

Interview with Nathaniel Burrows: An American TA commends the disruptive and critical thinking of Rennes 2 students



What drew you to Rennes 2 as a student?

While studying anthropology and history at Reed College, I decided to explore the possibility of participating in an exchange program. I received a list of possible universities from Reed's International Programs Office, some were in Paris, one was in Lyon, and then there was Rennes 2. I'd already visited Paris with my parents when I was younger, so I opted to discover another part of France this time around. The staff member in charge of the exchange program told me all about Rennes, presenting it as a young and left-wing city, and Rennes 2 as a university that shared Reed's values and my own. So, in 2019, I arrived in Rennes for my mobility program. I have to say that I felt very much at home here during my 4-month stay. When I decided to become a teacher abroad the following year, I chose to return to Rennes 2, this time as a TA.

What does the job of a TA at Rennes 2 involve?

I give refresher courses to English degree bachelors level students. My main goal is to help them speak the language, as the particularities of pronunciation tend to be fairly difficult for non-native speakers. I teach phonetics as well as grammar, vocabulary and culture...My role is to create a supportive environment and construct engaging activities so that students feel comfortable speaking as much as possible. I love teaching, and seeing them progress makes me happy. I'm coming to the end of my two-year contract, but I'd like to stay longer.

What made the biggest impression on you when you arrived at Rennes 2?

The first thing that struck me was the importance of politics on campus. Students here are not only engaged in discussion, they're genuinely involved in taking collective action. I've also observed this as a teacher on an academic level: they don't just do the work that's asked of them, but find creative and playful ways of making it their own and enjoying it. There's also an atmosphere of solidarity and support for students in need, which I hadn't experienced at Reed. I'm thinking in particular of [the free grocery store](#).

How would you sum up the essence of what characterizes Rennes 2?

For me, Rennes 2 students really endeavor to connect humanist political values with their studies. They have a great capacity to express themselves and think for themselves in a way that is truly "out of the box" as they say. It's always very interesting to have discussions with them. Academic creativity is an integral part of Rennes 2's identity.