

# Education Abroad Returnees of the Month October 2017

## **Sophia Padilla**

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UVA in Valencia, Spain, Academic Year 2015-16

### **Most interesting class and why?**

I loved Translation! My professor, Mabel Richart (who is teaching in Charlottesville this semester!), is incredibly passionate about the subject and had so much knowledge to share with us. It is super interesting because when translating things like movies, songs, TV shows, etc., there are so many cultural references that are difficult, if not impossible, to translate. Overall, I realized that there really is no perfect translation, and it proved to me why it's so important to actually learn other languages in order to truly understand other cultures.



### **Did you take classes in connection to your major or electives?**

All the Spanish classes counted toward my Spanish major, I was basically done with my Spanish major when I came back, which allowed me to declare a second major.

### **How was education abroad different than anticipated?**

One thing I underestimated was how much effort I needed to put in, in order to immerse myself in the culture. It's easy to think that just by being in the country, you are immersed in the culture. However, it's very easy to find yourself back in

the UVA bubble if you only stick with American students. You have to make the effort to go out and meet locals, not the other way around. During my time in Valencia, I was studying abroad, but everyone else is just living their normal life, they're not actively searching for you. You must put in a lot of effort if you want to learn. You also have to realize when learning a language that it takes a LONG time. You have to keep making mistakes and stumbling over words and eventually it will become easier.

### **Number one way the experience contributed to your growth**

My study abroad experience continues to affect my life daily. The biggest thing to me was realizing that study abroad didn't have to end when I came back to the US. When I was in Valencia I was always trying to make the most of my time there. I really explored the city and tried to meet lots of new people and learn about their culture. One night, toward the end of my year there, I went out to eat with my local friend. Some people who were visiting the city came up to us and asked us for recommendations on where to go dancing. My friend said she didn't know and looked to me. I gave them some recommendations, and later my friend and I laughed because she was supposed to be the local one! But I realized I

was the same way. Before, if you had asked me for a recommendation for a restaurant in Charlottesville that wasn't on the corner, I would have had no idea what to tell you. So now that I'm back I try to remember that there is so much in my own backyard to explore. I joined APO and got really involved in the community, and now I feel so much more connected to Charlottesville. There are so many rich experiences here! This past year I've gone to things like Cville Sabroso, Charlottesville Lady Arm Wrestlers, hiked places other than Humpback, and met a ton of international Students through VISAS. I think study abroad has taught me how to seize the day and make the most of life, no matter where you are.

### **Favorite local hangout, and why?**

My favorite hangout is called "El Río" which just means "The River." However, it's not a river anymore. It was transformed into a huge park that goes throughout the entire city. I lived very close to it so it was a perfect place to go on a run, take a walk with a friend, have a picnic, etc. Valencia has great weather so it was amazing to have this huge outdoor space to hangout.



### **Most interesting/delicious cuisine tried**

The most interesting meal I had was pulpo gallego (octopus). It's very yummy, and it's not the craziest thing to eat, but the experience was bizarre because we just stopped in the middle of hiking 20 miles to eat octopus and drink wine and then continue on with our hike. This was during the Camino de Santiago. Most Americans eat trail mix as a hiking snack, but we ate octopus!

### **Most meaningful experience abroad**

Without a doubt, the most meaningful part about study abroad was the people I met and came to love. I had such a sweet host family with 3 little host sisters, a sassy cat, and an adorable puppy. They became my second family. I also made a new best friend who I still keep in contact with. She was one of the best parts about the experience, and I'm so thankful that she helped me learn Spanish and shared her life with me that year.

### **Sum up the experience in three words**

"No pasa nada!" (Don't worry about it!)



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