Major/Minor: _____ Political Science

Country: Spain           Program: Barcelona-UAB            Term & Year Abroad: Year-2009-10

Instructors
- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?
  They were essentially the same. They lectured, they had office hours. They were also comparable in
  that they made themselves available if students had difficulty in the course.

- Could you call them by their first names?
  No, they wanted to be addressed formally.

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?
  I would say it’s pretty much the same

- Were they available for help during office hours?
  Yes, but not as much as the professors here

Courses
- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?
  No, however it was challenging in the respect that the teaching style was different. They do not have
  assignments, and the entire grade pretty much depends on the final. Some people like that and some
  people do not.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?
  No, they do number grades from 1-9, with 9 being the highest.

- How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?
  We just had finals. Class attendance was optional, so if you wanted, you can never go to class and just
  show up to the final. However, this is not encouraged.

- Did you have oral and/or written exams?
  I had written exams.

- Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?
  It was very flexible. There were 2 final options, one offered after the course and another one offered a
  month after the course was finished. This was designed in the scenario that if you failed the first time,
  you have the opportunity to retake.

- What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?
  I had an academic advisor working non stop to make sure my academic needs were fulfilled. Their
  main is goal was to make sure that you do well in all your classes and they do everything possible to
  ensure that you succeed. They are the Best!

- Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?
  I definitely felt that it forced me to be more independent. Since there are no assignments or section,
  you have to be on your toes to make sure you do well.

- Was classroom participation expected?
  Absolutely, in many of my classes the structure was based on the students’ conversation on the subject
  matter.

- How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?
They were a lot smaller in scale; they were generally the size of a high school class. But the content was the same. There a lot more courses available in subjects pertaining to the country which also led to the possibility of learning something there that you would never learn here.

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
  I had class 4 days a week, but many of my friends had class 2-3 times a week. It’s also very common to not have class on Friday. The length of the class varies; some may be one hour and some may be 3 hours—it depends on the course.

- **What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**
  Class culture is very laid back. You do not have to worry about being punctual because in general the class always starts 15 minutes after the scheduled time. A lot of professors generally run on “Spanish time.” Professors do get mad if you eat or drink in the class, it is looked at as rude.

**Language**
- **In which languages were the courses offered?**
  Courses were offered in Spanish and Catalan.

- **What language did you take your courses in?**
  I took courses in Spanish and Catalan.

- **If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.**
  At first it was a bit challenging, although I was a native speaker I had to adjust to the accent. This did not remain a problem and I quickly got used to it after the first month. After the transition I viewed class the same as I viewed them at UCSB. It was normal for me; it did not feel like I was taking a course in Spanish, it just felt like going to school normally.

**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?**
  I felt UAB had a lot of similarities to UCSB. It was a decently sized campus influenced by nature. The campus is engulfed by trees open grass areas and surrounded by mountains. It has several buildings based on focuses of study. Getting around the campus was hard at first, but I quickly got used to it plus I took political science classes and they were all in the same building.

- **Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?**
  The Catalan students generally live on campus or at home, however many of the international students and Spanish students tend to live in the city.

- **If not located in the city center,**
  - How far or close is it to the city?
    About 30-35 minutes by train.
  - **What type of public transportation could you take – cost?**
    I used the metro and the train to get there. I purchased a seasonal metro pass that costs 162 Euros but it counted for unlimited trips for 3 months.
  - **Could students take cabs -cost?**
    Cabs are really expensive, and should not be seen as an option.
- How long would it take to get to the city center?
  About 30-35 minutes

- Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?
  I believe there were clubs, but I'm not as sure as I was not very involved on campus.

- Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?
  Yes there is a bookstore.

- Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?
  The computer labs were in the libraries.

- What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)
  There are several cafes on campus and all of them very delicious.

**Housing**

- What types of accommodations are available to UC students?
  You have options of looking for roommates by gathering information on websites and visiting those apartments or living with a host family.

- How close are they to campus?
  Many people in my program lived off campus and in the city. So typically they lived 30-35 minutes away from campus.

- How did you find your housing?
  I found it through a website known as loquo where I then visited the apartment and decided I wanted to live there.

- Where did you live and with whom?
  I lived in a neighborhood known as Sants where they had many grocery stores and located near a metro stop which made going to school very convenient. I lived with 2 guys from the Canary Islands and on Frenchman in my first apartment. I then moved and lived with a Catalan guy who was a student and lived with his girlfriend who was also a student.

