feel that Team France allowed me to draw from my previous international experiences and in many ways my program at MIIS has felt like one massive re-entry training. With everything that I am learning and doing, I am unpacking more pieces from my experiences with TAPIF and study abroad. It was exciting to make these kinds of connections as I am learning during the course in Paris. My previous experiences abroad and the ones I had in January, give me real-world applications to big, rich, multi-faceted concepts. Additionally, my background with France gave me the ability to better support my peers throughout the program. Being able to give them recommendations, tips, guidance when they asked, or using my language (as I mentioned before)
to support them was a direct application of these developed skills to my work today.

Knowing what I know now, I have much more clarity about where I’ve been and where I’m going next. I want to leverage the knowledge, skills, and attitudes I’ve been developing throughout all of these experiences to be a better professional in the field of education abroad and better equipped to support students on their own unique journey.
None of this would have been possible without the tireless efforts, the thoughtfulness, the time, the commitment and the amazing network of Professor David Wick. I am so grateful to him for never stopping to try to make this program as amazing and rich as it was for all of the participants—especially in very ambiguous situations!

I am also so grateful to have had the opportunity to be a Team Leader and especially with Martha Levin. She was such an incredible partner to have on this project. Her insights, knowledge, experience, and commitment were evident and so helpful throughout this process. She and I leaned on each other, supported each other, and I truly feel lucky to have both a friendship and a professional relationship with her. I am so excited for both of us to find amazing opportunities in France where we can continue collaborating and doing great Education Abroad work!

Et un grand merci à tous les autres...

**Partners**

- Middlebury Schools Abroad in France (Centre Madeleine)
  - McKenna Hughes
  - Julia Kelley
  - Lucy King’oo
  - David Paoli
  - Amy Tondu
• ACCENT
• American Business School
• Atome
• CEA
• CIEP
• Comforts of Home
• EUSA
• Paris Diderot
• Sciences Po
• TAPIF

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• Eva Gudbergsdottir
• Financial Aid
• Cashiers
• IPL Funding & Barbara Burke
• And many more...
France

- Café les Editeurs
- Chez Jenny
- Gibert Jeune
- Les Boulangeries-Patisseries de Paris
- Les Pharmacies de Paris
- Le Marivaux
- Le Mechoui du Prince
- Le Relais de l’Entrecote
- Orange
- RATP
- And many more...