

French program

2017 Study Abroad Program at UCO-CIDF, Angers (France)

FAQ

Everything you need to know about the Angers Program in 35 questions

1. What is the difference between the Angers “faculty-led” and the OLA “affiliated” programs in France?

- The total cost of studying in France is about the same for all programs, while usually a bit lower for faculty-led programs. While UH tuition and fees are included in the program fee for affiliated programs and not for faculty-led programs, affiliated programs are run by a “for-profit” third parties, which increases the cost. Students need to compare not only the total cost of each program but also the services offered by each program in order to determine which is a better fit for their priorities and budget.
- The faculty-led program is located in the city of Angers, while affiliated programs offer more locations. However, Angers has the advantage of being a medium-size university town, only 90 minutes from Paris by train.
- All students enrolled in a French language affiliated program will be required to take an equivalency oral and written exam upon return, in order to receive UH French credit, as equivalency is not automatic. No equivalency/placement exams will be required for students going on our faculty-led program, because they will enroll directly in a UH course.
- UH Students who study French through affiliated programs attend classes with students from other universities worldwide, while our faculty-led program in Angers offers classes designed only for UH students.
- **All upper-level courses offered through the faculty-led French program will count toward the major/minor in French.** This not the case with affiliated programs, where courses offered are limited and may not be considered for equivalency credit.
- In faculty-led study abroad programs, the director is a UH faculty: his/her role is to assist, advise and mentor students throughout their stay. No such environment is provided in affiliated programs.
- A faculty-led program provides the structured environment of **homestay**.
- The faculty-led program in Angers includes three excursions that are part of the total learning experience. The excursions are included in the program fee, while it is usually not the case for affiliated programs.

2. Why do I not have a choice between “homestay” and staying in dorms during the Angers program, as is the case with affiliated programs? What if I don’t like the idea of staying with a family?

If you are worried about the lack of privacy or the constraints of family life, please rest assured that host families will give you as much or as little independence as you want. Most families host students year-round, and are used to giving students full autonomy. Your only obligation is to take your meals (usually dinner) with your host family and their other students (if applicable). Some students prefer a more inclusive “family life” and should express their preference on the “family placement form”.

Living with a French family is one of the most rewarding experiences of a study program in France, as it is a unique opportunity to see French culture from the “inside”. The isolation and “English-only” environment of a campus dorm or apartment is absolutely not the proper way to explore French culture on short-term programs.

3. Will I know about my family prior to departure?

Yes you will, generally a few weeks prior to departure. Families are selected in advance and with great care by the UCO (Université Catholique de l’Ouest) housing director, but in case there are unexpected changes, such as family emergencies, UCO prefers to wait until the last few weeks to send us the family roster. You will get your family’s address, email (if available) and phone number before departure. We encourage you to contact your family as soon as you receive their contact information.

4. How will I know that this is the “right” family for me?

Selection of families is based on the questionnaire you fill out. Please be very thorough in your answers, to insure proper placement. We accommodate all reasonable requests.

5. If I don’t like my family, can I be moved to another?

All families are selected with great care, and we have had very few complaints. However, if you do have a problem, please inform the Director immediately and we will resolve your issue or move you to another family if necessary. Remember that families make plans long in advance to welcome you into their homes, and the decision to withdraw a student must be reasonable and fair to both parties.

6. How far will my family live from campus?

Some families live very close, some a bit further out and most likely, you will need to travel to school by bus, a very safe and common mode of transportation in French cities. The average bus ride to and from campus is about 10 to 15 minutes. Bus passes to and from school will be provided to you at no extra cost. However, if you live within 15 minutes walk to school, you will NOT receive a bus pass. If you have any disability or if you cannot walk that distance everyday, you must notify me on your family form.

7. How much money should I bring for my personal expenses?

That depends entirely on your personal budget. This is an all-expense paid program. You should plan to bring the same amount you would spend in Houston for your outings and entertainment.

