

SAINT FRANCIS UNIVERSITY



Meeting Our Brothers and Sisters Around the Globe

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH NEWSLETTER
Semester in France 5th Anniversary Edition

SPRING 2013

*Have you ever had a dream so vivid and beautiful that you never wanted to wake up?
That's what spending a semester in France is like.
Every moment is a journey of growth, discovery, and wonder.*

- Beth Wheeler, 2011 Fall Semester in France

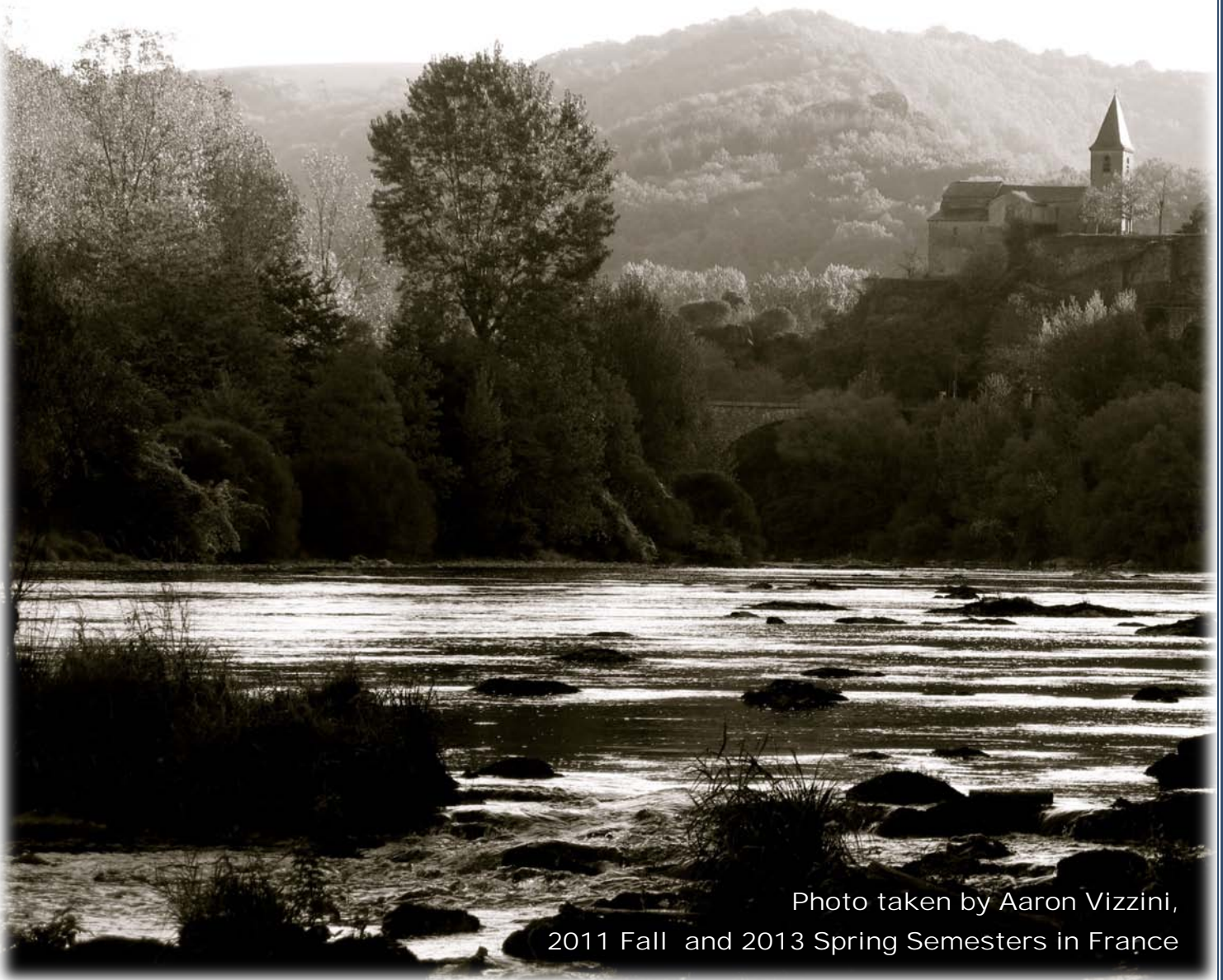


Photo taken by Aaron Vizzini,
2011 Fall and 2013 Spring Semesters in France



SEMESTER IN FRANCE – THE BEGINNING

by Vince Remillard

Several years ago (perhaps around the year 2000) there was a suggestion that came from an outside review of either the Administration or the General Education program (I don't recall which) that the University should try to take advantage of its Franciscan network as a way of enhancing its educational resources. Following this suggestion I inquired as to what properties the TORs may have in France to see if there was a possibility for SFU to establish a campus there. Fr. Christian then

informed me that the TORs had properties in France but he did not know if they were available. In any case, the idea was not pursued any further because SFU at that time did not have any long range plans for establishing a study abroad campus.

