France, Montpellier SupAgro – Spring 2016
IAP Program Handbook

The France, Montpellier SupAgro program is offered by International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with the Montpellier SupAgro: Centre International d’Etudes Superieures en Sciences Agronomique de Montpellier. This IAP Program Handbook supplements handbook(s) or materials you receive SupAgro as well as the IAP Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information and advice available at the time of publishing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

Questions about your program abroad (housing options, facilities abroad, etc.) as well as questions relating to your relationship with your host university or academics (e.g. course credit and equivalents, registration deadlines, etc.) should be directed to International Academic Programs at UW-Madison.

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Contact Information

On-Site Program Information
Daniele MORNET
International Relations Office
Montpellier SupAgro
2, place Pierre Viala
34060 MONTPELLIER Cedex 01
E-mail: <mornet@supagro.inra.fr>
Ph: +011 +33 (0)467617013

UW-Madison Information
International Academic Programs (IAP)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
106 Red Gym, 716 Landgon Street
Madison, WI 53706
Tel: 608-265-6329 Fax: 608-262-6998
Web: www.studyabroad.wisc.edu
Emergency Contact Information
In case of an emergency, call the number provided to you for the onsite staff in Montpellier. If you are unable to connect with the onsite staff, call the main IAP number (608) 265-6329 between 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the IAP staff on call at (608) 516-9440.

Embassy Registration
All program participants who are U.S. citizens must register at the U.S. Embassy before departure as this will help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. You can register on-line at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country’s embassy or consulate.

U.S. EMBASSY
2 Avenue Gabriel
75382 Paris Cedex 08
Phone: 33-1-43-12-22-22
Fax: 33-1-1-42-66-97-83
Web: http://france.usembassy.gov/

Preparation Before Leaving
Immigration Documents
Passport
A passport is needed to travel to France and to obtain your student visa. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website (http://travel.state.gov/passport). If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad.

Visa
To enter France, you will need to apply in person for a “Long Stay Student Visa”. More information will be provided under the visa tab in your My Study Abroad account. You must secure your visa in the US before your departure in order to stay in France for the duration of your program. The visa process can take 8+ weeks in total so keeping track of the information from IAP and the deadlines is essential to move forward.

Handling Money Abroad
You should bring approximately 100 euros in cash with you to cover your expenses for the first few days. Check with your bank or credit union for more information.

In Europe, as a general rule, avoid buying foreign currency (either with travelers checks or cash) at airports, railroad stations, and especially hotels and stores: they charge higher fees than at currency exchange places, which in turn charge slightly higher fees than the banks. Do not depend on the exchange rate published in newspapers; it is a bank-to-bank rate, and what you will get is often at least 5% less.

Feel free to utilize this website as resource to monitor the exchange rate and/or to print out a Traveler’s Cheat Sheet card to carry with you: [http://www.oanda.com/currency/ converter/](http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/)

**Using Credit Cards and Debit Cards in ATMs**

A generally reliable way to get money from the U.S. is to use a VISA or MasterCard credit card or a debit card for use in ATM machines. Machines that accept CIRRUS are more common than those that accept PLUS debit cards. VISA is accepted in more places than AMERICAN EXPRESS or MASTER CARD.

Credit card companies do charge a fee for “cash advances” if you choose to take money out using a credit card. Know what these fees are before you leave the U.S. Using a debit card that withdraws directly from your checking account in the U.S. will avoid these fees. Regardless if you use a credit card or debit card, you will likely be charged international transaction fees.

Before you leave for France, notify your bank/credit card company the dates that you will be abroad. In trying to identify theft, banks will cancel debit/credit cards used in unexpected ways.

If you charge purchases to your card, you will get a slightly better exchange rate than you will get at French banks. Groceries, personal items, clothes, train tickets, and many other items can be purchased with a card, though some stores may have a policy of accepting it only for purchases above a certain amount.

You should never type your PIN number when a third party can see it. It is better to lose your card, which can easily be cancelled, than to reveal your PIN number to a stranger.

**Packing**

Since you will be carrying your own luggage during the trip, often for long stretches in airports, bus, and train stations, it is important that you pack sensibly. Take only as much as you can carry easily by yourself. One way to measure what is easily carried is to pack everything you would like to take, pick it all up, and walk around the block. If you are not comfortable doing so, you may want to re-evaluate what you’ve packed.

**Important:** Take clothing that needs a minimal amount of care (this is especially important if you plan to do any independent traveling). You may have to go a couple of weeks without doing any laundry, especially at the beginning of the program. Laundromats will be the only means of doing laundry if you plan to live in the dorms or an apartment. Laundromats are expensive and
complicated to use, and it may take some time to make arrangements for your laundry in Montpellier. Dryers are available in Laundromats.

