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Prospectus

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According to the OECD Better life index of 2014, People in the United States work 1,790 hours a year and spend 60% of their day not working, or devoting their time to personal care and leisure, while People in France work 1,479 hours a year and spend 64% of their day on average not working.<sup>1</sup> French employees are working less due to programs such as the 35-hour work week and 5 weeks of paid vacation. It is clear that the French are spending less hours working than Americans. Does this extra free time give the French more opportunities than Americans to partake in activities that could ultimately lead to increased happiness? For my thesis research this year, I plan to study French labor policies and discover if these policies, in turn, effect the worker's overall quality of life.

Employment is a large aspect of life. It is evident that without an income of some sort, people cannot pay for life's necessities. The majority of persons who find their income resulting from employment, spend an abundant amount of time at a job throughout their life. Because so much time is spent working by an average individual, I believe that one's occupation can influence the employee's happiness, or quality of life. I think it is evident that most persons have the similar goal of achieving happiness throughout their life. If governments could potentially enact policies that would

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<sup>1</sup> *The OECD better life index*. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org>

contribute to an increase in the working population's happiness, or overall quality of life, the population as a whole would strengthen in both mental and physical health. Thus, it is important to study labor policies to see if they can help improve the working population's quality of life.

I plan to use the labor policies of France as a model for this research. After studying abroad in the country for a semester, I was surprised to learn of these policies and experience them firsthand. I realized they were much different from the American policies that I was accustomed to and this interested me greatly. For the first part of my Thesis, chapter 1, which will serve as an introduction, I plan to give a more detailed explanation of why I believe this topic is relevant and how it can impact one's quality of life. I mentioned a few of these reasons above, such as the importance of both employment and happiness, but I will expand on this idea making it more extensive and coherent. I will incorporate personal experiences from my time abroad, as well as qualitative data from interviews. I hope to make this topic both interesting for readers, while also giving them a basis for the information that I will present in the following chapters of my thesis.

In the second chapter, I will give a historical overview of labor policies in France. I will research how and why these policies emerged, while also giving specific attention to the different labor unions who played such an important role in enacting the policies. I hope to tie the history of this chapter to French culture. I believe a lot can be learned about the culture not only because of the policy itself, but also from the citizens and ruling governments who fought to implement these ideas. These people helped

campaign and mold labor policies that would coincide with their culture, and this culture can reveal a lot about the historical reasoning behind labor policy in France. It is also important for International readers to understand the culture and history of the labor policies, so that they can better comprehend the policies taking place today. After presenting the historical information, the rest of chapter 2 will focus on explaining the major policies in France today, such as the 35-hour work week, 5 weeks of paid vacation, *réduction du temps de travail*, maternity leave, and other smaller policies. I will explain how these policies work and who they effect. I will also add information about changes in productivity at the workplace as a result of these policies I will search databases and find statistics to help expound on the laws. After this chapter, readers will be better able to comprehend the labor system as a whole in France.

In chapter 3, I will attempt to define quality of life and connect it to labor policies discussed in chapter 2. The World Health Organization defined quality of life as “Individual perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns.” I plan to elaborate on this definition and mold it with other sources that have already attempted to defined quality of life. Because of the great diversity in the world, it is sometimes hard to create a definition that would be applicable to every human. I hope to find a definition that would most likely fit all labor pools, so i can use it to conduct research in both France and the United States. After creating this definition, I will begin to find statistics that can relate to my definition of quality of life.

Chapter 4 will focus on presenting and explaining the results from my research. I intend to search French and American databases for statistics of the employed population that could directly affect quality of life as a result of labor policies. The biggest step of research would be determining which of these statistics are actually relevant to quality of life. Some of these potential statistics could be related to categories such as social relationships, the environment, and physical and psychological health. I hope to have between 10 and 20 relative statistics, and then explain exactly why I believe each is correlative to labor policies. For instance, I would explain why the 35 hour work week in France, as opposed to the 40 hour work week in the United States, could benefit the employee's physical health through a decrease in stress levels. Consequently, this could strengthen one's quality of life. Using this example, I could present a statistic regarding the stress level an average working person experiences. I would compare this number in France to the number in the United States and determine if this difference, if any could be a result of a particular labor policy. This specific example may or may not prove anything of real significance as a direct outcome of labor policy, but I hope that after comparing many statistics such as this, I will have a better possibility of understanding if labor policy does indeed contribute to an increased quality of life.

In addition to the research mentioned above, I plan to conduct interviews of workers in France. Because of my recent study abroad trip in France and the contacts I made there, I hope to interview 4 or more French workers with differing jobs and ask them about their work experience. But, due to the lack of significance of this small

sample size, I do not plan for these responses to directly influence my final conclusions. This will add a qualitative aspect to my project, and I hope to weave quotes from these interviews throughout my thesis. I believe these interviews will help add a new element to my project by presenting authentic opinions from French citizens who work under these policies. I intend for this interview to be more of a conversation, but I will have a few probes to help ignite the discussion. I have listed some of these potential questions below.

1. How many hours per week do you work?
2. How many weeks of paid vacation do you have?
3. Do you travel during this time? If not, what do you do during your time off?
4. Are you typically happy with your job?
5. Do you ever feel pressured to finish your work within your hours?
6. How many breaks do you normally take during a work day, and how long are they?
7. Do you ever feel overwhelmed by your job?
8. Do you believe you have adequate time to do other activities outside of work?  
(necessities and pleasure)
9. Do you believe your job affects your happiness?
10. Are you ever expected to complete projects at home, on your own time?

These questions are very basic, but I plan on asking the interviewees to expand on their answers. I will attempt to conduct these interviews in French and over a video chat, such as skype. I will then record and translate their responses so that I can appropriately utilize them throughout the project.

There is a lot of research to be done for my thesis, but I believe that if I follow a strict schedule, I can not only write a coherent and beneficial thesis, but also finish the project in a timely manner. I am excited to learn about my topic and get started on the research.