In the 2003 fall semester Fr. Gabe called me into his office and presented me with the goal of establishing a center for international studies. He asked me to create a plan for such a center, part of which, per my suggestion (recalling my earlier conversation on this topic with Fr. Christian), would include establishing a university campus in France. Consequently, I wrote to Fr. Michael Higgins in Rome, my former student who was then the TOR Vicar General, to request information on TOR properties in France that would be available for our use. A reply was sent to Fr. Gabe that there was a vacant TOR priory in Ambialet, France. Since Joyce and I were going to France as part of my sabbatical in the 2004 fall semester, I contacted the person responsible for this property, Fr. Jose Botelho. He invited us to come to his parish at Notre Dame de la Drèche, just outside the city of Albi, and about 15 miles from Ambialet.

Upon arriving in Albi, Fr. Jose invited us to dinner and there we met the last French Franciscan TOR priest, Fr. Jacques Albert. We also met seven other men who were part of an association that overlooks the TOR properties in France. They were all proud of their historic site and were anxious for the Priory to be used by an educational institution affiliated with the Franciscans so that it could continue its original mission.

The group then brought us to the top of a cliff where the Priory stands. We entered through huge wooden doors that squeaked on their hinges and that led into the inner courtyard. Its huge patio overlooked the treetops and across to the cliffs and led the eye down to the Tarn River that wrapped around the cliff and which had turned red after a recent rainstorm. Besides four floors of deteriorating dormitories, bathrooms and kitchen, one of the inner courtyard doors opened onto the 9th century Romanesque church. We were stunned by the view of the front patio of this church overlooking the tiny hamlet of Ambialet and that one could walk down the cliff and enter directly into the hamlet by way of a path at which there are wonderfully picturesque stations-of-the-cross stops.

In short, the site grabbed our soul, a spiritually uplifting, serene and magnificent location at which we felt a divine presence wanted us to continue what the Franciscan TORs began at that location more than 150 years ago. Historically, the Priory was built in the middle of the 19th century and served as a school and pre-seminary for boys.

When we returned home, Joyce and I reported our findings to Fr. Gabe and to other members of the administration. While we had been in awe of what we had seen, we were very realistic in regard to the horrible condition of the building and the isolation. For a year I was in continuous contact with Fr. Jose so as to keep him informed as to where we were at SFU in discussing the Priory. In the spring of 2006, Fr. Jose reported that he needed to know if the university was interested in pursuing a lease for Ambialet. At a meeting held soon thereafter, Fr. Gabe gave initial approval to a one year lease and requested that we hire

There is no other aspect of Saint Francis University that has had such a profound effect on my education, beliefs, ideals and cultural awareness than that of the Semester in France program. The countless individuals at Saint Francis University that bring about this opportunity, through their handiwork, have created something truly remarkable and it should never be taken for granted. It is wonderful to see how the program has progressed over the past 5 years and I hope that the Saint Francis University community continues to support the program's progression forward for many years to come.

- Aaron Vizzini,
2011 Fall and 2013 Spring Semesters in France

someone with experience in establishing campuses abroad to make a more detailed report on what we needed to do. At the recommendation of the Director for study abroad at Dickinson University whom I contacted, we engaged Tim Perkins to do a feasibility study. He followed up with a complete report with estimated costs and timelines for refurbishing the Priory as a campus. We then asked Tim if he would initiate and supervise the work there and he agreed.

My duties were then to introduce the Priory in Ambialet to various sectors of the institution, administrators, faculty and students. After I retired in May 2007 Joyce and I were asked to accompany the first group of students to France.

SEMESTER IN FRANCE - ORGANIZATION

by Tim Perkins

The first time I saw the Monastery in Ambialet was late October 2006. My first thoughts: big...really big; dirty...really dirty; challenging...really challenging. Oh, and drop-dead magnificent. The magnificence kept me focused. That, and the fact that students were going to arrive in March of 2008.