Jeans are as common in France as here. Students dress very comfortably, but with style in France. Nice jeans, skirts (for women), nice but comfortable walking shoes, dark colors, and sweaters are all very popular items. Sweaters will be especially needed since winter temperatures drop to around freezing and the humid sea air can make the air very cold and damp. Consequently, we recommend a winter coat as well, as spring weather usually doesn’t begin until sometime in March.

**Electronics**

Electrical current runs at 220 volts, so US electrical appliances made to run on 110 volts will not work unless you bring a convertor. Convertors are not recommended for appliances such as hair dryers or curling irons as the current transition can cause them to spark or burn out.

These appliances may be purchased inexpensively upon arrival.

Electricity in France is very expensive, so people tend to use much less of it. People are careful to turn on only the lights they really need and always turn off the lights before leaving a room. Be careful not to overload circuit breakers and risk blowing fuses.

You’ll also need to purchase plug adapters as France is not on the same three-pronged outlet as the U.S. You can find plug adapters easily on-line by doing a search for plug adapters/France.

**Travel and Arrival Information**

You are responsible for making your own flight arrangements to Montpellier. There is an airport in Montpellier that you can connect to: [http://www.montpellier.aeroport.fr/airport-south-of-france.html](http://www.montpellier.aeroport.fr/airport-south-of-france.html)

Be sure to look for student discounts on airfare. Studentuniverse and STA travel are two web sites/organizations that offer discounts.

You could also fly into Paris and take a train to Montpellier, but given that you will have your luggage, it may be worth the extra cost to fly directly to Montpellier.

**The Academic Program**

**General Information**

Established January 1, 2007, several organizations fused to form Montpellier Sup Agro, the International Center of Superior Studies in the Agricultural Sciences.

Montpellier SupAgro is a member of the international Agropolis and has 1100 students, 100 professors/researchers and 240 administrative agents. SupAgro offers License, Master and Doctorate level studies in a variety of agricultural fields. SupAgro is the second ranked School of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources in France. There are many research units, excellent faculty, and links to surrounding institutes & universities. SupAgro has modern labs, an experimental vineyard and an arboretum on campus.
For more information on the University, please see their web site:
http://www.supagro.fr/web/pages/?idl=19&page=123

Course Information

Courses
Courses at SupAgro are modular, meaning students take one course at a time (generally six hours a day). To see which modules are offered during each session, you can refer to the SupAgro site here:  http://www.supagro.fr/web/pages/?idl=19&page=214.

In addition to the modules, students are required to participate in internships that vary in length from four-six months. There is a strong emphasis on team projects in the classroom.

* French language classes for foreign students :
Intensive courses for three hours a day for one-two weeks are offered before the start of the semester. There are also French courses organized throughout the year that meet for 90 minutes per week.

Registration
IAP will register you for a special “Study Abroad Course” for the term(s) you will be studying abroad; therefore, it is not necessary for you to register on the UW-Madison campus. This is a temporary registration, which will be converted into graded UW-Madison credit after the completion of your program.

You will submit a Contrat d’études or Learning agreement to SupAgro after being accepted by UW-Madison to the exchange program. You will also work closely with Daniele by email on any course related questions but not finalize your course registration until you arrive onsite.

Course Equivalent Requests and My Study Abroad
Each course you take abroad must be assigned a UW-Madison “equivalent” course in order for your grades and credits to be recorded on your UW-Madison transcript. In order to establish UW-Madison course equivalents for your study abroad courses, you will submit a Course Equivalent Requests through your My Study Abroad account. Detailed information on the UW course equivalent process that you will use through your My Study Abroad account is available in the IAP Study Abroad Handbook.

Credits
Conversions
SupAgro uses the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credit system. A full study load for one semester equals 30 ECTS credits. ECTS credits transfer back to UW-Madison credits using the following scale:
ECTS Credits | UW Madison Credits
---|---
2.5 | 2 *
3 | 2*
4 | 2*
5 or 5,5 | 3
6 or 6,5 | 3
7 or 7,5 | 4
8 | 4
9 | 5
10 | 5
12 | 6
12,5 | 7
15 | 8

*Please be very careful when selecting module courses.* If you choose to take module course (those that meet for part of the term), note that many courses are offered that carry fewer than the 5 ECTS (equivalent to 3 UW credits). Courses must be worth at least 2.5 ECTS to be approved at UW. Courses under 2.5 ECTS should be combined with other courses of similar content to create a UW course equivalent. The combined courses should be at least 5 ECTS to provide meaningful credit.

