Cynthia Ortoni thought the news was too good to be true when she was selected to participate in the Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD)’s Study Abroad trip to Paris, France. “I felt as if at any time I would get a phone call saying that the trip was going to be canceled,” Ortoni said. “No one called. I never would have dreamed that the trip was possible until the airline hostess checked my luggage at Detroit Metro Airport.”

Like Ortoni, Lina Aude said at first she could not believe her ears when she received the call that the Study Abroad Selection Committee has chosen her for the trip to France. “It did not hit me until I rolled my bags to the airport. I still cannot believe that any institution would care so much about its students that it would actually provide for them this kind of opportunity,” Aude said.

Ortoni and Aude were among a diverse group of 40 students representing many disciplines from the five-campus District, who traveled to France recently to study at Paris Langues, an institute solely devoted to teaching French. Students were immersed in the culture and language by mother-tongue instructors who specialize in teaching French as a foreign language. The school is located within the FIAP Jean Monnet, a lively international accommodation center in the heart of Paris.

The students logged 15 hours of French language, six hours of French civilization classes, and interacted with students from around the world who were also either studying at the institute or just staying at the FIAP. They also participated in City Excursions and toured notable places including the splendor of the Champs-Elysees, Notre-Dame, the Chateau Vincennes, Opera House, Eiffel Tower, and the Loire. Their travels led them to see Paris by night tour to experience the magnificent lights that brighten up the city and often mesmerize visitors. Many ventured out to discover the grandeur of Paris—its culture, romance and its breathtaking architectural designs—on their own using the efficient French Metro and bus systems to travel from one district of the city to another.

Amber Cooper said the French classes were very interactive. “I learned so much French in such a short time. Our professor was such a great teacher. He was patient with us and everything was done in French. He did not speak any English and would not allow us to speak English during our French class,” Cooper said. “This, I believed helped us to learn the language faster. I really enjoyed the class and it inspired me to want to learn more French and one day be proficient in the language.”

Joclyn Smith is grateful for what she called a “rare opportunity” in a lifetime. “I am blessed because I never thought I would ever have the chance to be in Paris; to see the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, and the lights that light up Paris by night. The trip is something I will talk about until I die – literally. I rode the Ferris wheel and who would have thought I would be on the top of Paris at the age of 32; to realize something I have always dreamed about when I was a child. All I can say is that my experience in Paris was a dream come true,” Smith added. Jacqueline M. Pawlowicz expressed her appreciation in French by saying “Merci beaucoup.” She said she has made many friends during the trip and will stay in touch with them. “I have learned about a wonderful culture and had a priceless experience. I have a passion to travel and I will remember this experience for the rest of my life. I honestly fell in love with Paris. It has been a life-changing experience and I am truly grateful.”

For years now, WCCCD has offered study abroad opportunities for more than 500 students. Students have studied the languages, cultures, social, political and economic systems of Argentina, Austria, India, Mexico, and Australia. WCCCD’s nursing students have spent time at the Guy’s and St. Thomas’ Teaching hospitals in Great Britain.

Shirley Garnett said the Paris trip has given her a global perspective. “Learning opportunities abound in WCCCD’s Study Abroad Program – a classroom without walls. It is true that education opportunities can be found in places other than in a classroom setting. This certainly proved the point!”