

Celeste Scola

Accounting Major: Spanish Minor

Valladolid, Spain & Germany, France, Italy

Jan 7, 2015- June 1, 2015

Expected Graduation Date: Spring 2017

Global Awareness Scholarship \$500.00

My study abroad experience started off like I'm sure it does for many with a "why not?" I have always felt drawn to the idea of studying abroad, but for five months, now that seemed a little intimidating for someone like me who loves my comfort zone. When my best friend jokingly asked me to enroll in Spanish 301 and join her in Spain, to her surprised I said sure! That moment was the perfect time for me to create a new adventure and I was ready for the change of pace. I've always felt a love for Spanish, but was not sure how it would fit with my accounting career. However, my accounting advisor had great enthusiasm and assured me that having a second language was a great idea, so I felt like I was making the right decision. I don't even recall being nervous; really I was just excited and ready for the experiences to come.

With all of our excitement, we made our way to Valladolid, Spain and luckily without any hiccups along the way. We bused from Madrid and I remember being the very last pair called off the bus to meet our vivacious and sassy host mom. Now this is when I felt nervous. Would she like us? What would our living situation be like? With our mom, nerves were quickly set aside. She was so accommodating and flexible and she truly made our experience stress free and wonderful.

We took all of our classes in Spanish including history, culture, literature, grammar, geography, art history and oral expression. Additionally, we even wrote a monograph, which turned out to be the longest paper I have ever written! There tends to be a stereotype that students who go abroad do not work hard, and while experiential learning is encouraged and supported, I would not say most students were able to coast by. Just like any school, some classes and professors are more difficult than others, but I definitely studied hard and am glad I did.

I had my fair share of experiential learning, too! I took advantage of my time there and was fortunate enough to do some traveling around. After all, when will I really be back in Europe? Our university did a great job of creating excursions for us to nearby cities including Segovia, Salamanca, Santander and others. These included lessons lead by our professors that tied into our course material. Additionally, I was able to experience Germany as well as Amsterdam over Semana Santa, our spring break! And before heading home to the States, we made our way through Madrid, Paris, Marseille, Rome and Florence! Each city has it's own uniqueness, but ultimately, Spain is the country that stole my heart, and I'm completely ok with it!!

It did not take too long to realize that no matter where you are in the world, you can find the same struggles to varying degrees: homelessness, poverty, pollution, governments in debt and so on. Whenever there are people, there are inevitably problems, but we can learn so much from each other! One way thing that Spain does very differently from the States is healthcare. In Spain, you do not need to wait for an emergency visit to receive help. Residents of Spain, and even those under 26 who are studying there from other countries, do not need to pay out of pocket for healthcare. A quick Google search will show that Spain has one of the top rated healthcare systems. One day I asked my host mom, who is a hospital nurse, why there seemed to be so many twins in our city. While it's speculation, she said it's due to artificial insemination becoming more prevalent. To my surprise, if a couple tries for a year to conceive but can't, the government will pay all of the costs for artificial insemination. I was amazed and wondered how people would react if this were implemented back home, because it even seemed excessive to me. But who is to say

where we should draw that line with healthcare, who should decide what is covered and is not covered?

It is very apparent that Spain values people and their health, though it comes at a price. I spoke with a gal who worked at the hospital and she told me about hepatitis C being a major issue right now in Spain. Usually, treatment for it was one thing not covered by the government because medication for one person alone costs 50,000 euros which does not include any additional costs such as staff or the hospital building. Many people cannot afford something like that out of pocket and hundreds, even thousands of people needed the treatments. Due to elections coming up, the government decided to pay for treatments despite government debts. It's a really fine line. Who gets to put the value on someone's life? It's a true ethical debate for all countries.

Another value, or maybe more of a cultural difference, I noticed the many times we made our way to the beach. Simply put, the beaches are culturally different because they are most always topless beaches, which to me expressed in a roundabout way how other cultures value women. I chose to talk about this over many other cultural differences I learned about because of its importance. I came to the realization that in America we have over sexualized, in particular, the female body; while at the beach I couldn't help but feel a bit uncomfortable. How ridiculous that I as a female felt uncomfortable by other women being topless at the beach. But then I got to thinking, why do I feel this way? Certainly I wasn't born that way and certainly I'm not the only American feeling this discomfort. Just stop and think of how our society reacts to breasts, which by nature serve one purpose, to nourish children. There is a huge breastfeeding debate in America, which other countries would just laugh at.