The first step was to have plans of the building drawn so that we knew what we were working with. In a building of 35,000 square feet, it isn't easy to keep everything straight. Each time I would visit the building it was different – some rooms grew, some shrank, some changed positions. We needed concrete drawings to work from.

At the same time there was the issue of how construction projects actually operate in France. I quickly learned the system is quite formal (as is so much in France: I guess a couple thousand years of tradition will do that to a place), and that the labor laws weren't going to help my timetable. They work 35 hour weeks (very little overtime), and in August they don't work at all (literally all the trades suspend operations for their vacations).

One of the concerns up front was being taken advantage of through our lack of 'local knowledge.' To counter that, we used a consultant company to review plans, estimates, and bills. This meant that we had both the consultant and the architect reviewing invoices before I even saw them.

Anyone who saw the building under construction thought I was crazy to think we'd finish it in time. I kept telling the 14 different sub-contractors that if it wasn't done the students were going to stay with them.

I would spend time at the site nearly every day through December 2007. Then in January it got a bit more complicated: 7 students arrived in Paris. That one term, we used a building in a close-in suburb of Paris for our students. Their program was split: first half in Paris; second half in Ambialet. Fortunately we had Vince and Joyce Remillard as resident adults, plus we had the services of Gerry Honigsblum (now our Academic Director), who was resident in Paris and an expert on the city, culture, and just about anything else one can imagine.

This was my commuting period: four days in Paris, three in Ambialet initially; then in February the opposite, as March loomed like the grim reaper.

I only had to "go American" once during this period, and that was the day in February when I showed up Friday at 10 and there were 3 people on the job. I blasted out emails and phone messages without discrimination to anyone who had anything to do with the building, saying, "It will be hard to finish the project on time IF NO ONE WORKS ON IT!" Monday morning I counted 23 workers, a few of whom muttered something about their bosses shouting at them.

A week before we were scheduled to welcome the students, I was likely the only person who thought we could do it. I pushed, poked, and prodded, repeatedly telling the workers that there was no plan B. The workers got the idea. At 4pm on Friday, the student rooms and bathrooms were completed – just in time for the Monday arrival.

Sounds good, no? One problem...the rooms were empty. All weekend a group of four Sri Lankans (don't ask!) constructed IKEA furniture. At midnight Sunday I was lugging mattresses up to the rooms, helped by a local family. Monday morning – almost exactly five years ago -- the students arrived.



1st Semester in France Group, Spring 2008

We continued construction a year later, adding another wing of bedrooms to bring us up to our legal limit of 29 beds, and then six months later we finished hammering and nailing by putting in a kitchen and dining room.

We're all set for now. Until we need more beds, that is. There is still an entire floor awaiting renovation. Lord, give me strength...

STUDENTS COME TO SFU BECAUSE OF OUR SEMESTER IN FRANCE PROGRAM

Thirty-two percent of the students who spent a semester in France said they came to SFU because of the program. Below are just a few of their statements.

When I began the search for the perfect college, I knew immediately that the college that I chose had to have various study abroad options. Sitting in Mr. John Krimmel's office after touring Saint Francis in November 2007, I fell in love, I fell in love with France and the realistic possibility of living in a beautiful monastery-converted-dormitory for four months while taking classes and delving into French culture. - Molli Rogers, Nursing, 2010 Spring Semester in France

The Center for International Education and Outreach set Saint Francis apart from the other Universities of interest...I am looking forward to my Semester in France. - Gabriel Phillips, History major, 2010 Fall Semester in France



2010 Spring Semester in France Group

The quality of the study abroad programs at Saint Francis University was a very important factor in my decision to enroll here. I look forward to the unique opportunity to study for a semester in France. - Jennifer Yealy, Psychology, 2011 Spring Semester in France



2011 Spring Semester in France Group

I was sent a large packet in the mail containing information about Saint Francis' Study Abroad program. I will never forget how excited I was to see the many places I could go while still completing an excellent college education. One of my dreams has always been to travel to Europe. The promise of such life-building opportunities sealed my desire to attend Saint Francis as I saw this as a way to broaden my world view and gain an understanding and appreciation of other cultures. - Laura Harmon, Nursing, 2011 Fall Semester in France

