After a semester of study in Rouen, France, Josh Hackbarth, MSU ’00, finds himself looking for the international section of the newspaper first. He’s come to believe that a second language is a good thing, and wishes he’d known French before he ventured to Europe. “I look at things differently now,” he says. “I approach things from a new, broader perspective. When I arrived in France, for example, I was shocked to find that the Institut de Formation Internationale (IFI) didn’t require daily or weekly homework. After a while I started to see that the focus on case studies and discussion-based learning had a lot to offer. It wasn’t necessary to follow a textbook.”

Hackbarth and four other students, two from Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) and two from IFI in Rouen, were the first to experience the benefits of an exchange program established between the two institutions in 1999-2000. IFI, part of the ESC-Rouen group, and MSU have made it possible for enrolled students to study for credit abroad while paying tuition to their home institution. IFI is a four-year “Gran Ecole,” an institution that has earned the highest level of accreditation attainable for a French collegiate school of business. The institution has 400 students who are fluently bilingual in English and French. Students of the Institut de Formation Internationale study additional languages as part of their program, and are required to spend their second year of study abroad. Additionally, each student completes a six-month internship outside of France.

MSU students studying in Rouen typically enroll in five classes: International Marketing, European Business Studies, Business Strategy, French Language and French Culture. MSU students have the option of living in a dormitory or with a French family. They are offered opportunities through IFI to tour some historic sites in the Normandy region. Rouen is approximately 1.5 hours from Paris by land.

Christine Jirele, MSU ’00, never imagined herself an exchange student. But work at the Renaissance Festival in Shakopee, Minnesota last year started her thinking, and the experience of a cousin who studied in London piqued her interest. She found the people in the International Programs Office at MSU helpful and decided to spend her last semester in Rouen. “It was difficult to relate to other exchange students when we were all going through culture shock,” she says. “The studies were different, but my most important lessons were learned in that personal context.” Jirele says travel, presentations and speakers enriched her study.

Jimena Catarivas, an MSU student from Uruguay who spent the 1995-96 academic year as a high school exchange student in Worthington, Minnesota, had traveled extensively before enrolling in the Rouen program. Catarivas took advantage of the central European location to explore Spain, Italy, Portugal, England, Switzerland and Germany when she wasn’t studying. “My most valuable lesson,” she smiles, “is that there is no one right way to do things.”

French students Emmanuelle Straub and Perinne LeFevre spent their entire second year of study at Minnesota State, Mankato. They enrolled in a standard academic program in the College of Business, with all studies completed in English. Emmanuelle had travelled in the United States three times previously; for Perinne the 1999-2000 stay was the first visit. “There were stereotypes to overcome,” laughs Perinne, “but it was a good experience for all of us. It was a challenge to get used to another culture, but if I could stay now, I would not leave.” Emmanuelle agrees, “The year went too fast.”

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Student Highlight

Developing a Global Vision

Above: Christine Jirele (L), of Waseca, Minnesota & Jimena Catarivas (R) of Uruguay, both new College of Business students, studied at the Institut de Formation Internationale in Rouen, France during the spring semester 2000.

Above: Emmanuelle Straub (L) & Perinne LeFevre spent their second year of university study at MSU. Here they’re experiencing Minnesota’s unpredictable weather — the fountain is flowing and it’s snowing on October 1, 1999.

JOSH HACKBARTH, MSU SENIOR FROM NEW RICHMOND, WISCONSIN, PACKED HIS BAGS FOR A SPRING SEMESTER IN ROUEN. HE SAYS, “I’D DO IT AGAIN IN A HEARTBEAT!”