8. Should I bring cash or credit cards?

- You should bring some (limited) cash. I suggest about 200 euros. You can change your currency in Houston or wait until you are in France. Some banks in the US charge a commission for transactions done at their desk. Or you can get cash at any ATM machine in France using a credit card. ATMs are found on every street corner in France. French banks are not allowed by law to charge a commission for the use of their ATMs. However, your US bank will usually charge you a transaction fee each time you withdraw cash. It is best to withdraw larger sums less often.
- If you bring a credit card, be sure it is one from a major bank, which allows you to make purchases or withdraw cash worldwide. Please inform your bank that you will be traveling abroad, as “unusual” places of purchase will be “flagged” and you may not be able to complete your purchase.
- Travelers’ checks are usually accepted in most places, but if they are in US dollar, the exchange rate for them is not as good as for cash.

9. Should I carry my passport with me at all times?

Only when you travel outside of France or plan to change money will you need your passport. Your ISIC (International Student ID Card) and CIDEF ID cards are accepted everywhere. Please leave your passport in a safe place at your family’s home and remember to register your trip at the “Smart Traveler Enrollment Program” of the US Department of State: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

10. Is Angers a “safe” place?

Angers, like any other city in France or Europe is only unsafe if you allow it to be. Although there is far less crime in France (where there is a total ban on guns) than in the US, “petty crimes” are not uncommon, especially in Paris, and being a foreigner, you may be more of a target than a French person, simply because you tend to “stick out” more. My only advice: be aware of your surroundings!

Here are some tips:

- do not walk around with your valuables in obvious reach of another person (in your open shoulder bag, back pack, or back pocket).
- When walking in public, hold your purse or bag tightly. When sitting at a café, do not leave your purse on the table or on the floor, or on the back of your chair.
- In public transportation, have your money or tickets ready before you get on the bus or train.
- Only bring one credit card at a time when you go out.

- Do not get distracted by a stranger addressing you, this is the most commonly used trick of pickpockets. Don't be afraid to appear rude.
- If you feel unsafe in any given situation, you probably are, and need to seek immediate assistance. ALWAYS carry the Director's cell phone number and your French family's phone number.
- If you are lost, find a good, well-lit spot to stop and use your map or phone. Don't be afraid to ask people for help. They will gladly come to your rescue!
- Be discreet. No need to call attention to yourself by speaking loudly in English.
- Report any occurrence of what you might consider "harassment" to the Director.
- NEVER VENTURE OUT BY YOURSELF IN PLACES YOU DON'T KNOW.

11. What is the exchange rate between the Euro and the dollar?

There are many websites, which give you the prime exchange rate to the minute. The one I use is <http://www.xe.com/ucc/> The exchange rate you will get will include commission not reflected on these websites.

Students can exchange currency at a discounted price at

<http://www.travelex.com/currency-exchange-locations/houston-galleria-houston-tx/>

12. Do all European countries also use the Euro?

Yes, most of the EU countries around France do.

13. Are activities planned for weekends?

If you look at the "class schedule and itinerary" (online), you will notice that weekends are free. This is to allow students time to travel on their own, if they wish to do so. There are many things to do around Angers also, and many students in the past have chosen to stay in town and enjoy the beautiful surrounding region and the city itself. If you want to travel, you should plan your trips in advance. It is always more fun to travel in small groups. If you need help planning your own excursions, please contact me at giacchetti@uh.edu

Optional Paris excursion. Based on student demand.

Students who would like to go as a group on a weekend Paris excursion must reserve their own accommodations in advance. The program director will accompany them and help them with the organization of their activities, places to visit, and will give them a special orientation session. However, this is not an excursion that is included in our program fee (three other excursions are included). Students may plan activities in Paris as they wish.

14. What is the best way to travel within France?

Trains will take you anywhere you wish to go. You can also rent a car. However, you must be over 21, and even if you travel with 3 other passengers, this is an expensive mode of transportation: gas is more than double the price you pay in the US, insurance is very high, and driving in France implies learning new driving rules. You must inform me if you plan to rent a car (see "program rules").

15. Where do I go to get information about train fares?

The national railroad company (SNCF) has a website where you can purchase your tickets, but it is in French: <http://www.voyages-sncf.com/> You can click on the English speaking version by changing the country to “United Kingdom” but you will be charged in UK currency.

If you want an English language website, this website, “RailEurope” will sell you tickets at a higher price than the SNCF, but the charges will be in US currency:

<https://www.raileurope.com/en/index.html>

The cheapest way is still the French SNCF website.

