F&M Students Live Different Culture At The French House

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Even if you know your way around Franklin and Marshall College and you successfully find the first floor lounge in Mull House, you will still think you're in the wrong place.

Full-length color posters boast "Alsace" and "Cote D'azu" and "Paris." Instead of Newsweek or Good Housekeeping magazines, copies of L'Express and Jours de France lie on the tables.

The bulletin board -- a required bit of decorating in any college dormitory -- displays notes written in French and a poster for an upcoming movie called "La Belle Americaine."

Welcome, foreigner, to the French House.

Just completing its first year, the experimental French House is one wing of the Mull House dorm. Eleven students this year have elected to live there, to speak French as often as possible, to become familiar with French culture, to literally take their French class studies home with them.

A Different Experience

"It's a way for students interested in French to get together, live together and have an experience which is a bit different from what the other students have," French Department chairwoman Dr. Angela M. Jeannet explained.

"It's an intimate, pleasant environment because the students can identify with a certain area on campus which is theirs," she added.

The French House has had a successful first year and it will continue to function next year, hopefully with a full house of 13 students.

One person responsible for the language dorm's success, Dr. Jeannet said, is the native French "assistant," Catherine Munier, who was given a one-year grant from F&M to come to this country and act as teacher-advisor for the French House students.

"I really feel more like a student than a faculty member," 25-year-old Miss Munier commented. "I'm here if the students want to speak to me in French, just for conversation, to learn about French civilization, way of life, food."

"For me I think it's really great to experience life in the states," continued the Paris native who is studying for her master's degree in American Literature. "I could not have gotten this from books."

Brought Posters, Magazines

She brought French posters and magazines with her when she came to preside over the French House last fall. Last semester she and the students would meet every evening in the lobby to play French games, sing French songs, see French films.

This semester the routine in the French House has become "more informal," Miss Munier explained. Every day between 4:30 and 6:30 p.m., the students have agreed to speak only French. They also meet three times a week in the large dormitory dining room and have a special French table where they eat.

"I speak French to them all the time and they speak back in French," Miss Munier laughed. "But between themselves, I think it is instinctive to speak English."

The students themselves admitted to feeling a little guilty that they don't speak French as often as they should in their daily activities.

"It depends on whether Catherine is..."
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around," French House resident Dang Le, 19, said. "Then we have the atmosphere."

Gives Him The Habit

A combined chemistry and French major, he said living in the French House keeps him in the "habit" of speaking French. "It is good to talk to Catherine," he said, "because she tells us about French youth and all they do."

Not every student in the French House is a language major. Every student, however, must be able to speak French.

"I can't here mainly because I like French," biology major William Smith, 19, commented. "I thought maybe I wouldn't be able to get in as many French courses as I wanted to, since I'm a pre-med student."

Priority for living in the French House is given to students who are planning to spend a semester studying abroad, Dr. Jeannet said, or students who have just spent a year in France.

"I'm a French major, but at the time I came to French House I was undecided," said sophomore Margery Brittain. "I was thinking about going abroad, and now I will. This has been a good way to prepare for studying abroad."

Her roommate, Lisa Schreep, also 19, will be studying in Montpellier next year. Both girls hope to return to the French House to live when they finish their European studies.

"When I come back from France I'd like to live here so as not to lose what I've gained," Miss Brittain said.

Two Main Suggestions

The students have two main suggestions for improving French House. One is to "speak French right away" in daily situations. The other is to have more private quarters.

"I think they'd like to have a house off-campus," Miss Munier said. Now the French students eat with all students in the main dining room, she said, "and all the students go through this area to get to the other dorms. It always disrupts, a little, the atmosphere."

Dr. Jeannet said the faculty would have preferred a "separate residence" for French students but were limited by available housing. A true French house is not likely soon.

Even the Mull House wing "will not be expanded for next year," Dr. Jeannet said. Eventually, she hopes other foreign language departments will develop similar programs and they could share one full dorm, creating a campus "foreign quarter."

Meanwhile Miss Munier will return to France next month where she is a junior high school English teacher. A new advisor will be referred by the Institute for International Education in New York to work with a new set of French House students.

The new students will inherit the posters, magazines and crepe pans.