For example: *Systematic Botany* (2 ECTS) and *Practical course with Field Exercise in Systematic Botany* (3 ECTS) = UW’s Botany 400 (3 UW credits).

It is possible to have courses approved as 2 UW credits instead of 3 UW credits. However, if you are taking courses to apply to major, certificate or college requirements, the ECTS must be equivalent to the UW courses credits. For example, Botany 130 is 5 credits at UW. If this course is needed for your major, certificate, or college requirement, you need to combine UHOH courses to equal at least 9 ECTS. If you have any questions on course credit, please contact your IAP Study Abroad Advisor.

**Limits and Load**
Students are required to take one course during each module and need to maintain full time status at UW Madison, which is a minimum of 12 credits for the semester.

**Pass/Fail/Drop/Audit**
Please refer to the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for academic policies.

**Grades and Grade Conversions**
IAP will use the following grade conversion scale for the courses you take at SupAgro:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UW-Madison</th>
<th>SupAgro Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>11.6-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>9.6-11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>8.6-9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>7.6-8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>6.1-7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4.1-6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Living Abroad**

**France**

France is a country whose metropolitan territory is located in Western Europe and also comprises various overseas islands and territories located in other continents. Metropolitan France extends from the Mediterranean Sea to the English Channel and the North Sea, and from the Rhine to the Atlantic Ocean. French people often refer to Metropolitan France as *L'Hexagone* (The "Hexagon") because of the geometric shape of its territory. France is bordered by Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Monaco, Andorra, and Spain. France is also linked to the United Kingdom via the Channel Tunnel, which passes underneath the English Channel.

The French Republic is a democracy that is organized as a unitary semi-presidential republic. It is a developed country with the sixth-largest economy in the world. Its main ideals are expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. France is one of the founding members of the European Union, and has the largest land area of all members (with a population of roughly 60.4 million people). France is also a founding member of the United Nations, and a member of the Francophonie, the G8, and the Latin Union. It is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council wielding veto power, and it is also an acknowledged nuclear power. France is the most popular international tourist destination in the world, receiving over 75 million foreign tourists annually.

(Information in the above paragraphs was adapted from Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France).)

Along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in southern France, Montpellier, the seventh largest city in France, has everything it takes to please. A lively and surprising city in the heart of the Languedoc-Roussillon region, Montpellier is vibrant, elegant and artistic. People are drawn here by the city's rich past, former and contemporary glory, intense cultural life and youthful feel. Its sunny climate and well-preserved historical environment are second to none, nestled between the sea, vineyards and mountain landscapes.

Known internationally for its world-class medical schools, whose long-standing tradition dates back the Middle Ages, Montpellier is well practiced in the art of welcoming people. Montpellier today is a leading destination for business tourism, vacation and language stays. Montpellier is only three and a half hours from Paris by train.
Montpellier Tourism office
http://www.ot-montpellier.fr/en/

Housing
Students are housed on-campus in single rooms or studio apartments. Student housing has Internet access and laundry. Students share kitchen and bathroom space. Daniele at SupAgro will work with you on your housing placement and questions.

Transportation
Montpellier has both a public bus system and a tram line. For more information and schedules, please see the TAM web site (Transports de l’Agglomeration de Montpellier)


To reach the campus from the train station take bus No.16 and get off at place Viala. To get to the campus from the airport take the shuttle bus to the train station and take bus No.16 as above. The airport website has more information about buses taxis and how much they cost.

Montpellier also has a train station for travel throughout France and Europe: http://www.ter-sncf.com/Region/languedoc_roussillon/gare/MONTPELLIER%20ST%20ROCH.aspx

Safety
You are responsible for reviewing the US State Department’s website at www.travel.state.gov for up-to-date information on travel to France and any other countries you plan on visiting during your term abroad.

• Female students should avoid traveling alone at night. Always walk in groups or with a male companion. Do not look strangers in the eye or speak to them, particularly at night, as this is considered an invitation to conversation. Use a firm “Non, merci.” or no response at all to any verbal harassment. Do not try to defend yourself if confronted by strangers or hagglers, particularly at night. Immediately leave the setting and seek assistance from the nearest restaurant, café, or police officer.

• Keep your personal belongings hidden. Montpellier is a metropolitan city with people from many different economic levels and cultures. You should not assume that you are safe to travel without concern.

• Use common sense when giving out your address or phone number. If you are uncomfortable with someone, you may have a real reason to be. Although you want to meet and get to know people, some people may not share in that innocent intention. It is wise to set up times and places to meet others rather than give out any personal information. If you are living with a host family, check with them before giving out their phone number, address, or inviting guests over. In general, overnight guests are not appropriate in any housing situation.

