

Student finds French campus bleak

Long before I finalized plans to come to Bordeaux, I was warned that French campus life is not at all similar to the animation typical of American universities.

One glance at the expansive University of Bordeaux campus confirms these premonitions. In fact, it touched upon an even more profound question—is there life on campus?

mary jo pitzl

The Bordeaux campus is located in a remote suburb that 15 years previously was a wooded area. It's a big campus: about the size of three UNL city campuses laid side by side. Long, low, gray classroom buildings, six architecturally similar residence complexes and lots of wide open spaces fill the campus. The overall effect is incredibly drab, boring and lifeless.

My daily trek from the dorm to classes, although only a seven-minute walk, is so lackluster that I've taken to riding my bicycle to break the boredom.

No landscaping

Obviously, landscaping is not included in French university planning. The campus is functional, in that you do get from one place to another, but the going has never been so dull.

Plush green lawns, carefully-tended flower beds and big shade trees are distinctly lacking from this campus. There is no area that lends itself well to informal class gatherings. Of course, there could be a reason for this, as it rains almost constantly in Bordeaux.

Given these rather stark conditions, it's understandable that the outward appearance of the campus evokes no image of animation. But trying to find interior animation can often be just as futile.

No place to gather

There is no student union, no bar, no downtown center where students can congregate. Bordeaux alumni, who knew the university when it was located in center city, lament the fact that there are not even any cafes near the present campus. Cafes for the former university site were what the Hole, Horsefeathers and the Rail are to UNL.

Students seeking entertainment at night are almost obliged to go into the city, which requires either a car or relying on the insufficient bus system. No buses leave the campus after 8:30 p.m., and the return trip from the city to campus must be made by 8:15 p.m. or a wait for the midnight bus is mandatory.

The dorms themselves are not well-suited to socializing. The rooms, all singles (well, theoretically), are void of the memo boards and other paraphernalia that decorate dorm rooms in the States. There are no floor lounges, no snack bars, and only one of the six residence halls has vending machines. Each dorm has a communal TV room and my dorm is blessed with the convenience of a kitchenette on each floor. The kitchenette has proven to be one of the best congregating spots for large groups, although there are no tables or chairs whatsoever.

Dorm rooms, social centers

Therefore, most of the socializing, partying, and conversations take place in the individual rooms. This works well up to a certain point, then conditions get a little crowded. But students have learned that if they move their bed, desk and chairs into the bathroom, they have a lot more space for big dinners and dancing.

Although there are not many conditions conducive to a lively campus life, if you know where to look, you can find it.

There are frequent "boums" on campus, which is the French word for a big dance in a crowded, smoky room where an amazing amount of American songs are played. Disco is quite the rage over here, although I've yet to

see John Travolta look-alikes.

Bi-weekly cinema clubs bring a varied selection of films to campus, and at prices that students can afford. Very often, these films are followed by a debate among audience members.

"Coffee times" lively

The best animation is that created by the individual. A rather regularly-observed custom is to invite friends over to your room for coffee after the evening meal. These coffee times often stretch on for hours once the conversation gets rolling, precluding any hopes of evening studying.

Finding my evenings easily filled by socializing when I first arrived at Bordeaux, I realized the wisdom of a friend's advice. He had told me that American students often have to adjust their study habits at Bordeaux, as the daytime was made for studying and the evenings for relaxation and partying. Considering no libraries are open at night and everyone is basically "stuck" on campus, the best solution does seem to be seek-or-create-animation.

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