

Emily Woodley
Summer Study Abroad in Spain

This Summer, I had the wonderful experience of studying abroad for a month in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, which is a town right outside of Madrid. During my stay, I gained a ton of experience in Spanish classrooms, as well as full immersion into Spanish daily life and culture. Most people in my study abroad group stayed with host families, but I had the opportunity to stay in a University dorm. This was a great experience, because I got to see not only what elementary school is like in Spain, but what college and dorm life is like in Spain. The dorm was in the middle of the city plaza, which allowed me to get acquainted very well with local shops, restaurants, etc. which even after just a month, felt like home to me.

I had clinical experiences in a public elementary school from Monday through Friday, 9 am to 1:15 PM, with a wide range of daily tasks, including observations, teaching full lessons, working individually with special needs students and even playing games and interacting with kids at recess. Some differences I observed at my school were that, because of a lack of English speaking teachers and a demand for English education, students stayed in the same classroom all day while different teachers taught lessons in the students' home classrooms. Another large difference is that Spanish curriculum, especially in the lower grades, consists mainly of workbooks, and it does not stray much from teachers guiding students through each workbook page. While I was in the 2nd and 1st-grade classrooms, I made it my goal to introduce new ways of getting material across to students. Unfortunately, even if teachers did want to incorporate new lessons, the government requires these workbooks to be completed, and teachers are not expected to spend any time outside of normal school hours to plan or prepare. This really opened up my eyes to how different school is in each part of the world, and how much planning we do in America and what our educational goals are.

Not only did I gain a ton of educational experience in elementary schools, but I also had the opportunity to take a class, connected with my clinicals, from the Universidad de Alcala.

While in this class, I gained so much more inside knowledge on the Spanish school system, and also an outsider's perspective from my instructor of the American school system. She mentioned many times that every time she has students from the US, she notices how focused on grades and perfection they are, and they are not really learning, they are only aiming for good grades and superficial success. The contrast between the Spanish laid-back way of life and the more uptight American lifestyle really made me reflect on my own mannerisms, as well as how the American way of life affects education.

Finally, throughout my time in Spain, I had many opportunities to tour different parts of Spain, and even had the opportunity to visit Paris for a weekend trip. I saw an unbelievable amount of famous monuments as well as treasured sights that I didn't know existed

This trip allowed me to gain an abundance of experience in both culture and education. I really feel that this study abroad experience allowed me to develop a much broader perspective of the world. I feel like because of this experience, I will be a much better teacher and person. You really never know what studying abroad is like and how much it can do for you until you experience it yourself. I would strongly encourage anyone to study abroad if they have the chance!