

# COLUMBIA-PENN PROGRAM REID HALL, PARIS

Spring 2008, Vol 1

**W**elcome to our first newsletter. We will publish updates each term to inform you about changes in our program. Students, faculty, and staff will contribute their viewpoint on life at Reid Hall, at French universities, and in Paris.

We are very pleased about the new directions in our program and welcome feedback and suggestions from all of you.



The Reid Hall courtyard

## Program Highlights

The goal of our program in Paris is to fully integrate students into the French academic community and to maximize their knowledge of and adaptation to French language, culture, and society in a global context.

Students are now required to enroll in a 3-week advanced grammar practicum, followed by a 10-week academic writing course.

For their electives, they select 1 or 2 classes at one of the local universities, or at Reid Hall. The in-house curriculum includes joint seminars with our French university partners, noted guest lecturers, and on-site

courses. Students also have the possibility of conducting research on specific topics mentored by a French university professor with whom they meet on a weekly basis.

Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities engage both French and international students.

### Joint Seminars

The program now hosts joint seminars with several French partner universities. In this pioneering endeavor, a French professor is invited to give his or her seminar at Reid Hall, and an equal number of French and American students participate.

Future seminars are planned in conjunction with:

**Sciences Po:** *Diversité, mobilité sociale, discrimination positive* (Fall 2008); *Relations entre la France et l'Afrique, 19<sup>ème</sup> et 20<sup>ème</sup> siècles* (Spring 2009).

**Paris I:** *Actualité des expositions artistiques à Paris* (Spring 2009).

**Paris VII:** *Traduction Français-Anglais: Thème et Version* (Spring 2009).

**A "classe de prépa"** at the Centre Daniélou: *France-Amérique : Regards croisés* (Fall 2008).

### Tutorials: French University and French Language

The tutorials at Reid Hall provide additional training on French academic approaches to reading, analyzing, and, especially, writing a text. Organized by discipline, they involve group or one-on-one meetings in which students work on the assignments required in their French university courses. The French language tutorials focus on writing style and grammar. Most of

the tutors are junior scholars; many have participated in an exchange program and studied in an American university, some as visiting scholars at Columbia. They thus understand what it means to be confronted with a different educational style and can relate to the needs of our students.

### Living in France

In Paris, students live in French households and participate in community outreach projects with their host family. They are also introduced to different regions of France through week-long homestays in such provincial French towns as Nantes, Besançon, Lyon, Auxerre, and Aix-en-Provence. By touring the region with their host family or with local guides they gain valuable insight into regional life-styles and cultural specialties.



Reid Hall garden

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# Student Perspectives

## A Semester of Strikes - Allison Grant, Columbia College

I had been in Paris for just over six weeks and had barely learned how to find my way around on the subway when the first strike happened.

That week, I did what many Parisians do when faced with *la grève*: I put on my sneakers and walked. On the first day, I discovered that the French students had also decided to go on strike: about fifty students entered the Sorbonne and closed the doors, stranding those of us who were supposed to be taking tests and doing presentations, a process they would repeat intermittently for three weeks.

Then on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, France shut down. No trains, no newspapers, no public school. No AirFrance, no



stock market, no university. Instead of going to work, they took to the streets and marched across Paris in a huge *manifestation* from Place d'Italie all the way to the Arc de Triomphe.

Despite the annoyance of having to go to class only to discover the *fac bloquée*, it was definitely a unique cultural experience to remember. Not only did I learn a lot about French politics, I also gained a new perspective on Parisians. *La grève* wasn't just about opposition to a particular policy, it was a unifying activity. People talked to each other in classes, asked each other for directions, rode bikes in groups, and shared a good-natured laugh when the announcements came on in the overly-crowded subway station. And even though the French Revolution of 2007 was (not so) short lived, when it was all said and done, I felt just a little bit more Parisian.

## Science in the French University System - Stephanie Davidson, Columbia College

As a double major in French and Neuroscience, I was met with wishes of good luck and a fair amount of skepticism when I announced my plans to spend all of junior year abroad to these two departments.

Upon my arrival in Paris, the academic coordinator at Reid Hall was more than happy to help me in my quest for a biology class that would fulfill my requirement. After a personal interview, I was offered a few courses at the *École Polytechnique*, one of the so-called "*Grandes Écoles*."

Most Americans think the most prestigious university in France is "The Sorbonne," when in fact this status belongs to the *Grandes Écoles*. Unlike the rest of the university system, which is entirely public and offers free entry to any student who has passed his or her Baccalaureate examination, the *Grandes Écoles* are extremely selective in recruiting students. Admission is offered only after students have completed a preparatory program (*classe de prépa*) and passed an extremely competitive entry examination.

On the first day of class, I discovered that my professor was a member of the French *Académie des Sciences* – an organization formed of the most elite scientific minds. However, the level of instruction turned out to be introductory. Later, I learned the reason. In the French system, one goes directly into medical school after finishing high school. Therefore, most classes in the field of neuroscience are taught either in medical school or at the graduate school level. The *École Polytechnique* specializes in engineering, so neurobiology courses are rare and only skim the surface of the material. Additionally, the French definition of a "seminar course" is simply a lecture course in which a guest lecturer, and not the professor, gives the lecture each week.

