



Opinions

Making this culture part of my own

A view from Spain

Contributed by Phillip Blume

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VALENCIA, SPAIN — Spanish women move really fast. Since I arrived in Spain one month ago, I have kissed more girls than in all my previous years combined — two kisses, one on each cheek upon introducing myself.

Spain truly is a country of pairs: Castellano and Catalán, the fiesta and the siesta, tradition and modernity, the old and the young.

This atmosphere saturates the narrow streets and expansive plazas of Valencia, where 17 University students, including myself, are participating in the first "UGA en España" fall semester program.

Even in the short time we've been here, we have come to know Spain on an intimate level, and its identity is slowly becoming part of our own.

I first experienced the unique Spanish atmosphere late one Wednesday night, at about 1 a.m., in a plaza overshadowed by an ancient cathedral where nearly 100 students of the Universitat de València gathered to carry out an annual tradition.

We had arrived the previous week. It was our second day of classes, and the residents of our dormitory, the Collegi Major Rector Peset, were directing the "novatos" — freshmen — toward the streets.

At first, I expected the crowd to disperse and for everyone to make their way to one of the several discotecas in the area. To my surprise, I witnessed instead a very pleasant, typical Spanish custom.

Standing together in a crowd so large it would have required a permit in Athens, the older students encouraged the novatos to crawl, dance and sing their way down the winding road leading to the plaza.

Cars waited patiently while a wave of bodies slowly tried to squeeze by, pressed between the automobiles and the five-story stone buildings on either side. A few people watched the revelry from balconies above.

Once in the plaza, the novatos had to perform several exercises, including marching and dancing along the edge of a noisy fountain.

After a little embarrassment and a lot of laughter, the novatos were pushed by their superiors — now their comrades — into the water surrounding a statue of a Greek god with a horn of plenty in his hand.

Wet and jubilant, they invited bystanders from the surrounding cafés to participate in the festivities, pulling the more hesitant by the hand. In the half-light of street lamps, young and old danced and shouted while a 70-year-old guitarist played with as much enthusiasm as the youngest student present.

An hour later, the fiesta continued. A month later, it continues in my mind as an experience that helped me come to know Spain a little better, and to make myself a part of this wonderful country.

The education one receives while studying abroad goes far beyond academics. It fosters a deeper understanding and a broader view of the world we inhabit.

Studying abroad gives students a second point of view and perhaps even a home outside of the United States.

— *Phillip Blume is a senior majoring in journalism and Spanish. He occasionally will submit columns from Spain, where he is studying abroad this semester.*