

COMING TO AMERICA

OHS hosts six foreign exchange students for 2021-2022 school year



By Hayden Walker

editor-in-chief

Oxford High School's longstanding tradition of hosting exchange students has returned for the 2021-22 school year after a temporary moratorium due to COVID-19 international travel restrictions. This year, OHS welcomed six exchange students—a record high—hailing from four countries across Europe: France, Spain, Italy, and Germany. For Dinahlee Rebeyrolles, a senior originally from Montauban, France, American teaching methods were a refreshing change from her high school, or lycée, back home.

"I like the school system. It is very different from France," Rebeyrolles said. "I like the approachability of the teachers and it is a lot more relaxed."

Rebeyrolles appreciates the more laid-back attitude of the education system in the United States, although it was a bit of a shock at first.

"My class plays Monopoly, it is incredible," Rebeyrolles said. "This would never happen in France. Here, students speak a lot and in France, no. It is very different. In France we don't have football games, we don't have spirit days, and we don't have homecoming or prom. In France, school is just for academics and here it is an experience."

According to Celine Erdmann, a junior from Nuremberg, Germany, the high school experience is all-encompassing. The tradition of high school American football on Friday nights lived up to her expectations.

"[Football games] are exactly like the movies," Erdmann said. "In Germany we don't have football games or stuff like that. If people from our school would do sports in school, none of their classmates would show up to the games because it's not that big in Germany. School is more focused on grades and achieve-

ments, but here it's all about clubs and sports and basically everyone is going to the football games."

Oxford High School provides Erdmann with experiences off of school grounds as well as academic opportunities that would not be available for her in Germany.

"The school is very different," Erdmann said. "It is really easy to meet new people because the school system is so different than in Germany. It's really easy to get to know people from your grade. In Germany, you see all of those videos of Americans that don't really have a good education, but it's actually not really like that. All of my friends were like 'you're not going to learn anything in school.' Math, we have that in Germany, but stuff like economics or psychology are subjects that I wouldn't have in Germany. Those things are only available to learn at university in Germany."

Erdmann was fascinated by the American grading system. In Germany, teachers grade students based on how they present themselves in addition to their academic scores.

"Some people go to school in pajamas," Erdmann said. "If you went to school in Germany wearing sweatpants, your grade would go down. Our teachers grade how you appear to them, how you act in class, plus your academic achievements. If you wear sweatpants or sleep the whole time you would get bad grades in Germany."

While academic education is a major part of studying abroad, the

experience is also meant to broaden students' horizons by exposing them to a different way of life. For sophomore Lorette Iffly, studying abroad is all about exploring a new culture. Iffly is originally from Rodemack, France.

"I wanted to [study abroad] because everyone is showing their experience and it looks really cool to learn a new language, the culture, the lifestyle, new people," Iffly said.

Because OHS is hosting five other exchange students, Iffly gets exposure to multiple cultures simultaneously.

"I think [the best part] is meeting new people, friends from the USA," Iffly said. "Not just from here because I also know the other exchange students and I can discover several cultures at one time."

The layout of American cities was a big adjustment for Iffly.

"The city [Oxford] doesn't look like French cities," Iffly said. "It is very open. In France, there are a lot of buildings very close together. Here, everyone has a house and it doesn't feel like a city to me."

According to Iffly, her study abroad program offered many destinations but the United States was her first choice.

"I wanted to go to the USA, not anywhere else," Iffly said. "In the movies, it's always the USA and I wanted to be like them, like the characters in the movies. And I wanted an English country but not England. I don't really like British."

In Iffly's experience, Americans are more friendly and courteous than Europeans.

"People are very friendly all the time. Once I pushed someone but it was not on purpose, and the person was like, 'oh, I'm so sorry!' In France, if you do that, they would push you back," Iffly said.

Sofia Cestaro, a senior from Verona, Italy, found that American students were also willing to help her when she was struggling with more obscure English terminology.

"All of the people are so nice and actually I love my health class, because it's funny. [My classmates] help me with the pronunciation or if I don't know some words, so that's nice," Cestaro said.

According to Cestaro, it took a few days to adjust to complete immersion in English. COVID-19 safety precautions proved to be an extra challenge.

"In the first days that I was here, I couldn't understand everything that people said and I couldn't speak well," Cestaro said. "I couldn't express how I wanted to. It is especially hard to

understand people with masks."

Loren Fuentes, a junior from Barcelona, Spain, was intrigued by the eating habits of people in the United States.

"Americans eat dinner really early," Fuentes said. "We eat dinner at 10:30 in Spain. Americans go to bed really early too."

Fuentes hopes that she can extend her experience in the United States. She currently participates in OHS's MCJROTC program.

"I'm going to try to stay here for my senior year," Fuentes said. "I want to do my senior year and go to college here in America. College is really expensive here, though."

Yannick Voigt is a sophomore from Leipzig, Germany. For him, the biggest surprise was the size of American buildings.

"I really like it here, everything is so cool. The school is so huge," Voigt said. "In Germany we have 400 students and here we have 1,200. Everything we have here, we have in Germany too, but it's just bigger [here]. When we went to Walmart for the first time, it was amazing. You could put 20 supermarkets in Germany into one Walmart."

Voigt further elaborated his surprise that Walmart was not only a place to buy food: the store sells items related to all aspects of daily life.

"They told us that the supermarkets were huge, but I didn't realize how big it actually was," Voigt said. "In Germany, the line for ketchup, mayo, and mustard is only ten meters. But here it's like 20 meters of just different types of ketchup. At Walmart you can buy clothes, you can buy food, you can buy stuff you need in homes. When I went in there it was amazing."

Voigt had the opportunity to participate in the annual Oxford High School homecoming parade this year.

"I am on the soccer team and we got in the back of the truck for the homecoming parade, and we stood there driving through the city. All the people were there cheering and it was really cool," Voigt said.

For Voigt, the best part of studying abroad in America is connecting with other students. Even though the two cultures are an ocean apart, he has found that his peers are not so different from him after all.

"I really like the people. Everybody is so friendly. In the bus, in the school, the teachers, the students, everyone is really friendly. That is something that doesn't happen in Germany. That makes it a lot of fun to go to school," Voigt said.