While touring the Saint Francis University campus I was impressed but not completely sold on the idea of attending a small school in the middle of virtually nowhere. However, after talking to some program representatives I began to see that Saint Francis had a lot more to offer than pine trees and cold winters. One program representative in particular stopped me and began talking to me about a program in which students could explore diverse cultures and customs while earning college credits. The study abroad representative mentioned that a trip to France is taken twice a year both in the spring and again in the fall. He began describing, in great detail, exactly what students learned and experienced while on their study abroad adventure. After the discussion I knew my decision on which college to attend became so much easier. - Caleb Brantner, Economics, 2012 Spring Semester in France



2012 Spring Semester in France Group

When I was looking for a college, studying abroad was definitely on my list of things to do in school. My older sister studied abroad and she had some complications with her classes when she came back to the states. She studied abroad on a completely different campus and school system that was not really attached to her school. In order to avoid the problems she had with her study abroad experience, I wanted to find a school that had their own campus in a different country and that had a good solid program that would allow me to enjoy all of my time abroad and not have to worry about any problems. Saint Francis had the program I was looking for. – Katrina Vosteen, Occupational Therapy, 2012 Fall Semester in France

The study abroad program in France definitely influenced my decision to come to Saint Francis University as I was looking for a program where my financial aid would transfer and the tuition would be the same. – Nicole McClement, Exercise Physiology, 2013 Spring Semester in France.

The day I learned of the study abroad opportunity that Saint Francis University offered I was blown away by what kind of future stood before me; with this being said, there is no question that the study abroad program influenced my college decision process. –Katrina McCombie, International Studies, preparing for 2013 Fall Semester in France

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.
– Mark Twain

SFU's Semester in France Staff



Tim Perkins: Leader of the team, the program and the building, Tim makes his humor and experience part of everyday life in the monastery. He guides rather than mandates, and he cherishes and **nurtures** intellectual curiosity among the students.



Gerald Honigsblum (left): Quite likely the closest you'll come to a 'renaissance man', Gerry is expert in practically anything to do with France, art, music, literature, or languages. Students love his intellectual energy and the dazzling breadth of his knowledge -- all delivered with humor and delight.

Eric Sepich (right): former student of the program, Eric is in his second year as Program Assistant. His incredible joy, coupled with unflagging energy, empathy and dedication, makes Eric an ideal help and inspiration to students.



Eric Crema (pointing up): The fearless guide to the mysteries of SW France, Eric loves medieval architecture, history and art. Students love his tours because he's fun and he makes sense out of things students didn't even know they didn't know!



Bernard LaBrosse: Everyone's favorite chef, Bernard produces an amazing array of food every day. *Poulet-Frites* will never be the same for you after you've had his version!



Sophie LeQuéré General 'handywoman,' office manager and head gardener, Sophie brings Frenchness right down to the daily level. While preferring to stay in the background, she will step forward to talk about gardens with anyone.



Marie Perez: Since opening day of the building, Marie has been our 'femme de ménage', fearlessly and tirelessly tidying up after us -- all with incredibly good spirits and enthusiasm. She loves the students and they her!

2013 SPRING SEMESTER IN FRANCE UPDATE

by Chuck Olson

On March 2, 2013, SFU organized along with Jean Pierre LaFloch (mayor of Ambialet) and the community at large An Evening of Music featuring SFU artists in residence (Fall 2012) Clelia Cicero and Neter Calafati in the performance of PIAF, the Songs of Edith Piaf, plus performances by local musicians, SFU professor Chuck Olson, and the students at Ambialet. It was a most remarkable evening of exchange between many aspects of the SFU abroad spirit: Ambialet, Parma, Loretto, and the Tarn Region. More than 155 people attended the four-hour event in the village.

Students and faculty spent four great days in Barcelona visiting the important cultural focal points of this Catalan capital. Dr. Sue Morra, Dr. Gerry Honigsblum, Ms. Marie Thomas-Olson, Mr. Chuck Olson, Mr. Eric Sepich and our 22 students traveled to Gaudi's Casa Battlo, The Barcelona Aquarium, Miro Foundation, the Picasso Museum, La Sagrada Familia, the Barcelona Market, and participated in a walking tour of the Barria Gothica. Great weather favored a complete tour of this incredible city.

Dr. Sue Morra and Mr. Eric Sepich have been conducting a series of five wine tasting information sessions with, of course, representative wines - exploring the wines of Gaillac, Burgundy, Bordeaux, Alsace Lorraine, and the Champagne regions! Hats off to Dr. Morra and Mr. Sepich for taking the initiative on this.

