

ASHLEE RUFF: 3/04:

The study abroad program is a wonderful experience and I encourage everyone who can to participate in one of the programs. Many biology majors believe that they do not have the time to study abroad, but it is possible if you carefully arrange your classes. I am a biology/Spanish double major. As a Spanish major I was required to go abroad. Since I had to go abroad and I had Spanish classes on top of my biology classes, I took summer school. Nevertheless, I know of some Biology/Spanish majors who went abroad and did not attend summer school.

I attended the IES program in Madrid Spain the fall of my Junior year (2002). All of my classes were conducted in Spanish. I honestly do not remember the names of my professors. I took a business class, grammar, women's literature (Latin America vs Spain), drama literature, and an acting theater class. My favorite was the acting class. Besides the fact that I enjoy acting, I really felt like it helped me learn how to speak Spanish more naturally because I had to memorize lines. I liked my theater class the most, but I felt that all of the classes were valuable because they were all taught in Spanish. My least favorite class was the business class. I thought I was going to learn a lot of business related terms, but the class wasn't how I expected. We did talk about CVs and how to behave in an interview in the Spanish culture, which I found useful, but I enjoyed my other classes more. I lived with a Spanish woman, Elena, during my time there. Her children were all grown and had already moved out and had their own children. The apartment was nice. Everything in Spain is smaller than here, so my room was very small. I didn't have any other IES roommates, but I know some of the people in the program did. Elena would provide a small breakfast for me, which was usually just cereal and some fruit and orange juice. She also would cook lunch for me, or if she was unable to cook lunch, she would give me 20 euros (at the time that was \$20, the euro has become stronger since then) to go and get my own lunch. Dinner was not provided and the students had to go out to eat. Lunch is the largest meal of the day in Spain. On Sundays, Elena's children sometimes would come over and eat with us. Elena did not speak English and there were times when we would bring out the big Spanish/English dictionary. During my time in Madrid, I was hardly ever at home. I would go to class in the morning, come back home around 2:30 for lunch (that is the typical lunch time) and then I would take a siesta. On some days, I chose to eat a bocadillo (sandwich) at the school cafe because I had an afternoon class I think around 4:00. My school was 30 minutes away from my house by metro, so I did not have time to go home and eat. On Mondays and Wednesdays I joined a dance school with another IES student. This school was not affiliated with the program but my friend found out about it from her host family. Some students lived with families who had children, some with just a husband and wife, but most, like myself, lived with widows. I took Flamenco classes that lasted an hour in the evening and it cost 50 euros per month. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I tutored a 12 year old Spanish girl in English. Another Spanish family that I became friends with asked me if I would be willing to tutor this girl. She was the daughter of one of their colleagues. I received 10 euros per hour for this under the table job. My weekend started on Thursday because we did not have class on Friday. There is a lot of nightlife in Madrid and you will never run out of something to do or new places to go to. The Reina Sofia and the Prado can take 2 whole days to visit alone. I also traveled a lot around

Spain on trips that were covered by IES. We stayed in very nice hotels on all these trips. The weather during this time of the year in Madrid was about the same as it is here during the fall semester. When we traveled to the south of Spain, though, it was warm enough to go for a swim in the ocean.

I thoroughly enjoyed my entire experience abroad. There are times of frustrations, but the good definitely outweighs the bad.

I loved Spain so much that I went back during interim on the AIFS orientation program in Salamanca. Compared to Madrid, Salamanca is very small and you can visit pretty much all the important monuments within a weekend. Although I did not attend the entire semester program in Salamanca, I can say that I enjoyed my host family much more than I did in Madrid. I, and other Spanish majors who have gone to Salamanca, agree that Salamanca has the best host families. This time I lived with a mom, dad, 16 year old brother and 12 year old sister. I also had two roommates from my program and various roommates from time to time from other programs. The way the apartment was set up, the family lived on one side and we lived on the other. The kitchen was in the middle and that is where we would meet every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The family was very talkative and friendly. I spent more time at home when I was in Salamanca than I did when I was in Madrid. During January, it can get very cold in Salamanca, so take your sweaters and coat. I took a grammar class, communications class, and a culture class during my month stay. I enjoyed my classes and the teachers were really great. Opposed to Madrid, I did have classes on Friday.

If I had to choose between Madrid and Salamanca, it would be a hard decision to make. I have to say that I like Madrid because it is very large and there is a lot to do. Salamanca, on the other hand, has it's own charm for being small. You run into people on the street that you know all the time, which typically does not happen in Madrid. I felt that AIFS was more prepared and organized than IES (Madrid). I also am more biased towards Madrid since I lived there for 3 and a half months. I made a lot of Spanish friends there, whereas I only made a few Spanish friends while I was in Salamanca for the month. It is more expensive in Madrid than it is in Salamanca. For example, almost every club in Madrid has a cover charge, whereas very few, if any, in Salamanca do. In Salamanca you can walk everywhere. In Madrid you have to take the metro or if it's past 1:30 am you have to take a taxi (or wait until 6:30 am when the metro opens back up - many people do that by the way). Anywhere you go abroad, you will have a great time, I guarantee. My freshman year I studied in Siena, Italy for interim (2001) and also had a great time. There I stayed in a hotel for the month, which was provided by the program (once again AIFS). Once again, they were very organized and provided small trips even for the month. My classes were conducted in Italian, but since I had had no previous Italian, I was in the lowest level class.

I encourage anyone and everyone to take advantage of the study abroad programs while at Wofford. One can go to many different countries and no matter where you go, it will be an unforgettable experience. You will not be the same when you come back.

Ashlee Ruff