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Experience Summary  
Spain STT

It was hard to know what to expect as someone who had never traveled to Europe and barely been outside the United States. Since the program was new and still developing and began the experience with a lot of unanswered questions. During my time though, my expectations became easier to understand and I was grateful for the experience. I would recommend teaching in another country for anyone who wants a unique opportunity to teach ESL and learn about all the things other cultures have to offer. It has also left me grateful that I had this chance made possible for me through scholarships. The living and teaching experiences I had while in Spain were very different from what I am used to in my own home of Park Ridge. Everything from the culture of the country, the school, and the language had me reflecting on my experience.

The biggest adjustment I faced when I first arrived was definitely the culture and the language. Of course I had practiced my Spanish speaking skills before flying to the country but it was still an unexpected adjustment. I lived with a host family, specifically a host mom, whose family has grown up and moved out. My host mom always treated me like I was a part of her family and taught me so much about her culture that I wouldn't have experienced living in a dorm or in a classroom. She spoke only Spanish which forced me out of my comfort zone and helped me practice my language skills. She showed me how to cook many traditionally Spanish dishes that helped me feel more at home. I always loved helping my mom in the kitchen and being able to do that in another culture and country was a heartwarming experience.

The school that I student taught at was the biggest part of my journey that will help me in my own future classroom. I was placed at a bilingual charter school that ranged from preschool to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I primarily worked with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in the subjects of English and Science. My time at the school consisted of about 5 different classes with at least 25 students in each classroom. It was an overwhelming experience to get to know and build relationships with so many faces. At home, I was used to only one classroom of 25 faces that I spent the whole day with. That was the most noticeable difference when I first arrived at the school. I quickly realized it was easy to build those important relationships when they were just as eager to meet me as I was to them. The students at this age speak Spanish and are proficient in English. Some students were more nervous to speak English with me than others but I always loved to encourage it since my goal there was to teach ESL. During my first week, they loved hearing about where I am from and why I was at their school. I started planning activities with my cooperating teacher right away. A lot like the US there is a lot of pressure to cover all the curriculum on time. We worked on making a schedule that allowed me to incorporate my own activities but also learn from their practices as well.

Overall, my experience abroad taught me lots of new lessons and opened my eyes to a different view of the world. I feel confident that this experience can be beneficial to so many other students as long as they put the effort into it that they want to get out of it. It wasn't always easy and even during my short time abroad I experienced home sickness but the relationships that are built with the host family and at the schools are once in a lifetime. I am

proud knowing that I could make a difference at the school and that two cultures can share new ideas with each other to be mutually beneficial.