Personal information

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Major: AEM
Name of host university: ESADE
Period/Time of Exchange: Spring ’17

Practical Advice

Visa
You need a visa to study abroad in Spain, so start the process early. Students in the state of New York are allowed to mail their application to the Spanish consulate in New York City, so I didn’t have to go anywhere in person which was quite convenient. Just put everything into a big envelope at the UPS Store in Collegetown and make sure you track your package! It took one full month for the consulate to process my documents, approve my visa, and then send it to my permanent address. I would highly advise starting months in advance because there’s so many documents they need and because of holiday season in December. I mailed mine out around mid-November so I got it before the holidays, and luckily it was a stress-free process.

Housing
ESADE did not arrange housing for us, so I found my flat online through Llogo (student apartments in Barcelona). ESADE will give you a list of websites to check out but I found Llogo on my own and it’s great! I pay 475 euros per month including everything (heat, water, electricity, Wifi, full kitchen, washer, furniture, full bedding). Eixample is a great residential neighborhood that’s very close to the city center, 40 minutes from the beach by public transport, and an hour commute to school. I always feel very safe at home and live right next to a supermarket.

ESADE, which is in a small town called Sant Cugat, has on-campus housing but I don’t recommend it at all. It’s much more expensive than renting out a flat in Barcelona, it’s an hour away from the city center, and barely any exchange students live on campus (zero from my semester). It’s definitely not a good choice for exchange students because it takes away from the abroad experience – living in Barcelona is wonderful – and it’ll be much harder to hang out with people because everyone is in Barcelona.

Arrival
Arriving was super easy, I went from Boston to London and then to Barcelona with no issues at all. The orientation program was during the same week as the Spanish intensive course – the very first week. There were some events (walking tour of the city center, bus tour of the city, museum tours, dinner & party at a club) during that week that were good for meeting people and were organized by local ESADE students. The Spanish intensive course was also an important way that I made friends. There’s a buddy system but it wasn’t useful for me at all because by the time the list came out I’d already met many people and figured a lot of things out by myself.

Academics

The University
ESADE is located an hour northwest of Barcelona city center in a small town called Sant Cugat. The campus is tiny, with just three main buildings and two cafeterias. It’s modern and the facilities are great, including outlets, group study areas, couches to relax on, computer lab, etc. The exchange program coordinator for the Americas (Silvia Molar) is so helpful and responsive by email. That’s all I needed to get things figured out academically. I didn’t spend much time at school
because it was far from the city – I just went when I had classes and came back right away, but it’s a pleasant campus. I brought snacks every day when I had class because the classes were 3 hours long (you get one break in the middle). When I had back-to-back classes, I went to the Gilda Restaurant (first building when coming from the train station), where I could a full meal for 5 euros.

Courses
You enroll in classes through ESADE’s online system. There’s a one-week period during which the system is open – it’s not first-come-first-serve the way Cornell’s is. You allocate points to each course you want to take before the period ends, then they get back to you later about which classes you got. After that, the system is open for another period during which you can request changes to your schedule – adding or dropping classes. You have to state why you requested each change, and they’re processed one at a time. You will get an email when a request is resolved. Once you get to campus and the program starts, however, you cannot change your classes (most of the time). I know some people who were able to add classes because they were under the credit requirement for their home university, and I was able to add a class because one of mine was cancelled (out of my control). But otherwise, you can’t switch courses just because you don’t want to wake up for an 8am or because you don’t want Friday classes. So make sure you sit down and take the time to create a good schedule – that was something I should’ve done. I had classes on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, which is still great, but I wish I would’ve scheduled my classes from Wednesday through Friday so that I could travel from Saturday through Tuesday.

I’m took 6 courses, which is a lot because I took no intensives (except for Spanish). The first week of the program is orientation and Spanish intensive (required for Cornell). The second and third week are part of the two-week intensive period, during which I got none of the classes I tried for. That’s why I had a full schedule from the fourth week and on. I would highly advise taking as many intensives as you can during that two-week period because you become close to people in your classes and you get the credits over with fast (that way your workload from that point on is much lighter). Since I didn’t get any intensives, I spent the two weeks traveling, which is just as great, so don’t worry if you don’t get any intensives. It’s best to either take as many credits as possible or none during the two-week intensive period.

The business classes I took were Marketing, Project Management, Strategic Management, and Supply Chain Management. The two non-business courses I took were Spain and Catalunya Today: Recent History, Current Affairs and Never Too Many Movies: Spanish Society and Culture through Cinema. Classes are 3 hours long once a week. I really enjoyed the non-business courses because I’ve learned so much about Barcelona and Spanish culture, and it makes it much easier for me to understand and connect with locals. I think everybody who’s studying abroad in Barcelona and calling the city home for 4-5 months needs to understand the history and culture of Spain in order to really appreciate their time there. Those two classes are also just more fun than the business ones – we talk about the current events in Recent History and we watch a movie in each Never Too Many Movies class.

All of my classes were graded on exams, presentations, cases, and attendance. There’s so much group work at ESADE, which you will most likely be used to. Exams weigh the most; group presentations and cases are probably around 20% (no cases for the non-business classes though). Attendance is 5% because there’s a total of 10 sessions, so you may skip up to two sessions. There are also two week-long breaks during which there’s no class – one in mid-March and one in April during Easter. Also, the program ended on April 28 for my semester, which gave me plenty of time to enjoy the city beyond the semester.

Difference between studying at Cornell and at your host university
It’s easy to take notes during class because the professors always use PowerPoints and upload them to the course website, but I didn’t find it necessary. I just went back to all the lecture slides when finals came around and studied hard at the end. The courses themselves are not nearly as organized as they are at Cornell – syllabi are vague, expectations are questionable, you always have to ask for clarification on what exactly the professor wants, random guest lecturers squeezed into the calendar, etc.