- If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?
  No, it was easy because the website supplies all the information.

- Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?
  Yes, and you get more for what you pay for. For the first time in my college career, I had my own room and own closet space that was fairly large.

- Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?
  Rent was cheaper in Barcelona than it is in IV. I paid 300 Euros a month for everything: gas, internet, electricity, etc.

- How/who did you pay for housing?
  I paid my roommate.
**Food**

- **What was the food like?**
The food generally focused on bread and ham. It’s very difficult to be a vegetarian in Barcelona. The ham is absolutely delicious though, especially their iberic ham or Serrano ham which tasted a lot like bacon. In general the food is bland; it doesn’t mean that it isn’t good but that spice does not exist in this region. If you wanted some spice however, kebab places are around but the spice is minimal.

- **Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?**
I ate most of my meals at home, I cooked for myself.

- **How much was an average meal?**
If you go out a meal can cost you 3 Euros if you are craving a kebab but a standard dinner or lunch can cost from 7-10 Euros.

- **What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?**
People at lunch from 12-1 due to the fact that everything closes for the siesta after those times. People ate dinner pretty late, usually at 9 or 10 pm.

- **Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?**
YES. Like I said, Spain’s diet consists of bread, ham, and cheese if I were to sum it up. It’s hard to find meals but not impossible, however it would just be easier for the vegetarian to become a pescatarian if they wanted to go abroad in Barcelona and not starve.

**Travel/Safety**

- **If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?**
There are several forms of transportation. The metro was my favorite, it went all throughout the city and there are many stations in the city as well so no matter where you lived you typically had a metro nearby. Buses are another option and they are also available throughout the city as well but are a little slow compared to the metro. Barcelona also has Bicing, which is a rental bike service where you pay 30 Euros for the year and have access to public bikes that are available at Bicing stations that are located all throughout the city.

- **Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?**
I felt 100% safe in Barcelona whether it is day or night because violent crimes were generally unheard of. The only concern is pick pocketing.

- **Describe the public transportation in your host country?**
See Above

- **Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?**
Traveling to neighboring countries was easy. There are several websites designated for that purpose of finding the cheapest and best way to travel all through Europe.

**Host City/Country**

- **What was the weather like?**
It was similar to California; however it was very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. It probably rains a little bit more in Barcelona than it does in California and the winter tends to last a bit longer. On normal days, however, it is just typical beach weather.

- Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?
  Barcelona has a lot of characteristics that San Francisco has. They are both cities in which it is not the biggest however it does not mean that it is small. The way that Barcelona is designed is also similar to San Francisco in that there are a lot of high rising apartments and homes.

- What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?
  There are a lot of great bars in Barcelona where locals and international students chose to hang out. However, if you are in more the mood in taking in the atmosphere in the region going to Plaza Catalunya, La Rambla, and Plaza Espanya are always great spots to meet up with friends. Montjuic also offers a wide arrange of fun activities, from hiking to exploring the castle at the top of the hill at the top of the mountain where you can enjoy the best view of the city. Also, at night Montjuic has a fountain show where they have the water dance to a mix of different music—it is a lot cooler than it sounds. Parc Guell is another great stop to have fun in the city if you want to enjoy art and nature at the same time.

- How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?
  There was a mix of all different types of people from all over the world. Whether it was tourists or people living in the city; I encountered people from all the main continents in the world.

Culture
- Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.
  - Time & punctuality
    People were typically late, even professors.
  - Eye contact & staring
    Catalan people tend to stare; they don’t do this to be rude because to them it’s normal. You get over it after a couple of months.
  - Relationships
    - More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?
      People tend to dress a little bit more formal in Barcelona. I rarely saw flip flops and shorts unless I was at a beach.
    - Alcohol consumption
      People in Spain love to drink, but they do so in moderation and binge drinking is discouraged. However, public drinking is not a problem and actually something that young people tend to do.
  - What culture shock did you go through?
    I could not believe that everything closed from 1-5pm on weekdays and all day on Sundays.
  - Other?

Banking
- Were credit cards widely accepted?
  Yes, I never had a purchase denied.

- Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?
I opened a local bank account; it was fairly easy seeing how UAB gave us a debit card. Even though the debit card was our student ID it made getting a banking account fairly simple seeing how I already had an ID number.

- 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?

Withdrawing money was tricky, because only one transaction was offered per day. ATM fees were hefty so if you are going to take out money it’s better to take a large sum out.

- Were there ATMs on campus?
Yes