16. What about traveling outside of France?

Although I do not recommend spending so much time and money traveling to other countries when there is so much to see in France, I understand that some students want to see as much as they can of Europe. Sometimes, the cheapest way to travel is by air. There are “low cost” airlines, which will take you to London, Amsterdam, etc. for cheaper than the train. Easy Jet is the discount airline I would recommend, because they depart from Orly or CDG Airport, close to Paris. Any airline departing from the Beauvais airport should be avoided. Also check with Air France, if you are under 25. They have “youth fares”.

17. What is the weather like in France in May-June?

France has a very moderate climate; temperatures rarely fall below 40 degrees in the winter or rise above 90 in the summer (although we have experienced “heat waves” in the past). HOWEVER, the weather is very unpredictable. In that late spring season, it is usually cool at night (in the 60s), and pleasantly warm during the day (in the high 70s).

18. What should I never forget to pack?

Bring a light raincoat and a couple of warm sweaters. Comfortable walking shoes are a MUST! French people dress very casually. Jeans or casual pants are best. Shorts are not as common as in the US but are fine (no “cut-offs” at school!).

19. How about electronics and electric items?

In Europe, not only the electric current is different, but the wall plugs are too. You will need an adapter for all electric and electronic devices. All laptop computers, cameras, video cameras, come already equipped for both US and European standards. All you need is a small inexpensive adapter (to be found in hardware stores, computer stores, or the airport). Hair dryers, even the dual standard ones, are notoriously poorly designed to withstand the electric current in France. Some get too hot, some not enough. At your own risk!

20. What about baggage on transatlantic flights?

Regulations concerning number, weight and size limits for baggage vary from one airline to another. Please go to your chosen airline's website and find their luggage requirements.

However, I urge you to **travel light**. Airlines will charge anything from \$100 per extra bag to \$50 per extra kilo. The worse are the so-called "low-cost" airlines, their extra fees can add up fast.

Laundry is washed every week (see program rules), so you do not need more than 3 pairs of pants and 4 or 5 tops.

Note: no sharp objects, no liquids or gels are allowed onboard. Pack your scissors, nail cutters, knives, perfumes, bottles, etc. in your check-in bag.

21. What about toiletry and medication?

All toiletry articles can be purchased in France, but are a bit more expensive than in the US.

All "over-the-counter" medication (aspirin etc.) can only be purchased in pharmacies in France. They are usually cheaper than in the US because of government regulations.

Only prescriptions by a French doctor will be filled in French pharmacies.

Please remember to fill your prescriptions before you go. Many prescription drugs available in the US are not sold in France.

22. How about using my cell phone in France?

You have options:

1. Most US phones can be used in France. You should find out about their international plans from your phone company.
2. The cheapest way is to purchase a French prepaid SIM card (available at the CDG airport), but they only work on unlocked phones (total cost around 30 euros).
3. You can purchase a cheap disposable cell phone in France, with a one-month prepaid unlimited texting plan (total cost around 60 euros). You will be able to receive calls at no charge to you. You can also purchase an unlimited text+ voice one-month plan, at a higher price.

Please give your French phone number to your family and friends in Houston but remember that France is 7 hours ahead of Houston.

NOTE: all French cell phone numbers will have a 06 prefix (as opposed to 02 for a landline in Angers). When calling a cell phone number, remember that the caller is the payer. Calling cell phones can be quite expensive unless you have an unlimited plan.

23. What is the most inexpensive way to make international calls?

If you have your own laptop computer, smart phone or Ipad, you can enroll in Skype or WhatsApp, which allow free computer-to-computer calling. Skype has a "skype out" option, which allows you to make inexpensive calls from your smart device to a telephone number (cell or landline).

24. Will I have free Internet access in France?

Yes you will! The CIDEF will provide wireless access during business hours. Angers is equipped with free internet access in many public areas and commercial sites. Your family will also provide free Wi-Fi connection.

25. Will I need my laptop computer in France?

You will need Internet access for class in upper-level courses, so you will need your laptop. It is not required in second-year classes. However, we ask that you limit your time on the internet. After all, your time in France is best spent.....in France, not in cyberspace!

26. How do I get in touch with the rest of the group before departure?

We will have a distribution list, which includes all participants. All names and addresses will be disclosed to the group (unless specified by you), to allow students to communicate among themselves.

27. How do I get in touch with the rest of the group in Angers?

A list of the families' phone numbers/emails/street addresses will be given to all participants. The director's cell phone number will also be given to you, so that you can be "in touch" at all times.