• Neighborhoods in Montpellier are made up of people from all economic levels. Students are housed in typical neighborhoods with people of all ethnic and economic backgrounds.

Communication
When making calls, keep in mind time zone differences (www.timeanddate.com/worldclock). To make an international call to the United States, dial the access code for the country from which you are calling plus the United States country code (always “1”) followed by the appropriate U.S. area code and local number. To call internationally from the United States, dial “011”, the country code, city access code (if necessary) and the phone number. Country and city codes can be found online (www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/dialing.html). Some of above steps can vary if you are using a calling card.

Websites of interest:

- U.S. State Department Students Abroad site: http://www.studentsabroad.state.gov/
- UW-Madison International Academic Programs http://www.studyabroad.wisc.edu
- U.S. State Department Students Abroad site: http://www.studentsabroad.state.gov/
- Center for Disease Control http://www.cdc.gov/travel/
- Current exchange rates http://www.oanda.com
- Lonely Planet http://www.lonelyplanet.com
- Sup Agro www.supagro.fr

Student Testimonials
The testimonials below are from past participants; they reflect various students’ experiences and are included to provide different perspectives. IAP does not endorse any specific view expressed in this section.

Academics
You will have much more "class" time in Montpellier, and much less outside work. Classes are generally from 9-12, lunch break 12-2, then class again 2-5, Monday-Friday. It was hard for me to adjust to being in the same class for 3 hours. At times it is hard to stay concentrated, just try your best! Most professors allow a break half way through class, and some even provide free coffee. Utilize the break time and "pause midi" to re-focus.
Class size is never more than 25 students. (yay!) You will be in class with other international students and French students. **Do not be afraid to ask the French students for help if you did not understand a concept in class—they were more than willing to help me.**

It is very common for multiple professors to lecture during one course. The purpose of this is to provide lectures given by people that specialize in the topic. However, this made it difficult to get used to one teaching style, because in many modules that changed on a daily basis. If your final grade is based on a project, this isn’t a big deal. **If your final grade is based on a final exam, I would ask each professor to give you an example of an exam question they might ask, so you know how in-depth you will need to review their lecture.**

Your grade will be based on either a final group project or a final exam, and possibly attendance. I never received "homework" from a professor. This is nice because after class, you can relax. This is bad because you may get to the end of a module and have not reviewed any material. **Do not put off studying until the night before! If you have to do a group project, partner up with a French student - you will learn more and might make a friend.**

**Housing**
You will live (alone, no roommate) in the SupAgro student residency. Your 3 choices for housing will be: Les Hameaux, Les Cigales, and Le Soleil.

- **Les Hameaux** - older, but bigger. This is the popular hang-out spot because the campus bar is in this residency. **If you like to socialize, I would live here.** However, it can get loud at night.
- **Les Cigales** - the newest dorm, but much smaller. Rooms will be about the same size as your freshman year dorm, but include a bathroom and mini-kitchen. **If you want a good-night sleep every night and don't mind not being able to have a gathering in your room because it's too small, I would choose Les Cigales.**
- **Le Soleil** - the oldest dorms, as big as Les Hameaux, but quieter.
- The cheapest (and smallest) rooms are in les Cigales. I chose this dorm because it was the least expensive (280 euro/month).

Keep in mind your room will only come with a stove and a sink. There is no microwave or oven. However, there are kitchens you can rent in every dorm.

**Health and Safety**
The bakeries will get to you... go to fitness club or any of the other sports offered at SupAgro! There’s a team for just about everything. SupAgro also organizes volleyball and badminton tournaments, which are really fun!

- **If you want to participate in any sports club or competition at SupAgro, you will need to get a physical from a french doctor saying you are healthy enough to participate.**

I always felt very safe in downtown Montpellier. Nonetheless, never walk/bike home alone at night.

**Communication**
I bought an international phone plan with ATT that allowed unlimited texting and some data from anywhere in the world. This was to stay in touch with my family, as well as skypeing with them about once a week. I also bought a cheap phone and phone plan with Orange so I could text/call in France. **Buy a phone and phone plan immediately when you get to Montpellier. You want to be able to give new friends a way to reach you other than facebook! You will have two choices of carriers; Free and Orange. Both stores have multiple locations in Montpellier. Free is much cheaper, but the service is very spotty outside of major cities. If you plan on traveling or perhaps hiking a lot, I would pay a little more for Orange.**

When you get to SupAgro, you will be assigned a "parrain et marrain" (French students who act as your godfather and godmother). My "godfather" turned out to be one of my best friends at SupAgro - **take advantage of this immersion system that the school has set up!** These students volunteer to help international students, aka they want to be your friend and help you. So ask them to hang out, ask them any question about school or the city, about traveling, about clubs, for help on an assignment... etc.

