

Lisa Patrick

IAU Barcelona

Summer 2017 Report

I am so very thankful to have received a Study Abroad award from the Languages and Cultures Department of West Chester University. Without it, I would not have been able to cover the tuition and fees associated with going abroad. It liberated me from having less to spend out of pocket to cover the wide variety of experiences I had while in Barcelona, Spain. The most salient discovery I made about myself through this experience was how much of a curious person I am. I often found myself willing to explore on my own and embracing my enthusiasm.

Because I had my classes in the afternoon, I had a lot of free time in the mornings. I would get up early and spend a lot of my time exploring Ciutat Vella, the oldest part of Barcelona. In doing so, I also found a piece of my heritage as a Jewish person. El Call, Barcelona's Jewish quarter, was made accessible through maps on the side of buildings. Before coming to Barcelona, I thought that there would not be much of Jewish culture or community in Spain, and I have never been so happy to be wrong. I visited the site of the Sinagoga Mayor, one of the oldest in Barcelona where I listened to a talk about the excavation project surrounding the site. It still functions as a synagogue that holds weddings, bar mitzvahs and services. In addition, there is a lively Jewish community that lives in Barcelona as well. I met a shopkeeper who owned a store which sold Kosher wines, books about Judaism, and Judaica. We had a very lovely conversation about our respective Jewish communities. In addition, there was also a small museum about El Call and many of the major Jewish thinkers that lived and worked in Barcelona. This became the basis of my final project of my Urbanism class that I took while I

was there. I focused on the design of El Call and how the Jewish community affected the history of Barcelona.

On another one of my morning adventures, I took advantage of the fact that I lived about three blocks away from the National Art Museum of Catalunya (MNAC) which houses the largest collection of Catalan art and sits at the foot of Montjuic. This museum separates its art by historical periods. I found that I enjoyed a lot of the early Romanesque art whose style and influence can be found in Barcelona's architecture.

On a Saturday, my friend and I took in the beauty of Montserrat. Not only did we visit the cathedral, but we also hiked as far as we could up the trails. From those heights, we could see the beautiful vistas of Catalunya. It was a clear day and everything felt very peaceful. In addition to the mountains, there was also a museum that explained the history of Montserrat.

I had two classes while I was in Barcelona. One was about Urbanism and the other was about Nationalism. Combined I received a very detailed overview about the history not only Barcelona but the rest of Spain as well. We explored the connection between geography and the development of Barcelona as a modern European city as well as how it gave rise to Catalan nationalism which has become very relevant over the past few months. And while I was writing papers and doing classwork, it never felt like busy work and always felt relevant, especially when much of it is done in a quiet café or in the gardens of the University of Barcelona.

I am very grateful to have been able to study abroad. The scholarship that I received took away a lot of the fear that I had about paying for tuition. I was able to explore freely and savor the experiences that I had bettering my Spanish, visiting museums, going to the opera, exploring the city, and even discovering something new about my own culture.