

## A Global Community

Language is not simply the study of grammar rules, correct spelling, and accurate pronunciation; it is a living method of communication, created and maintained by a community in order to keep memories alive and express our deepest thoughts. I had forgotten this rule during my regular high school years, but through Virtual High School I have learned this important lesson all over again.

In my junior year, I was taking French 4 classes with only one other student. She was a senior, ready to graduate and move on to college, and we rarely saw each other outside of the classroom. I was prepared to continue my studies into French 5, even though I would be the only student. Instead, my teacher recommended Virtual High School as a means of taking French 5. Hesitant at first, I eventually agreed to sign up; I was at the top of the waiting list, and two weeks later, after nervous anticipation, I finally got into AP French 5.

Virtual high school was a definite change from sitting in class and talking to real people and teachers in front of you; Discussions took place on a discussion board, assignments were handed into virtual drop boxes instead of a teacher's hand. The school week began on Wednesday, and assignments could be handed in as late as Tuesday evening, although such actions were heavily frowned upon as signs of procrastination. The teacher was there to answer questions and correct papers, but in reality it was up to the student to study and get the work done. We were essentially teaching ourselves.

If I had taken an online math course, I probably would have had much more trouble in teaching myself and getting the material to stick. But in AP French 5, the whole point of the class was that we worked off each other as much as we questioned the teacher. Our very first assignment was to post information about ourselves and ask and answer questions from fellow peers, all in French. Each week had an assignment involving commenting on each other's opinions and stories. Questions about grammar and assignments were answered by the other students as much as the teacher. In this way we could help each other along and catch mistakes more quickly.

The class was a welcome change from my previous three years of French education. My freshman year, there were only nine French students in French 2. By French 3 the number was six, and in French 4 it was only me and one other girl. Now I was part of a large community of girls and boys all dedicated to passing that AP exam with flying colors. I was part of a group again, a surrogate French family ranging from Russia to France to Brazil, filled with diversity.

Virtual High School made me remember that the great thing about learning and knowing a second language is that it allows you to connect with so many people and so many new experiences. I realized that if I were to continue my studies in college, taking language courses and studying international relations and politics, I would need more than a college that simply offered language courses; I would need a college that offered language communities and brought universalism to the forefront of education. I looked into colleges such as Middlebury and Georgetown, where the different language classes serve to give students a broader perspective and a greater community instead of just teaching past tenses of verbs and regional pronunciation differences. I hope one day to become a foreign diplomat or aid worker and continue to help build communities by using my language skills.

Virtual High School and all the people involved reminded me that while learning a language can look good on an application or in small talk, the important thing is that it unifies people of different backgrounds with a common history and culture. Language is part of who we are and who we hope to become.