Chelse Spinner

Reflection

Part 1: What?

 This summer I was given the opportunity to travel to Spain and to have a Spanish Immersion. In Spain I took Spanish language classes at The Don Quijote Language School and a Spanish cultural class taught by my professors. While in Spain I stayed with a host family for six weeks and my experience was very rewarding. Spain offers the opportunity for one to embrace the culture, the food, the people, the historically rich sites, and the abundance of unique places.

The most significant experience for me would have to be how I made this trip special and different from the group. Towards the end of my study abroad trip I was able to go to the Spanish National Cancer Research Centre (Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Oncologicas). I was in contact with Ms. Lola Martinez who is over the Women in Science Program that is held at the Center during the summer, and I was able to meet with her in person and discuss what types of projects that were currently being performed. It was most significant to me because it was an initiative that I took upon myself to complete and it has made my study abroad experience that much more unique. I really enjoyed being able to meet with Ms. Martinez and just ask her different questions about why she chose this line of work and due to this meet and greet I now have a professional relationship with someone in a different country that could possibly help me in my career in the future.

I believe that my experience in Spain superseded my expectations that were described in my proposal. Before going to Spain I really did not know what to expect and when I finally saw the city I realized it went above and beyond what I was expecting. Spain is such a historically rich country and the amount of history that I was able to see was just extraordinary. An expectation that I had written in my proposal was to understand Spanish culture and take pride in learning the Spanish language. During my time in Spain I was really able to immerse myself in the culture if not from asking my host family, but from my professors as well. I truly enjoyed learning about the differences and similarities between Spain and the United States. I feel that my Spanish has definitely improved because of this trip. At the beginning of my study abroad I was slightly hesitant in communicating with my host family, but by the end I was having full conversations with them in Spanish. My improvement in the language gave me more confidence to have more conversations in Spanish with other individuals.

**The first learning outcome is to interact with individuals from different cultures and express a sensitivity, appreciation, and respect for the complex range of experiences of diverse people.**

This learning outcome was one that I was able to complete each and every day of my time in Spain. Each day I was becoming more and more comfortable with using the Spanish language, and with this comfort I was able to communicate with more individuals. My host family did not speak any Spanish, so I had to pick up on my Spanish quickly in order to have a conversation. During one weekend I was the only one in the host house and I was able to talk with and learn more about my host family. I believe because of this I was able to form a good bond with my host family. Each night at dinner my roommates and I would eat and talk with our host family also while the Spanish news station was on. We would be able to ask our host family about different things happening within Spain and sometimes be able to compare or contrast with certain things happening in the United States.

**The second learning outcome is participate in a global society and understand the role of a global citizen.**

Each day for four weeks I took a Spain Today class taught by Dr. Carl Bryant that was designed to educate students on the culture of Spain. It was in this class that I was able to learn about economy, culture, food/diet, unemployment rates, and etc. about Spain. I become very aware of the differences between Spanish culture and United States culture. This made me knowledgeable about certain practices that are not common within the United States. Something that I had to get used to in order to become more of a global citizen were the eating practices. In Spain it is common to have a small breakfast, large lunch, and small late dinner. It was somewhat hard to adjust to, but I was able to do it. Another thing to get used to is at restaurants waiters are not tipped and one is not supposed to throw away their own trash. It is almost unheard of for someone in the United States to not tip a waiter/waitress or throw away their own trash, but in Spain it is a common practice. I also had to learn to order food for myself and communicate on a daily basis with workers in stores or restaurants because I had to eat and on occasion buy items. Due to this constant interaction I was able to pick up on Spanish terms quicker and more efficiently. I believe that constant and non-stop interaction is beneficial when one is learning a new language.

Part 2: So What?

