Spain visas: The process of getting a visa was definitely a hassle: a lot of run-around, in both Santa Barbara County and my home county (Marin). It's a process that students should definitely start as early as possible. Once it's time to actually go to the embassy and have your documents checked, from what I know, the process is much more of a nightmare at the San Francisco embassy. People (including me) had to show up in the middle of the night to get in line so we'd be seen in the minimal group of people they allow each day. Los Angeles was supposedly much faster. Getting the visa renewed once in Spain (at least in Madrid) was much easier, and handled almost entirely by the staff at the study center. We didn't even need most of the documents from the original process we were told to bring.

Traveling in Spain: Traveling in Spain is really easy and relatively inexpensive, especially if you opt to travel by bus, which is possible a lot of the time. But, as is always true with services in Spain, be prepared for things to be inefficient and sometimes a bit confusing. Mediocre, hands-off service is entirely acceptable in Spain. Traveling from Spain to other parts of the world is also easy and pretty inexpensive compared to what we would be spending to travel from the U.S. Everyone I know from the year-program in Madrid was able to travel extensively to many countries throughout Europe, and even beyond.

Classes at your host university: Students should be prepared for a different style of class than what we are used to with UCs. There are no discussion sections, only lectures, where student participation is minimal if existent. Although sometimes a professor will choose to establish a tutorial section for international students to give them extra help with the material, this is almost always lead by someone other than the professor. Some classes give you intermittent work, but often times you will simply be required to keep up with material and take a final exam at the end of the semester that effectively determines your grade in the class. Professors in Spain, however, are often much more flexible about due dates and length of papers, etc. Many students approached their professors and asked if they could modify the assignment they were given or change the due date and were met with willing responses.

Opportunities at your host university (internships, activities, special classes): Our study center (Laura, in particular) was very helpful in keeping us up-to-date on internship possibilities and finding internships for people with specific interests. Some students joined sports teams at the university and really enjoyed the experience. For the most part, if YOU seek THEM out, Spanish students are very willing to include you in activities and introduce you to their group of friends.

Catalan in Barcelona: I don't have much experience with this.

Host country orientation: The orientations at home were somewhat helpful, although I think more information could have been offered by the returnees. We were given ample opportunity to ask them questions, but I think most of us didn't know the right questions to ask. The orientation once we arrived in Spain was minimal, and we were sort of immediately thrown into the swing of things. Some people didn't like that, but I thought it was a good way to get us to be more independent and figure things out for ourselves. Spain is a great place to go if you don't want or need to be coddled.

Problems you faced in your town/city: The one thing that stands out to me is the housing process after you leave the dorms, if you are in a year-program. There is not really a standard way of doing things in terms of renting an apartment, each landlord does it the way they want to. Contracts are very small and do not include much information beyond who you are, how long you are staying, and what you are paying for rent (not utilities). This leaves lots of room for swindling, and some people ended up paying a lot more than they intended without really knowing why. It's really helpful to end up with a landlord you trust, so students should talk to the other residents of the apartment about their experience with the landlord.
Students should also feel comfortable arguing fees if they feel they are being cheated.

**Transportation:** Within Madrid, I recommend that all students get a monthly metro pass (called an Abono) as soon as possible, it will save them a lot of money and time. Most tobacconists carry applications and you just fill it out and submit it with a picture and it will process sometime between a few days and a few weeks.

**Banking:** I ended up staying with my bank at home and just withdrawing the maximum at the ATM every time, so I wouldn't incur a lot of charges. Other people opened up accounts with Spanish banks and found that really convenient most of the time (the hassle comes when you have to move money from your home account into your Spanish account, or visa versa).

**Costs:** Cost of living was the same, mostly. You go out more, which costs more. And you travel often, which costs money. But an overwhelming amount of people in my program acquired jobs teaching English, so they were able to more easily afford traveling.

**Your study center (Who was helpful? What was not helpful?):** Carmen was really helpful, especially during the first semester— but she has passed her duties onto Giorgio Persinotto, who is much less helpful in my opinion. A big part of the reason, as I see it, is because he is not Spanish or a native member of the University so he does not have the connections or the rapport that Carmen has with the professors. Also Carmen is a veteran with the program and had been doing things a certain way for a long time, and now Giorgio has stepped in and is doing things differently. This made things really hard for people in my program, because the switch happened between our two semesters abroad. We had gotten accustomed to dealing with Carmen and her way of doing things, and then we came back from our Christmas break to Giorgio who was totally different, and hardly understanding when it came to us attempting to transition between the two of them. Although I understand that they were using the first semester to give Giorgio a feel for things, and the second semester for him to transition in with Carmen's help, I would recommend to EAP that in the future they implement changes of staff in important positions during the summer. Laura Cid-Alonso is also very helpful, particularly with administrative things like renewing our visas.

**Medical/hospitals/medical problems:** People who got sick or hurt while abroad in my program were able to seek medical attention in Spain without much of a hassle. But it can be expensive, so students should be sure to remember to file a claim for reimbursement. For the beginning of the year program in Madrid, there is a clinic called the Unidad Medica, which is completely bilingual— this is very helpful if you just arrive in Spain and are not quite comfortable enough with the language to explain a medical problem.

**Culture shock/culture shift:** It definitely happens, it happened to everyone I know once being over there sunk in, or being back at home sunk in. The best thing to do I think is just talk to people who are sharing your experience about it, and help each other... isolating yourself is the worst thing.

**Weather:** The first month in Madrid was just unbearably hot. All of us were told it was going to be that way, but nothing prepares you for it. And the winter is much colder than a California winter, but much less rain. The more you travel the more you get accustomed to adapting to weather you're not used to.

Also, the **food** we ate while in the dorms the first month was really... not good at all. And not good for us. Fruit and vegetables rarely made appearances and fried things almost always did. Vegetarians especially will have a really hard time. So the faster students become acquainted with local markets and cafes, the better.

All in all, it was a wonderful experience and I would go back in a heartbeat. I really think it's beneficial for students to go abroad, to anywhere in the world that interests them. The important thing is to gain the experience of living in another country and all of the lessons and benefits that go along with that.