LESCANT Case Study
2011 Summer Study Abroad Program in Lyon
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The LESCANT photo database (http://www.laits.utexas.edu/lescant) played an integral part in the 2011 UT French Dept Summer Study Abroad Program in Lyon. The Lyon Program is a seven-week intensive program, May 23-July 8 in 2011, which offers students 6 hours of course credit. Students on the 2011 program were either second-year French students (17 students) taking an intensive four-skills language class or upper-division students (16 students) enrolled in a sixth-semester language course on gastronomy and a class on French culture, FC 340M -- Continuity and Change in Modern France. The objective of the culture course was to consider important cultural trends and structures of 20th-century France, and as such, LESCANT proved to be an excellent tool to help students notice and identify cultural differences between American and French societies.

FC 340M students were introduced to LESCANT during a two-hour pre-departure orientation session three weeks before departure. They were given Orlando Kelm’s handouts on the LESCANT categories and were shown sample photos from previous Lyon programs to illustrate each LESCANT category. Students were instructed to review the categories and be prepared to take LESCANT-suitable photos from the moment they arrived in France. In fact, several students submitted photos later of soldiers with machine guns that they had noticed on their arrival at Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris.

During the first week of classes in Lyon, the 16 students in FC 340M divided themselves into 4 groups (4 students each) and were assigned to upload one photo per cultural category to LESCANT. Four class sessions were scheduled (roughly once every week and a half) for presentation and discussion of LESCANT photos. LESCANT contributions counted 25% of the grade in FC 340M. (Other course grade components included a Paris assignment, 10%, 2 course exams, 50%, and a presentation on a Lyon visit, 15%) Students in the culture class also had two other textbooks, Sixty Million Frenchmen Can’t Be Wrong (Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow) and Summer Program in Lyon 2011 (Thomas Vessely), a course book with cultural and historical information to prepare the weekend excursions and visits in Lyon.
During the first classroom discussion, students presented their photos by LESCANT category, i.e. all groups presented their ‘language’ photos first, then ‘environment,’ then ‘social organization,’ ‘context,’ etc. However, in subsequent classes, it was easier for students to present their photos more informally from the administrator approval page in the order they had been submitted. Students took 2-3 minutes to present each photo, narrate a story to explain the context of the photo, and how it illustrated the specific cultural difference. Students presented roughly 20-25 photos per session. Photos provoked enthusiastic comments, similar experiences and agreement/disagreement from other students. The discussions were humorous and playful, as well as serious and reflective and almost always spilled over into lunchtime after class.

Lyon students uploaded 96 photos of France (plus a handful of photos submitted from trips on free weekends to Germany, England and Switzerland). Since they were assigned to submit at least one photo per category (at least for the first three class sessions), the photos submitted by category were quite even. However, students did find photos more readily in a couple of categories: Language: 16, Environment: 17, Social Organization: 13, Context: 17, Authority: 10, Non-Verbal: 13, Time: 12.

The LESCANT categories overlapped many of the topics identified in the culture textbook and by guides and professors. On weekend excursions and visits in Lyon, students often exclaimed ‘LESCANT’ to alert fellow students that they had noticed a cultural difference. As such, LESCANT was a shared experience for all of the students on the program, enjoyable and fun, so much so that students who were not taking the culture class asked to be able to submit their photos to LESCANT, too (and several did). The graduate student assistant on the program also participated and submitted several photos as well.

In conclusion, the LESCANT photo database was a huge success on the 2011 Summer Program in Lyon. Students were actively engaged in the process of noticing, identifying and analyzing cultural differences both inside and outside the classroom. LESCANT proved to be an invaluable tool to enhance cultural understanding in the study abroad experience and will be built into next year’s program as an activity for all students.