Before embarking on my study abroad trip to Spain I read two books. The first was called Eyewitness Travel Madrid by Michael Leapman and it mainly informed me about the history of Spain. The history of Spain is interesting and has a timeline that dates back to the 1400s. While in Spain I took a Spanish cultural class and in this class I learned about Spanish history, culture, and customs. By reading Eyewitness Travel Madrid before my trip I was able to have some background knowledge about Spain’s history which benefited me in the end. The book was also somewhat of a tourist travel guide and it pointed out the best ways of transportation and tourist sites to go to. Due to Spain’s rich history there are many historical and cultural sites to visit which were described in the Eyewitness Travel Madrid book. The second book that I read before going to Spain was The Art of Crossing Cultures by Craig Stori and this book was probably my favorite of the two. This book was a guide in how to effectively adapt to a different country and a different culture. I believe this book was the reason as to why I did not feel culture shock or even homesickness. By reading about how to avoid these things beforehand I did not experience them for myself. I truly enjoyed my time in Spain and I believe that because of the books that I read before going I was able to enjoy my trip even more.

Part 3: Now What?

While in Spain one of the most important things that I learned was to be actively involved and accepting of other cultures as well as people. During my time in Spain I was able to just jump right in, but then again I didn’t really have much of a choice. I immediately had to start using Spanish and use the vocabulary and grammar that I had learned from high school. Even though it was not the best I had to communicate and during my time there I definitely improved on my communicating skills. I was speaking in Spanish and had to ask things in Spanish which pushed me further out of my comfort zone, but allowed me to become a more outspoken individual. I believe that in my life now I won’t be afraid to take risks and to step up and take the lead whenever necessary. Another thing that I have learned from going to Spain is to not be afraid to network. Networking is extremely important and allows for individuals to make lasting social and professional relationships. From networking in Spain I was able to make friends that live in Spain as well as make a professional relationship with a program coordinator who works at the Spanish National Cancer Research Institute. I will also be willing to share my experience with other people to encourage others to travel to other countries. I believe that being able to travel to other countries broadens horizons and allows for individuals to embrace other cultures and other people from said cultures. I truly loved my experience in Spain and am excited to talk with others about my experience and go on even more study abroad trips during my time in college.

During my first year at the University of Cincinnati I feel that the main thing that I learned about in class was diversity and acceptance. I feel that these two words go hand in hand with what I learned during my trip to Spain. I had the opportunity to be immersed in a different culture and learn to embrace and accept said culture. While taking classes at The Don Quijote Language School, I was able to interact with people from different countries all over the world. Many of the people that were in my language classes were from China, Brazil, Sweden, London, Holland, Germany, and many other countries. I believe that when learning a new language it is most helpful to learn that language in a country that speaks it. I find it amazing that so many people wanted to not only learn about the Spanish language, but also about the Spanish culture and were able to embrace the culture while living in Spain. The teachers at The Don Quijote Language School wanted everyone in the classes actively involved and openly discussing different topics that allowed for everyone to discuss their opinion, while only speaking in Spanish. It helped everyone learn to speak the language better and for each person to learn about the differences between different countries. As a result of going on this trip I have made lasting friendships with people all over the world and have been able to embrace diversity and acceptance of different cultures even more so that I have been exposed to so many during my time in Spain.

Upon return to school for the upcoming Fall Semester of 2015, I hope to be able to share my experience with others on UC’s campus. This fall I will be a part of the UC International Fair and be sharing my experiences with those interested in the Spanish Immersion Program in Madrid, Spain. I will also be sharing my experience with young individuals in elementary and middle school about the importance of learning about different cultures and travelling abroad. I worked with those students during my senior year in high school when I started and After-School Tutoring and Homework help program, with The Commons at Chantry which is a part of a non-profit organization (National Church Residences) that helps formerly homeless individuals and families. I believe that it is important to talk with them because many of the children may not know what kind of opportunities are available to them when they start to think about college and what they want to accomplish while there. I will also be sharing my experiences with Darwin T. Turner Scholars and LSAMP Scholars. My experience in Spain has been truly wonderful because not only have I learned more about myself during those six weeks, but I have also been able to embrace, learn, and love the differences between my culture and that of Spain’s.