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I spent the last three months of 2015 living in Valladolid, Spain. I hold this time as one of the most important periods of my life thus far. I was able to experience so many things that I may have otherwise never experienced. From the people I met to the places I visited, my viewpoints on the world have been altered for the better. I was taught so many important and fascinating things both in the classroom and outside of it. Just a handful of months ago, I had never left the United States. Now that I am back home, I am happy to have the chance to review the many experiences that make up my time abroad.

Global Learning Element A: Demonstrate knowledge of the world's diverse cultures, environments, practices, or values.

The manners in which people socialize in Spain came to be some of the biggest differences I noticed between my host country and my home country. The biggest difference being the frequency in which the people go out for a coffee, a beer, or appetizers (tapas). While in the U.S., these events may happen a couple times a week for any given person, in Spain they happen practically every day. Spending time with friends at a café or bar during the work day, a week night, or on the weekends is a big part of the way Spaniards socialize. Sitting close, talking excitedly, and staying at one place for long periods of time are all part of a normal time out.

I view this kind of socialization as a more open and frequent type than what I experience in the U.S.; however, there are aspects of social interactions in Spain that proved to be more closed off than in the U.S. For example, something that I think can be chalked up partially to a language difference and partially a cultural difference is that some of the common manner practices that I am used to such as saying 'please,' 'thank you,' and 'excuse me,' are used much less often in Spain. A bigger difference that I took in is the separation of home life from social life. I was surprised to learn that having a friend eat dinner at your home or to just spend time there happens less frequently and is usually reserved for

special occasions. Also from what I took in, family and friends meet and mix less often than what I am used to.

I think that these differences are so interesting because while they seem minor, in reality they affect many things. Also the differences do not just come by chance, they come from things like geography and history. I loved spotting differences and thinking about the diversity of Spain.

Global Learning Element B: Learn to evaluate global systems, institutions and relationships of power in a historical or geographical context.

While in Spain myself and other exchange students from the U.S. noted some differences between children and young adults in Spain from those in the U.S. To myself and others it seemed odd that most teens and young adults do not have jobs until their professional jobs. We were also surprised to hear from our culture professor, Raquel, that it is common for middle-class parents to give their children 30 or 40 euros each week for spending money. When pressed more on this subject, Raquel chalked the differences somewhat up to a strong focus on education, but more so up to the effects of living in Spain post-dictatorship. Raquel further explained that the parents of the people of her generation wanted to give everything they could to their children because during the time of dictatorship in Spain that was not a possibility. She said that this type of parenting, catering more heavily to the needs and wants of the children, is still apparent in society.

Francisco Franco was the dictator of Spain from 1936 until 1975. During this time Spain was a much more isolated and poor country. While I would not consider myself well-versed in the history of Spain, I do know that people in Spain still speak of the time of Franco as a darker time for their country. I once asked my host mother if there were Christmas lights up when she was younger like there are all over Valladolid now. She said no and explained that when she was young, while Franco was still in power, the city and its people did not have much.

These little differences between children in one country to another could have easily been attributed to petty opinions. We could have decided that Spanish children are spoiled and that would have been fact to us; however, because we asked questions and others were willing to decipher their own society, we were able to understand better. I had only ever thought of dictatorships as part of others' history, never the history of the land I was occupying. In Spain, I received a great lesson in the importance of reflecting upon history before making assumptions about the present.

Global Learning Element C: Develop an understanding of the global implications of individual and collective actions.

There are two examples that come to mind when I think of the U.S. mixing with Spain, one more serious and the other more light-hearted. The more serious is also linked with the dictatorship of Franco. As Spain was not a part of the United Nations until 1955, much because of the leadership of Franco, resources from countries like the United States were scarce and Spain was suffering economically. In 1953, this changed when Spain entered into a trade and military alliance with the U.S. The U.S. gained a helpful location to use during the Cold War and Spain gained economic help that it needed in addition to setting up the country to be inducted in the U.N. two years later. A video we watched in history explained that to many Spaniards during the time of this alliance, President Eisenhower was a hero.

I noted a lighter example of someone from the U.S. affecting Spain while I was visiting Granada. Previously in culture class we had watched a video about Michelle Obama visiting Granada and going to a flamenco cave. One woman who had danced spoke to a news reporter about what it was like. We saw that Michelle Obama brought in huge crowds and how many people recognized her as a celebrity. While in Granada, we not only walked past the flamenco cave, but the exact woman from the television report

was sitting outside with a laminated picture of her and Michelle Obama taped up next to her. I imagine that she sits there often to bring in tourists.

While Spaniards are very proud of their own culture and history, the influence of the United States is very present-much more so than I thought it would be. The music played on the radio is primarily U.S. music. They watch U.S. television shows and movies. I think that these things, as well as the two examples that I gave, show the extreme presence of globalization. There are certainly positive and negative aspects to globalization, yet it is also certain that it will continue to affect Spain, the U.S. and the rest of the world for many years to come.

Describe a disorienting experience that challenged your assumptions

While abroad I did not experience many disorienting moments; however, I can reflect upon a larger scale one. When I left the United States I was not expecting to learn more about myself as someone from the U.S. and as someone who speaks English, but I really did. When I was in bigger cities in Spain as well as when I traveled to Portugal and Italy, many people automatically spoke to me and those I was with in English. My culture was everywhere on televisions and on the radio. Being catered to was an oddly disorienting experience.

In the past, I understood that I was privileged to be from the U.S. but I never saw that in action. While that was surprising, the more disorienting thing was learning what a privilege it is to grow up speaking English. I saw tourists really struggle to get simple things done because they did not speak the language of the country or English. Almost all signs that I saw in big cities had an English option to read. Most vendors knew at least some English. Many people, at least in Spain, reject having to learn English but need to to secure the jobs that they want. I would find myself being subconsciously proud or happy with this, but then I would make myself think about why this happens. English has become a semi-

universal language not because it is the easiest but because dominant countries of the past and present have forced others to cater to them.

While disorienting, I am happy to now understand the privileges I hold as an English speaker and a U.S. citizen. It is something I will now keep in mind when assessing and forming opinions about others. Explore and reflect on how you see your study abroad experience integrating into your life.

Studying abroad was the first time that I lived in a place without family and friends close by. This led me to learn things about myself that I wouldn't have learned otherwise. I found how resourceful I can be and noted my natural default to leadership. I planned trips and led myself and others around. I went out of my comfort zone to try new things. I journaled more. I had to reassess who I am as a person when I am on my own. In all of these things I found new ideas and habits to take back home with me.

In addition to finding myself in different ways, I now understand others better than I did before. As a future social worker, it is so important that I work to understand and empathize with others. Being with Spaniards and exchange students from other places gave me a closer look into what makes up a person. It was comforting to find that there are many core similarities between people around the world. It was eye opening to learn about why and how the differences exist.

It is difficult to summarize all of the things that I have brought back with me to the United States. What I know for certain is that I am a more understanding and strong person for my time in Spain. I could not be more grateful for this.