Students have also met with students of the Universite d'Albi both in Albi and at the Ambialet campus. French film series and Art History films are held every week. Students travel to open markets in nearby St. Jurey and Albi.

Students will head to Paris for 10 days on March 10 followed by a 10-day free travel period before returning to the monastery for Easter. Travel destinations include Italy, Ireland, England, Czech Republic, Hungary, Istanbul, Athens, Crete, Switzerland, Germany, and, of course, France!



2013 Spring Semester in France group's visit to the American Cemetery at Suresnes commemoration, with group gathered around Jenna Zemlock, singing the National Anthem.



In Paris, every evening, a ceremony is held at the Arc de Triomphe. The Arc, with its Eternal Flame, honors French soldiers, as well as the Unknown Soldier. Retired French military tend the flame and perform the evening ritual. Individuals from Allied countries are invited to participate in the ceremony. Once again Saint Francis students were honored by the invitation to participate in the ceremony. As our students look on, Gerry Honigsblum and Eric Sepich tend the flame.

MAYORS' ATTESTATION

Recently, on a trip to the French Embassy in DC, the Director of the Center for International Education met with representatives of the Embassy to discuss the visa process for our Semester in France students. Gerry Honigsblum, the program's Academic Director, collected letters from the Mayors of Ambialet and Albi, in support of our France program, to take to the Embassy. Below is a translation of each letter. The Embassy representatives are very pleased with our program in France as are the French Mayors, as you can read...

To Whom It May Concern

I, the undersigned, Jean-Pierre LEFLOCH, Mayor of Ambialet, herewith attest that the arrival of Saint Francis University in the Priory of Ambialet some five years ago has had a number of positive effects:

--Economically and in matters of heritage preservations with the completion of restoration work on this 11th century building listed on the national heritage roster, work done in two successive phases resulting in its capacity to host, lodge, and feed students, all the while abiding by the rules of historic preservation. A third phase of restoration is already anticipated. It should be stated that this site attracts a large number of tourists, situated as it is in the middle of an unusual meander of the river Tarn, unique in Europe.

-- A very good integration of young people into local everyday life and special events (exchanges with our youngsters in the primary school, active participation in numerous local events and holidays).

--A measurable contribution to the local economy (increased business and employment).

--Five years of high-quality cultural activities within the framework of international student mobility. Presence of young people, not only Americans, but Europeans (ERASMUS), and Russian (protocol agreement with Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow).

--Franciscan ethics, secular educational policy which found its place without any difficulty in our community, made official via formal registration as a not-for-profit organization (SFU FRANCE, as per the provisions of the law of July 1, 1901; statutes on file at the Préfecture du Tarn).

--A commitment on the part of the resident director to open SFU to the greater community via open door days, invitation to participate in the Thanksgiving celebrations, visits by the American Consul in Toulouse....and many other functions too numerous to list.

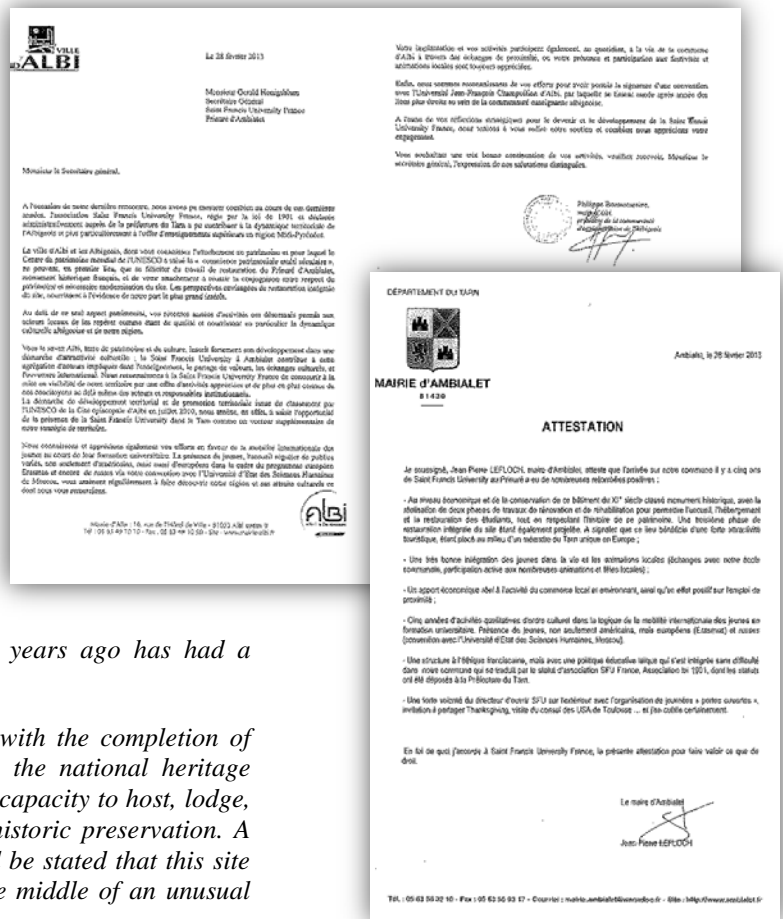
In witness thereof, I submit the above testimony to whom it may concern. Jean-Pierre LEFLOCH, Mayor of Ambialet

