

2022 Winner: Kendy DeHaan

Kendy DeHaan is a current sophomore at Calvin University majoring in French, English and Secondary Education. She will study for the fall semester with Calvin's French Department program at the Université de Grenoble Alpes. Her aspirations include a career as a secondary teacher of French and English. She expressed her sincere thanks for this support from the Alliance Française. We hope to meet her at one of our events; all applicants receive an 18-month membership in the Alliance. Félicitations, Kendy!

Kendy's essay:

Before my freshman and sophomore years of high school, I spent a week in Haiti on a mission trip. The first time I went sealed my commitment to French, as the people speak Haitian Creole – a French dialect. When my school's French program was discontinued after my first year of study, I continued my learning with a virtual school program for another four years. Upon coming to Calvin University, I immediately declared my interest in French, and I attended events as frequently as my schedule allows. Since my education major is intertwined with my French and English majors, I apprenticed and taught in a French classroom for four hours a day, four days a week for the 2021 Fall Semester. In May, I am studying in Italy for a month, and, in the fall, I am studying abroad in France for the entire semester.

My dream is to teach French and English to middle and high schoolers. Before I get there, though, I want to attain nearly (if not entirely) native-level fluency. This I hope to achieve through my semester study abroad, college courses, and post-graduation time abroad teaching in French speaking areas. Here, I will also create connections with local educators and discover different ways of conducting the classroom. When I return, I anticipate teaching French and English to adolescents. The secondary school years are some of the most formative of our lives, but very few schools truly engage with their students. In my experience, language is one of the greatest stepping stones in forming connections with others and with oneself. The thought of equipping students with awareness of the world, the stimulation of a challenge, and the beauty of a different culture invigorates me. To inspire awe and understanding in my students, however, I must have a personal connection with the culture myself. Having studied French with a host of educators and over a plethora of platforms, the experiences of and the relationship with the educators have, for my learning, made all the difference. Professors who could go beyond the text to the nuances of expressions illuminated culture alongside grammar, and peers with stories of trial and triumph created greater intrigue in a people so close and yet so far from the ones I had known. By studying abroad and continuing my studies at home, I will be able to place a whole world in the grasp of the students in my classroom, and I hope to continue making connections and educating for as long as I live and breathe.