I had some weekly group cases for my business-related courses but they’re very easy and don’t involve any studying (you can get it done in an hour or two). I also had some small midterm quizzes that I would recommend studying for considering that your grade is going to be made up of mostly your midterm and final exam scores. Although you can relax during the semester and enjoy studying abroad, you should really sit down and study hard when finals come around. I purposely booked no flights for the weekend before finals week and that really helped because I stayed in my
room the whole weekend and studied for everything at once. I would’ve been extremely unprepared for finals if I didn’t properly study because those grades matter so much and they’re longer exams. Although they’re simple compared to Cornell finals, I’d highly recommend studying at the end because nobody wants to come home and realize they’ve failed their semester abroad.

The professors at ESADE are approachable and nice, but it feels like once they’re out of school their job is over because they never respond to emails. So if you have a burning question you better ask in person or email them right away because I’ve had one professor respond to my email question about the final exam at midnight the night before the exam. They’re much nicer in person – talk to your professors because some of them have done cool stuff in the business world and they enjoy talking about your travels and abroad experience. My favorite professor is Alex, who teaches the recent history and movies courses, both of which are non-business-related. He set up a farewell lunch at the end of the program for all of his students and clearly enjoys spending time with students outside of ESADE.

Life Abroad

Language
You’ll take a two-week Spanish intensive course at ESADE before real courses begin, so don’t worry about the language. You can also take Español during the semester if you want to further continue the language studies. As somebody who didn’t speak a word of Spanish before studying abroad, I was worried, but the intensive helped a lot (and was fun) and the people were really nice to me. I personally didn’t need much Spanish beyond the basics to manage in daily life; I found that many people know English and are willing to speak English with you. You should definitely try to speak Spanish first, but they’ll immediately respond in English if you’re not fluent. There are certainly some people who are rude and refuse to speak English, but you just have to deal with those. Pull out the google translate.

Catalan is also spoken pretty frequently in Barcelona but it was never a problem for me – it’s actually cool that there are two languages you’ll be exposed to in Barcelona. It sounds like a mix of Spanish and French so I understood nothing that I heard in Catalan, but nobody ever spoke Catalan to me because obviously I wouldn’t understand it.

Health and Safety
Always be on guard with your belongings. The pickpockets in Barcelona are no joke. Nearly every single person I met on exchange got pickpocketed at least once, one of whom got stolen from within 10 minutes of leaving the airport. Even though I didn’t get pickpocketed because I’m extremely paranoid and cautious in public, I lost my phone by simply leaving it on a bus when traveling in Lisbon – stupid things happen. Just be aware of your surroundings at all times. It might sound like work but you’ll be glad you paid attention after you lose your wallet or phone. Bring a backup phone with you if you have your old one (that came in handy when I lost mine).

I don’t have much advice regarding health because luckily I never had any health issues other than getting a cold when I visited Switzerland. Bring some warm clothing with you because January-February in Barcelona is still not warm, and especially if you want to travel to countries up north! If you get sick, take a visit to any farmacia – these are like pharmacies except you don’t need a prescription to buy anything. They’re located on nearly every block in Barcelona so they’re super accessible.

Overall exchange experience
Spring 2017 was hands down the best semester of my college career. I’ve never traveled much before studying abroad which was a major reason why I wanted to leave. I was able to visit 11 countries (including Spain) during my 4-month program and 20+ cities all over Europe. It’s something I’ll always be grateful for because not everyone has the chance to travel so extensively. It’s taught me to be independent on a new level, how to solve problems on the spot, how to be confident in my abilities to navigate countries where I don’t speak the language, how to be open to other people’s lifestyles, how to ignore racist comments and let it go, how to use a paper map, how to meet new people every day, how to be comfortable being alone, and so much more.

Traveling makes you close to people exponentially faster than just hanging out or going to the same high school – that’s when people show their true colors. I’ve made some really great friends from all over the world that I truly did not think I would become so close to. As somebody who has close friends and many acquaintances, I was surprised by how much I opened up to my favorite group on exchange. It doesn’t feel like I’ve known them for only 4 months because they were
my support system, traveling buddies, shopping buddies, everything buddies. That’s the beauty of exchange – you will go through everything together, and you will make great friends who will be there to share the good times and endure the bad ones.

I didn’t want to leave Barcelona when I did because it was truly a fantasy. None of it seemed real – even in the middle of the program, I would still pinch myself and say things like “I can’t believe I live in Barcelona.” It’s a semester I will never forget and most people who have studied abroad would probably say the same about their experience.

Additional Tips for future students

Packing
I wish I had brought more warm clothes because I expected the weather to be super nice, and it is compared to Cornell, but it’s still winter in Barcelona until April. Get an apartment that includes bedding (most will) and a fully equipped kitchen so you don’t have to bring much else than clothes. Don’t bring any electronics other than your laptop and phone and bring a converter for those. Your curling iron and hairdryer will fry if you put them in a converter – I just bought a new hairdryer when I got there and it was much easier. Also book your plane ticket with British Airways because they let my overweight check-in suitcase go on the way there and back. Although I bought clothes and shoes and souvenirs that I had to bring back, I managed to not have to check in an extra suitcase on my way back (thanks BA).

Anything else that students should be aware when studying at your host location
It’s the best place to be. If you’re wondering why so many students go to Barcelona to study abroad, you need to just go there and see for yourself. I cannot say that there was a single day of my abroad experience that I felt bored, and that’s thanks to everything that Barcelona offers, including nightlife, shopping, tapas, sangria, museums, art, hiking, city views, churches, beaches, sports, food markets, music, dancing, languages, etc. It’s a city for everyone and it’s such a happy place.