Major/Minor: Global Studies
Country: Spain         Program: Barcelona (AUB)         Term & Year Abroad: Full Year 2008-2009

*What type of student should go on this program (ex: personality traits, major, etc)?*

Students planning on going to Barcelona for the year should be very openminded and willing to immerse themselves in a different culture—something that is by no means easy. This entails being away from home for an entire year and learning to live a different way. As far as majors go, I think Global Studies and Political Science are ideal as far as finding classes goes at the Autonoma, as students in these fields will find a wide variety of classes taught in Spanish, and with professors known to be friendly to foreigners. Still, there are plenty of classes for other majors, such as literature, communications, and psychology.

**Instructors**

- **What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?**

Professors really are not all that different from UCSB professors. Most are enthusiastic about what they teach and will help you if you struggle.

- **Could you call them by their first names?**

Generally not, unless they made it clear that this was OK.

- **Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?**

Typically yes, most professors are helpful but not particularly warm with students. It is a good idea to speak to them formally and courteously if you do not know them well.

- **Were they available for help during office hours?**

I really can’t say; I never checked.

**Courses**

- **Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?**

I would say that they are not really more difficult, but at times, the language barrier makes it seem like they are. However, most professors take into account that you’re foreign, as do the EAP coordinators that finalize your grades. Also, there are courses designed specifically for UC EAP students; these are designed to help you learn about Spanish language and Europe in general, and they are really not difficult at all.

- **Was the grading system similar to UCSB?**

Not at all. Spanish professors grade on a 10-point scale, where a 5 is a passing score. It is generally quite difficult to score near a 10, as this requires going “way above and beyond” what is required by
the assignment. Still, EAP is generous with grading, and a passing score in the Spanish system equates to a pretty decent grade once transferred to our grading scale.

- **How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?**

Courses typically met a few times a week, but for longer periods than UC students are used to. There are often very few exams and projects, maybe one or two per semester. Most classes are small—high school size—and there is often much discussion in addition to lecture.

- **Did you have oral and/or written exams?**

All of my exams were written and essay-format. Final papers were often assigned as well. Most were anywhere from 5-15 pages.

- **Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?**

I can’t really say, since I never tried to change an exam date. I assume it’s about as inflexible as here.

- **What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?**

At the Autonoma campus, there’s an office for UC students with an awesome program coordinator who helps out with every detail of academic and personal life. This coordinator helped me out with everything from signing up for classes to handling medical insurance forms.

- **Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?**

Yes, of course. I found that I had to do many things on my own that I had no previous experience with. For example, students have to find their own housing after the intial Pre-ILP.

- **Was classroom participation expected?**

It was encouraged but not necessarily expected. I remember about 10-20% of the class speaking often, but most students just sat quietly and took notes.

- **How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**

As I mentioned before, the classroom structure resembled an American high school class, and the examination procedures are different, but there wasn’t anything that a UC student would have a lot of trouble getting used to.

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
Most classes met two days a week, either Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday, for about an hour and a half. Sometimes a class would meet one hour a certain day, and then two hours another, but regardless, most met for a total of three hours a week.

- **What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**

Class culture is more formal. You’re expected to be punctual, and I wouldn’t recommend eating or drinking. Some professors are pretty strict and will be harsh on you if you arrive late.

**Language**
- **In which languages were the courses offered?**

Languages are offered both in Spanish and in Catalan.

- **What language did you take your courses in?**

I took all of my courses in Spanish.

- **If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.**

As a fluent speaker, taking courses in Spanish wasn’t too big a deal. However, these universities often have large populations of foreign students, so the professors expect to have to clarify certain things and accommodate these students’ needs. The program coordinators know which courses and professors are best for foreigners, and will advise you to seek these out.

**Host University**
- **How large is the university? Student enrollment and approx campus size (smaller than UCSB)? Is it an urban campus with many tall buildings or just a few building?**

The UAB campus is huge, and I believe the student population numbers above 40,000. It is one consolidated campus found in the mountains—a 35-minute train ride outside the city. You can find anything: there are several cafeterias, a bookstore, a barbershop, a candy shop, etc.

- **Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?**

Most local students live in the campus villas or at home with their parents. However, most international students will live in the city like you.

- **If not located in the city center,**
  - **How far or close is it to the city?**
The UAB campus is about a 35-minute train ride outside of the city.

- **What type of public transportation could you take – cost?**

There are two train lines that you can take to get to the campus. If you buy many-trip or monthly passes, a day’s commuting will not cost you more than a few euros.

- **Could students take cabs -cost?**

It is too far to take a cab.

- **How long would it take to get to the city center?**

About 35 minutes.

- **Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?**

Yes, I heard of a few but I did not join any.

- **Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?**

I only had to buy a few books. I bought one at the university bookstore and the others at bookstores

- **Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?**

There are a few computer labs on campus, but they are generally pretty crowded. Students should expect to have to bring their own laptop to campus at least a few times per semester.

