Andrea Gerdes discovered a love for French while in middle school. Over the years, she pursued study of the language and today she’s a junior with a double major in French and finance. This fall, Gerdes will continue her studies in Lille, France, where her classes will be taught in French at the Université Lille III.

“I first started studying French in middle school because I thought it was a beautiful language and my godmother, who was a high school French teacher, encouraged me to do so. I fell in love with it and have continued study ever since,” said Gerdes, who often immerses herself in the language through French films, music and books.

“As faculty, our deepest satisfaction derives from teaching bright, inquisitive students. Andrea always meets you more than half way,” said Susan Stakel, associate professor of French in the department of languages and literatures.

“She wants to make sure she understands, she thinks deeply about things, she can put two and two together and see that there is four, but also implications beyond four. And to everything she does she brings an amazing joie de vivre, joie d’apprendre.”

“I love the DU French program,” Gerdes said. “I’m taking classes with students and professors who love French as much as I do. We get to discuss interesting topics all in French and learn the language as we go.”

Gerdes has worked as a French tutor in the University’s Center for World Languages and Cultures. The experience has improved her own understanding of French grammar and has enabled her to learn more about other languages and cultures from the other tutors.

When she’s not studying and tutoring French at DU, Gerdes can be found swimming with eels in her job as a mermaid at the Denver Aquarium.

“It’s tons of fun,” said Gerdes, who grew up in Golden. “We perform shows underwater that teach kids about recycling and then we hop out of the tank to meet and greet and take pictures with the kids. I get to swim with a ton of cool animals such as sea turtles, nurse sharks, stingrays and eels.”

Two years ago, Gerdes and her family travelled to France, visiting the Normandy beaches, Mont Saint-Michel, Paris, Versailles, the Loire valley and Nice. “It was great to see so many different parts of the country and to experience all of the things I had learned about,” she said.

Having fallen in love with both the language and the country, Gerdes hopes to combine both of her degrees to someday work in finance in France or possibly in a Swiss bank.