What about the times when female students are sent to the office for "revealing" clothing? We are teaching girls that their bodies are something to cover up so as to not distract boys. By sending girls to the office or even home to change, we are saying that her education is not as important as a boy's education because he may possibly be distracted by her shoulders. Instead we should teach all people how to respect one another and their bodies. Now I am not opposed to rules, but I have seen first hand how some teachers handle dress code rules. I've overheard a teacher in the office saying, "We need to fix 'this'" referring to a female student and her outfit. And as someone who has always dressed modestly, I even had a teacher snap at me once to pull my shirt up. I had never felt so embarrassed about my body. America needs to do a better job here. We should not be discomforted by any body. That is really the true cause of our dress code debates and the breastfeeding debate, people feeling uncomfortable. We can take note from other countries to change the mindset and realize that no one's body is anything to feel uncomfortable or ashamed of. We can gain a better respect for all people through education and conversation to become more progressive about this.

We did not have a current events class nor did my host family watch much news, so I do not feel that I really was able to grasp global systems, institutions or relationships of power. When it comes to my understanding of how the world interacts on a global scale, the only exposure that really comes to mind is airport security systems. It became evident how important and powerful knowing multiple languages is. This is also an area that can majorly impact other countries, both positively and negatively. Airport security is such a touchy topic for many, because we want our privacy but we also desire safety. I have been through airport securities abroad that are conveniently fast but in return are uneasily too

fast; you wonder if anyone cares enough to pay attention. With TSA failure recently brought to light, I question how other countries would rate in comparison. One country's failure to catch a suspicious person can become another country's problem. There's no doubt in my mind that today we have access to things on a global scale, which of course can create a new set of problems.

There are obvious issues that can arise, such as spread of disease, especially with the new trend of anti vaxxer parents. However, I believe even seemingly distant decisions can have an impact globally. A recent decision made by Walker affecting our public education could very easily affect my host community of Valladolid. Studying abroad is expensive and many students rely on aid to do so. Even despite this, UWEC is known for its high percentage of students who go abroad, right around 25%. However, with universities receiving less governmental aid, I would predict this percentage to drop. Valladolid has been Eau Claire's largest study abroad program, and UWEC students make up a large part of the University of Valladolid's foreign students. While the impact may not be severe, it could most definitely create a noticed void.

Going to Spain has changed my personal future plans in many ways, and of course in some ways my work future, too. My Spanish has improved and I even more so hope to utilize the language in my accounting career. I would love to be able to help clients who maybe only speak Spanish or work for a company and be the communicator internationally utilizing the language. A large part of what accountants do, is not only understanding the financial details, but being able to explain and communicate them to clients. For this reason, I feel that having a second language, and one as useful as Spanish, will benefit me in the future and open more doors for careers.

There were various times when I came to the realization that we as humans are easily desensitized. Usually it is something that we do not necessarily notice as it happens to us. For many students who study abroad for a longer length of time, the grandness and excitement of the cathedrals, and castles, and amazingly large museums become something mundane; a sort of "been there, done that" feeling which certainly is not intentional. However, what really solidified how desensitized we can be was when I attended a bullfight in Madrid.

The bullfight had six separate bulls including a series of events. First, they taunt the bull with pink capes. Next, a man on a horse jabs the bull in the back with his lance. Following this, men with smaller, colorful sticks run up and jab the bull in the back. Finally, the matador does his tricks and taunts to a fully riled up bull. Permitting the bull is not pardoned and saved for breeding due to the bull's outstanding success, the matador sticks his sword in the bull. Usually the bull slowly walks and falls to the ground, and if needed, they will do one last sword thrust to end the bull's misery. Initially, I could not even watch the horseman when he jabbed the bull. However, by the second bull I was fully watching and intrigued.

I never really knew much about bullfights before going to one, I just knew it was a debated topic in the States. I could see the cultural value of bullfighting and how important it is to many people; however, I learned that it is also a very big issue of debate within Spain. Many people find it to be an unethical event, but it is clearly hard to break cultural habits. As long as people continue making the decision to support bullfights, they will likely be around.

All of these experiences, realizations and more make me feel so fortunate and blessed to have gone abroad. I tell everyone that anyone who can go abroad should. I feel as though I have a greater appreciation for the world I live in, and now more than ever I realize that I will never be in “this” moment ever again; because whoever you are, wherever you are, life changes and we change, too. So enjoy the present.

I chose this photo because people are important to me. Here is an old friend, a new friend and my favorite teacher, Monste, at graduation!





While in Spain, I found a great UWEC guy to share many experiences with and I'm lucky enough to call him my boyfriend. Here we are enjoying sangria in our beautiful plaza mayor.