- **What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)**

The university campus itself has several cafeterias, a post office, a candy store, and a barber’s shop—to name a few.

**Housing**

- **What types of accommodations are available to UC students?**

Students typically find their own housing in the city itself.

- **How close are they to campus?**

Students living in Barcelona proper will have to take the train to get to campus, so it’s a fair distance.

- **How did you find your housing?**

We all used the Spanish-version of craigslist: www.loquo.com.
- Where did you live and with whom?

I lived at a few different apartments, mostly with Spanish people in their 20’s who were either working or studying.

- If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?

It’s not difficult to find a place to live; however, I would recommend checking out many places before deciding on one. Putting effort into your apartment hunt will really pay off.

- Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?

Most apartment buildings in Barcelona are fairly old, but the rooms are typically fine, not any worse than what you would find in Isla Vista. The only drawback of living in a big building is that not all rooms have windows to the exterior (most face the open shaft in the center of the building). Still, everyone gets their own room, which is awesome.

- Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?

Rent was comparable to what you pay in Isla Vista, or even a bit cheaper. A decent room will cost you about $550-$600 a month.

- How/who did you pay for housing?

In private apartments, there is usually one person who handles the rent, often the one who has lived there the longest.

Food

- What was the food like?

I liked the food but I’m really not picky. What most people complained of is the lack of variety. Most restaurants serve only Spanish food: lots of oily fried things.

- Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?

I cooked a fair amount since groceries are cheap, but typically ate out once a day, either at one of the university cafeterias or a cheap restaurant. I wouldn’t recommend food from street vendors.

- How much was an average meal?

A decent meal is around ten euro.

- What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?
Both lunch and dinner are taken later. Most Spaniards eat lunch at around 2 o’clock and dinner around nine o’clock.

- Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?

It wouldn’t be that difficult, though vegetarian choices are limited and often quite plain.

Travel/Safety
- If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?

Above I discussed the trains that go to the universities. Other than those, Barcelona has an extensive and very well connected public transportation system. I would recommend visiting their website to learn about nightbuses, other railways, and the metro system. Taxis are always available as well, though they are the most expensive option.

- Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?

I felt pretty safe walking alone around the city even late at night. Still, it is very important to always be aware of your surroundings and keep to public places when alone.

- Describe the public transportation in your host country?

See above.

- Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?

Easy. Barcelona has a good-sized international airport on its outskirts, as well as two other international airports within a few hours bus’ ride.

Host City/Country
- What was the weather like?

The climate is temperate, with hot and humid summers and relatively mild wet winters. Still, the weather can get a bit more extreme than here in California.

- Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?

The only American city that reminds me of Barcelona is San Francisco, though Barcelona has a much older feel to it. It really isn’t that big of a city and there’s more public transportation than you’d find here. In the older quarters, there are ton of little streets that you can wander, and you will always discover new places to eat and drink. There are tons to do at night in many parts of the city.

- What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?
Things that I did that I would recommend include: go to an FC Barcelona game, see a concert at the Razzmatazz club, go out for tapas and beers, check out the art museums, and definitely go see all the festivities that go on in the streets during the many holidays.

- **How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?**

Barcelona is extremely international, there are tons of young people from all over the world that come to live and study there. It’s also a huge spot for tourists.

**Culture**

- **Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.**
  - **Time & punctuality**

You will notice that Spaniards/Catalans are not so punctual; still, I wouldn’t recommend being late for things like doctors appointments or class.

  - **Eye contact & staring**

People will stare at you and you must get used to it. You’ll learn to ignore it. Spaniards will also get much closer to your face when speaking to you, and maintain eye contact for much longer than Americans would.

  - **Relationships**

I didn’t notice any huge differences, other than affection, especially in public, is much more common and accepted there.

  - **More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?**

Dress is slightly more formal for both sexes, especially at the university, but the typical American’s wardrobe would still be acceptable. However, Spaniards usually don’t wear overly revealing clothing or shorts.

  - **Alcohol consumption**

Some Spaniards do drink a fair amount, but they do not binge drink. Alcohol is consumed at a measured pace throughout the night. Obvious drunkenness is generally looked down upon.

  - **What culture shock did you go through?**

It was a little weird adjusting the to the eating schedule and the long drinking nights, but I never felt too uncomfortable during my cultural immersion.

  - **Other?**

N/A
Banking

- Were credit cards widely accepted?

Yes, Visa and Mastercard were accepted pretty much everywhere.

- Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?

I chose not to.

- If you did not open a local bank account, was it easy to withdraw money from the ATM? Which banks were popular & had low ATM fees?

It took a bit of work to find a few banks with low withdrawal fees, but after that I had no problems. I only used my American Citibank ATM card, and I withdrew from BBVA and the Spanish Citibank, as they charged a relatively low percentage on withdrawals.

- Were there ATMs on campus?

Yes, the Autonoma has an ATM or two on campus; however, I never used them because they charged me heavy flat rates on withdrawals.