Dear Friends and Supporters of the E. Catherine Barclay Scholarship,

It was a great pleasure to meet so many of you at the annual E. Catherine Barclay Scholarship send-off reception in June. I had just returned from Tours and felt privileged to be welcomed back to Calgary by such a strong community. It was wonderful to be able to thank donors in person and pass the torch of this marvelous opportunity to Valentina Fajardo, this year’s scholarship winner who will be leaving for Dijon in August. I learned that Valentina is currently pursuing a degree in French with a minor in Music. In fact, this past year she was a member of the UCalgary’s World Music Ensemble, playing various instruments and genres. She also volunteers at the St. Michael Catholic Community for its youth nights and is a walking tour guide in Calgary for the summer. In the future, Valentina hopes to become an interpreter.

At the reception, I had the opportunity to share with Valentina some things I wish I had known before I left last year around this time. For those of you who weren’t able to join us, or for future recipients, these might help. Here they are again:

1. You’ll learn that it’s okay to accept help, and that your journey to France will not be possible without the support of those around you.

2. Baguettes are delicious, but they’re not real food and you can’t eat them for every meal of every day.

3. Supermarkets, pharmacies and Medicentres are closed on Sundays.

4. Your French isn’t as good as you think it is. Some people may not understand you even after you’ve rehearsed the same sentence for five minutes, and one of your professors will return an assignment, telling you that your French isn’t good enough. But that’s nothing a little practice and effort won’t fix.

5. Wine is really cheap.

6. You’ll learn that less is more.

7. The French love to protest. It’s really cool that they express themselves politically, but it could be dangerous and it might cause some minor inconveniences.
8. You’ve already been warned that the French grading system is different (and that the teachers mark a lot harder), but you’ll still panic when you get your first 11/20. Don’t worry because your grades will improve as you adapt.

9. Living alone can be isolating. But you’ll learn to appreciate alone time, and you won’t take time with your family for granted.

10. You were freaked out by the thought of sleeping in the same room as strangers in a hostel, but by the time you’ve finished your travels, you’ll understand that a bed curtain is a luxury, and that a bed count in the single digits is a blessing.

11. Nothing can prepare you for how small travelling will make you feel. There’s so much history to see, so many people to talk to, and so much that you have to learn. Throughout your travels, you’ll notice that some of the nicest streets smell really good, and some of the poorest areas smell horrendous. Nothing can prepare you for how humbled you’ll feel when you walk past the countless people living in unspeakable conditions, and you realize that you can’t make this world fair for everyone, no matter how hard you work. You’ll feel especially privileged.

12. Despite your initial struggles, you’ll want to return to France as soon as you leave!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of you for your support of this amazing scholarship. It was incredible to be one of four consecutive scholarship recipients present at the reception. I could feel the strength of the community behind this award.

The last thing I would like to leave with you is a short video of my favorite places in Tours and from my year abroad. Enjoy!

Merci beaucoup et bon voyage Valentina!

Miya Larsen (2018 recipient)

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**Did you know?**

The E. Catherine Barclay scholarship has been supported by 68 donors who were recognized at this year’s send off reception. 16 award recipients have spent a year in France thanks to the generosity and support of this growing community and the efforts of numerous advocates and partners. In the last three years, the E. Catherine Barclay endowment has raised $24,000 to support and perpetuate the annual $7500 scholarship. The E. Catherine Barclay Scholarship Advisory Committee sincerely thanks each and every supporter and donor. Together we are building international learning opportunities for many more students to come.

Warmest summer wishes,