28. How do I get my airline ticket? Which airline do you recommend?

You can contact a travel agent or purchase your ticket directly from the airline. You can purchase your ticket through "discounters" as well. **Air France (or their partner airline, Delta)** is the only carrier for direct flights to Paris. However, you can find much cheaper flights if you are willing to make stops.

STA is a student travel agency, and they usually have better deals and more service than the typical discounters. They can be reached at <http://www.statravel.com/>

VERY IMPORTANT:

- You must book a ticket departing on May 27 at the latest, as all flights to Europe from the US have a **next day arrival**.
- ARRIVAL IN PARIS: We will be departing for Angers by bus from CDG-Roissy airport in Paris on May 28. **THE BUS WILL DEPART NO LATER THAN 1 PM ON MAY 28**. This means that **you MUST have an arrival time in Paris no later than 11:00 AM**.
- RETURN TO THE US: For our return to Paris CDG from Angers on June 25, our bus will leave from Angers at **5:30 AM**. We will arrive at CDG airport no earlier than 10 AM. Please be sure to **book your flight back to the US no earlier than 1 PM on June 25**, or arrange for your own separate transportation on the day before (at your own expense).

29. How much is UH tuition (and fees) for this program?

This information is listed online. Please go to <http://www.uh.edu/sfs/>
And click on “tuition and fees”.

30. What is included in the program fee?

All living expenses for the duration of the program are included, i.e. room and board (private room, 3 meals per day), books, all excursions including lectures and orientation tour, admission to museums and monuments, all ground transportation (transfer to and from airport, bus for excursions, bus to and from school if applicable), all UCO fees (including use of facilities, library, internet access, health clinic with attending nurse, 24/7 staff assistance), farewell dinner.

NOT INCLUDED: airfare, UH tuition and fees.

As part of your \$3,600 program fee, we will collect a \$50 non-refundable application fee.

31. What is the UH “fee waiver”?

Since the summer of 2009, students who participate in the faculty-led study abroad programs receive a fee waiver of \$500 for 6 credit hours. This amount will be credited to you account at the time of payment.

32. Are there scholarships available?

Yes, scholarships are available through the Office of International Studies and Programs. Please go to

<http://www.uh.edu/learningabroad/>

The French program will provide limited scholarships.

The **Alliance Française** offers a \$3000 scholarship each year that may be used toward the study program in Angers.

33. How do I register with the OFFICE OF LEARNING ABROAD (OLA)?

All study-abroad students must register with the Office of Learning Abroad.

Please go to

<http://www.uh.edu/study-abroad/study-abroad-programs/faculty-led-programs/>

You must make an appointment with a Study-abroad advisor who will help you with all your mandatory paperwork, required by the University of Houston. The OLA will charge you \$50 to process all your paperwork. This fee will include the cost of your ISI card and all notarized forms. OLA will help you get your passport for free!

34. Who are the program administrators in Houston and Angers?

At UH:

Program Director: Dr. Claudine Giacchetti: Giacchetti@uh.edu

Business Administrator: Ms. Devianee Vasanjee: dvasanj@Central.UH.EDU

Office coordinator: Ms. Rishika Harrylall: rpharryl@Central.UH.EDU

At UCO/CIDEF (Angers)

CIDEF director: Ms. Florence Plessis

UCO director of student housing: Ms. Dominique LeGal

Note: All second-year language classes will be taught under the supervision of the program director, and are designed for UH students only. The cultural modules of all French classes will be taught by Dr. Giacchetti (lectures will be mandatory) and will include excursions (also mandatory).

35. What is the application deadline?

The application deadline is the day of the first payment due, February 16, 2017. After the deadline, only “emergency” requests may be approved (such as graduating seniors needing the courses), based on availability.

IMPORTANT: the program will be closed when the quota of 25 students is reached, which may be earlier than the deadline.

If you are enrolled in the Angers Program but do not make the first payment on or before the deadline, you will be dropped and will lose your application fee. Re-instatement will not be guaranteed.

It is the student’s responsibility to check deadlines. Reminders will be sent via email.

Note on email: all correspondence with the students will be done by email. It is the students’ responsibility to keep track of their incoming email messages and provide the director with a working email address. Make sure that your email account is set to accept “multiple recipient” emails from giacchetti@uh.edu or giacchet@central.uh.edu