**Go to all the Erasmus events Montpellier throws!**

Create a facebook group and group message for all the Erasmus students when you arrive, so you can easily plan things together.

Subscribe to SupAgro's student mail account so you get campus and club updates every day. Ask your parrain/marrain how to do this.

**The City**

Montpellier is considered the dance capitol of France -- you absolutely must see a dance performance while you are there.

- **Sign up for a "Passe Culture"** on Thursdays in the cantine (there is always a Pass Culture booth set up). This gives students major discounts on dance performances, theater shows, cinema tickets, concerts, etc. Ask your parrain/marrain about the pass culture. Consider doing a **walking tour of Montpellier** when you first arrive. It gives you the historical overview of the city that you wouldn't otherwise be exposed to just hanging out downtown. Cost is about 7 euros - go to the tourist center at La Place de la Comédie for more information.

There is an **open market** under the aqueduct arches from 8-1pm every Tuesday and Saturday. (Very vague but you will know exactly where I'm talking about once you get to SupAgro.) Great olive stand!

Cheapest groceries are at lydl, in walking distance of SupAgro, but there isn't a huge selection.

Casino is a larger supermarket, but you will need a bike or car to get there. Find a friend with a car and do weekly grocery shopping together!

**Best traditional French restaurant = Bouchon St. Roch**
Best place for burgers and moulles frites = Chez Felix

**Buy a bike immediately!!! And a good bike lock.** Biking is the best way to get around town, and even go out at night. If you don't have a bike, you will be walking 40+ minutes. You can purchase a Velomagg through the city, off of a departing student, or buy one at the Mosson market. This market is every Sunday morning 8-12ish. Ask a French student how to best get there.

- If you buy a nice bike and/or a cheap bike lock, your bike will be stolen very quickly.

**Take advantage of the beach!!** It takes about an hour to bike there, an hour by tram/walking, or a 15 minute car ride (again, friends with cars helps). We always went to Carnon beach. If traveling to and from the train station (Montpellier St. Roch, conveniently located right downtown), the bus (line 6), will be your best friend. Just remember if you come home on Sunday night, the last bus leaves at **8pm** from the train station!

**Travel**
If you plan on traveling via train frequently, definitely **purchase a carte jeune**. This is 50 euro for the year and gets you a discount of up to 50% on every train ticket you buy. I broke even after 3 tickets so it's definitely worth it.

The train is the best way to travel in France, and there is a ton of towns and cities within a 2 hour train ride. (and Barcelona is only a 3 hour train ride!)

**Traveling Recommendations in the South of France (Languedoc region):**
- Sète
- Carcassone
- Nimes
- Les Gorges du Tarn (kayaking, hiking)
- Pont du Diable (kayaking!)
- St Guilhem le Désert (beautiful medieval town with hiking around it)
- Pont du Gard (most famous bridge/aqueduct in france)
- Les Calanques de Cassis
- Collioure (small coastal town next to Perpignan)
- Toulouse

Look into using a **covoiturage called "BlaBlaCar", France's ride-share program.** If you can't take a train where you want to go, and don't have a car, this is a great option. Sometimes it's cheaper and more convenient than using the train too!

For lodgment, I strongly recommend using **Airbnb instead of hostels**. I had one too many unpleasant experiences with hostels during my time abroad, and switched to using Airbnb about half way through my stay. Airbnb allows you to rent someone's apartment, or even a room in their apartment. If you have a group, it almost always ends up being cheaper and MUCH more comfortable than a hostel.

**Miscellaneous**
You will need to **open a French bank account immediately** upon arriving, for various reasons including insurance on your dorm and getting a French phone plan (Free only accepts payment via French banks). I recommend Société General.

- Bring a copy of your birth certificate (you will need this to open the account).
- Plan on waiting 2-4 weeks before your account is active. Pretty much any administrative process in France takes an agonizingly long time.

**The best way for your French to progress quickly is to be around French students.** They speak quickly and use a lot of slang, but you will catch on eventually. If you only spend time with the international students, your level will probably not improve during your time abroad. In fact, I know some Erasmus students that scored **lower** on their language exam at the end of the semester than the beginning because they only hung out with other Erasmus. This is because everyone will be using a simple vocabulary and making mistakes often with no one there to correct you. I made friends with a group of French students and because of that, my level improved significantly by the end of the semester.