

Ziplining in Spain. Teaching in diverse classrooms. Hiking for two hours for a breathtaking sunset view. Gelato. Making unforgettable memories with new, lifelong friends. All of these things, and more, are possible when you decide to study abroad with the College of Education. Personally, I chose to participate in the four-week education immersion program in Alcalá de Henares, Spain. For me, being a Bilingual Elementary Education major with an ESL endorsement, it was important for me to study in a Spanish-speaking country. With the added appeal of receiving 30 diversity hours, I knew this was the program for me. Reflecting back on the experience, studying abroad really changed me, both professionally and personally. First, I learned about culture diversity in a way that would be impossible to do in Illinois. I now have a deeper appreciation for diversity. Further, the education system in Spain is much different than in the States; not better or worse, just different. Through my observations, I have a better understanding of how to celebrate these differences. I also learned new techniques that I plan to use in my classroom from the teachers in Spain. Overall, I believe that I will now be a better, more culturally-responsive teacher in the future. Second, I have become more independent than I have ever been. Along with this, I truly got out of my comfort zone. I did not know a single person prior to signing up for the trip and this would be my first time traveling on my own. I was able to open up more, try new foods, and learn more about myself. I was also able to explore all of Spain. We visited castles in Segovia, ziplined in Toledo, saw the palace in Madrid, saw the sunrise in Barcelona, and rowed boats in Sevilla. Through all of these beautiful adventures, I grew to love the people on my trip, and myself. This is an amazing opportunity for education majors, regardless of your level of Spanish. It allows you to learn new ways to communicate with others that do not share the same first language as you do. This is a vital skill, as many students will come from differing backgrounds. The experiences that studying abroad offers is

worth every penny. There are so many scholarships available, especially through the College of Education. I was fortunate enough to win the Jepsen International Scholars Award and am beyond thankful for it, as it gave me the chance to see the world in a whole new perspective and grow as a teacher and person. So, don't think twice; sign up, apply for scholarships, and take it all in when you are there. Studying abroad, no matter where it is, is truly a priceless opportunity.