Mr. Secretary General:

On the occasion of our last meeting, we were able to measure to what extent the Association Saint Francis University France has contributed to the dynamics of Greater Albi for the past few years. Your institution, registered with the Préfecture du Tarn has made its impact notably on university-level teaching and learning in the region of Midi-Pyrénées.

The City of Albi and its citizens whose attachment to heritage you know well and which the UNESCO World Heritage Center has recognized for their "multi-secular patrimonial consciousness", cannot help be delight in the restoration work accomplished on the Prieuré d'Ambialet, a French historic monument, and in your commitment to dovetail respect of heritage and modernization of the site. The prospect of further restoration triggers in us a keen interest in your work.

Beyond this patrimonial aspect of your work, your activities over the past few years have been duly recognized by local decision



makers as notable and as adding considerably to the cultural dynamic of our region. You are well aware that Albi, land of heritage and culture, wagers strongly on developing its attractiveness in the realm of culture. Saint Francis University France enjoys our full recognition as a contributor to teaching and learning, sharing of fundamental values, cultural exchanges, and internationalization. We are grateful to Saint Francis University for enhancing the visibility of our region through its offerings that are increasingly appreciated by our fellow citizens, beyond the core of decision makers and institutional leaders.

Our regional development policy, born of UNESCO's listing of the Episcopal City of Albi in July 2010, in effect invites us to seize the opportunity offered by Saint Francis University's presence in the Tarn as an additional vector in our local strategy.

We also recognize and value your efforts on behalf of international mobility for young people enrolled in university degree programs. The presence of those young people, the regular reception of various groups, not only of Americans, but also of Europeans within the framework of ERASMUS, and beyond that of Russians through your protocol agreement with the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow, all bring credence to your efforts in helping our region and its cultural assets to be discovered by our guests on a regular basis. We thank you for that.

Your settling among us and your activities bring added value to community life in Albi through local exchanges during which your presence and participation in festivities and local events are always appreciated.

Last but not least, we are grateful for your efforts in fostering exchange agreements with the University campus of Jean-François Champollion in Albi through which stronger relations are nurtured, year after year, within the Albi academic community.

As you formulate strategic plans for the future development of Saint Francis University France, we are pleased to take the opportunity to reiterate our support and to express our gratitude for your commitment.

Wishing you continued success in your activities; we remain, M. Secretary General,

Very cordially yours, Philippe Bonnacarrère, Mayor of Albi, President of the Greater Albi Regional Council

FROM THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

by Juliana Horvath

I feel very fortunate indeed to have this opportunity to help students experience, first-hand, their global community. I've seen students change from compliant, indecisive individuals to confident, take-charge world citizens due to their experiences including personally meeting their international brothers and sisters. The transformation due to a semester abroad is priceless. The students feel they can go anywhere with the skills they've acquired in their four-month stay in Europe. The fact that SFU makes this opportunity available to our students for the same tuition, room and board cost as a semester in Loretto is just unbelievable. Congratulations to visionaries of our Semester in France program. Your work has and will be a wonderful contribution to graduates' success in life.

An email from a student currently in France...

For spring break, me and four other girls are starting in Venice, then going to Parma, and then seeing Rome. While in Rome we're doing bus trips to Pompeii and Florence, so it should be exciting.

Oh there is so much I can say about this program. It's been a truly life changing experience. Within weeks everyone here has gotten so close, just like a family, and we've all been able to experience personal growth through learning about the culture.

I can't thank you enough for helping me get here! Au revoir!

-Alyssa Phillips, 2013 Spring Semester in France



2011 Fall Semester in France Group