In spite of all this, these classes provided me with a window into the *Grandes Écoles* system (usually impenetrable by study abroad students who have not taken the entrance exams) and an insight into the way the sciences are taught in France.

I also found the environment at *École-*

*Polytechnique* more conducive to meeting people. The students are much more involved in the life and activities of the *École* than they are at the larger public French universities. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that a much smaller number of students are enrolled at the school and all students live on a very American-style campus; the students at the public universities are dispersed around the city.

Overall, taking classes at the *École Polytechnique* has been an eye-opening experience, and I recommend that any science major considering studying abroad do so. The credits may not end up counting, but the experience is one you will not soon forget.



Entrance to the *École Polytechnique*

# Student Perspectives

## International dinner - *Phil Malaczewski, University of Pennsylvania*



Spring 2008

Slightly intimidated at the start of the international dinner, a few American students and I floated around awkwardly to the different food tables and snacked on bread and pâté. After getting our fill of *hors d'oeuvres*, we de-

ecided to build up the courage to actually start conversations with the international students. Our method of introduction was simple: surrounding a student or two and rushing forth with a *bonsoir* and a *comment t'appelles-tu?* The method worked flawlessly as the French university students were just as eager to meet us as we were to meet them. I spoke with students from Italy, Austria and Peru, with the French language being our only means of communication. I eventually found myself holding longer, more involved conversations with a few students, and talks about post-dinner soirées began to spring up.

I ended up sticking with a group of French students who were going to a salsa dance club. One of the students, who proved to be a formidable salsa dancer, took the time to teach me the basic *un, deux, trois* dance steps, which were perhaps even harder to learn than the French language.

The night ended up being mentally and physically exhausting, but a lot of fun as well. Since then, I've kept in touch with my French friends and we've managed to get together for more soirées outside of Reid Hall.

## Night at the Boulangerie - *Andre Feigler, Columbia College*

It started out as an uneventful *soirée* in the *Ville Lumière*: new friends, groovy samba rhythms at my favorite Brazilian spot. With the conga of the night still pulsing through me, I hopped on my bike and pedaled off into the night.

Here is where the story should have ended... But little did I know, the adventure was just beginning.

As I gained speed I realized that I had no idea which direction was 'home.' Just as the situation seemed hopeless, I noticed a fellow night-rider up ahead who seemed to be in quite high spirits. "*Bonsoir mademoiselle!*" he called out, asking if I was alright and knew where I was going. When I shouted "*Bonsoir! Er...je cherche Nation!*" he seemed delighted and responded in French, "Follow me! I'm just going that way too!"

Fifteen minutes later, I found myself in familiar territory. Just as I was saying goodbye, my guide pointed to the corner bakery. "I'm starting my morning at work," he said. "Would you like to have a quick look?" I parked my *Velib* outside and trotted in

the boulangerie with cautious yet eager eyes.

My friend explained that he worked the morning shift, getting the first batch going at 4 am. I watched as he sliced open enormous sacks of flour, mixed water



and eggs, churned chocolate and butter, sifted sugar and cinnamon. I sat mesmerized, munching on a fresh-from-the-oven *pain au chocolat*, while my baker offered secrets of how the infamous French baguettes are just 'so'-crunchy on the outside yet fluffy on the inside.

When I finished my pastry appetizer, I jumped in. Working literally alongside of

the baker, I got a hands-on, *boulangère*-to-be personal training. I stayed in the bakery for hours, learning how to make the day's treats and tasting each one along the way. When the sun finally crept in through the cracks of the door, it was time for the *boulangerie* to open its doors and for me to go home. I said goodbye to the baker, and with flour on my nose and pockets spilling over with bread, I slowly made my way around the corner and back home.

When I woke up later that afternoon, those wee hours of the night seemed like a dream. But the evidence was there: I found a lone croissant tucked in the sleeve of my jacket, a crusty reminder of my *boulangerie* apprenticeship. The slightly awkward curve of its moon shape and extra flaky texture suggested a novice baker's hand—but as I munched my very first made-from-scratch croissant, I smiled quietly to myself. And if I should still doubt, the faint white flour freckles sprinkled throughout my hair were all the proof I needed. And that croissant? The best I ever had.

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## MA in French Cultural Studies in a Global Context

Danielle Haase-Dubosc, Faculty Adviser and Adjunct Professor of French

Students with advanced French can enroll in a Masters program at Reid Hall. This unique M.A. is concluded entirely in Paris. Students attend classes both at Reid Hall, Columbia's university center in Paris, and at different branches of the French university.

All students participate in a common four-course core program: a practicum on methodological points of entry into cultural studies, a pro-seminar on modern French history, advanced work in the French language, and an advanced seminar in French theory, cultural studies and postcolonialism. These four courses set modern French society in a socio-historical perspective and focus on the key concepts that shape its cultures and languages to this day.

The seminars and electives accompanying the core program, held at the French university and at Reid Hall, allow students to concentrate either on French cultural studies in a European context or French cultural studies in an African and Middle Eastern context. For their MA essay, students conduct original research under the direction of a French professor. For more information: [www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsas).

