

My study program as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar consists of one month at International House, a language school in Madrid, and two semesters at the University of Seville en Seville, Spain. The four weeks in Madrid were a great opportunity to improve my Spanish communication skills, to become familiar with the capital of Spain and to meet other Rotary scholars and students from all around the world. During my first semester at the University of Seville, I have chosen subjects in the University's Language Institute and in the Spanish Philology and Fine Arts departments. Of all of the courses, my course in the Language Institute has been the most interactive and allowed me to apply what I learn in class to real life situations and to adapt to life in Spain.

In the months prior to my departure, I attended the Pre-departure Orientation Seminar for Rotary District 7690 scholars and reviewed the list of pre-departure assignments with Mr. Howard Hick, my sponsoring host counselor from the Jamestown Rotary Club. I also attended the club's weekly meetings and sponsored events such as its Annual Horse Show in order to gain a better understanding of the internal operations of the club and its community service projects. In addition to giving periodic updates on the application process to the Jamestown Rotary Club, at the invitation of Mr. John Womack, the Rotary District 7690 Past Ambassadorial Scholarship Committee Chairperson, I had the opportunity to make a brief presentation to the Furnitureland Rotary Club in High Point, North Carolina.

Corresponding with Rachel Giese, a 2003-04 Rotary scholar who studied in Granada, and Adele Weinstock, a 2004-05 Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar assigned to study at the University of Seville was also helpful in my preparation to study in Spain. Rachel was extremely supportive and shared her experiences through various short but vivid emails. On the other hand, Adele and I shared our challenges and strategies for securing the necessary pre-departure information from the university.

After arriving in Spain, I received the name of Martha Lund, one of last Rotary scholars to study in Seville during the 2002-03 academic year. Martha and I spoke frequently during the weeks in which I attempted to make the transition from living in Madrid to living in Seville. She was very candid about the difficulties that she faced securing housing and enrolling in the university. She empathized with my level of discouragement yet constantly expressed how much she had enjoyed her experience as a scholar in Spain and wished that we had spoken before my departure to Spain.

The Inbound Scholar Orientation built tremendous enthusiasm builder. District Governors Arturo Estébanez and Carles Garriga welcomed the 2004-05 Rotary scholars to Spain and wished us much success in our roles as ambassadors of goodwill. During the group sessions District Governor Arturo Estébanez reiterated the mission of the Rotary Foundation and the objectives of the Ambassadorial Scholarships Program. He not only encouraged us to utilize our collective resources in accomplishing our ambassadorial goals but also to enjoy our time and ourselves in Spain. As a result, our first initiative was to set up a group message board using the name becariosespana0405 on yahoo.com in order to share photos and updates. In addition to promoting the use of a similar communication tool to future scholars, I would also recommend that Rotary consider providing access to scholar reports and alumni contact information to future recipients and club counselors perhaps via a password secured website on the Internet.

In Seville, I have regularly attended the Rotary Club of Seville meetings. It has been a great way to become familiar with the club members and its service projects. I have also had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the members and their families in more relaxed

settings. Mr. Antonio Alva, my host counselor with the Rotary Club of Seville was the first person to invite me to share a typical meal of Spanish tortillas and paella with his family. Soon after, the entire club spent a Saturday afternoon in the country home of club member, Dr. Miguel Del Pozo. Throughout the day we nibbled on tapas, feasted on paella that could have easily feed a hundred people, and listened and watched as the members of club and Dr. Del Pozo family sang and danced sevillanas, a type of flamenco. Aside from the meetings and dining with the club members, Dr. Enrique Valenquez who in addition to being a member of the Rotary Club of Seville is also a member of the Tunas of the Medical School of the University of Seville invited the club scholars to attend an evening of music with the Tunas, a fraternity of minstrel singers known for traveling around the world and serenading ladies.

There have also been occasions to meet members of the Rotaract Club of Seville. The Rotaract Club collaborates with the Rotary Club of Seville on many of its service projects and many of the Rotaract members are the sons and daughters of members of the Rotary Club of Seville.

In my daily interaction with people, I have met people from all over Spain and the rest of the world. After introducing myself and stating that I was studying in Spain on a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship in one of my classes, a student named Bogie Bene indicated that she was an active member of Rotaract in Canada. As a result of that introduction, it has been possible for her to learn more about Rotaract in Spain and I was able to facilitate her participation as a Rotaract volunteer in the Rotary Club of Seville's Annual Citizen of the Year Banquet.

The diverse population of people living in Spain first impressed me as a reflection of the country's distinct provinces, its progressive role in the European Union, and its indigenous and imperial influences. However the strong sense of community established through its neighborhoods, schools and education, professions, and special interest affiliations is what has most impressed me. Moreover, it is apparent that social courtesies and hospitality do not always develop into friendships or merit long-term relationships.

Although extremely different in terms of size and sentiment, common to Madrid and Seville are their superb public transportation systems and numerous cultural attractions. Taking a three-route tour of the Madrid's modern and historic districts was the best orientation to the city. Afterwards, I spent many afternoons visiting the Prado and Reina Sofia museums, the Royal Palace and other historical sites. In Seville, all that the city has to offer is literally footsteps away. While taxi rides are fairly inexpensive, they add up. They also do not offer near as much satisfaction that can be received from walking 30-45 minutes through the city center's labyrinth to get to a final destination. Aside from visiting the most tourist sites such as the Cathedral, the Alcazar, the Plaza de España, venturing in the popular culinary retreats and tasting traditional dishes and tapas has proven itself to be an excellent way to experience the Spanish culture. Outside of Madrid and Seville, I have visited Cadiz and hope to travel to Valencia, Barcelona, Bilbao and many cities near Seville to visit with the respective cities' Rotary clubs and scholars who are currently studying there.

Although my first months as Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar have been more of an immersion into the Spanish culture, I have had the opportunity to share my culture with members of the Rotary Club of Seville, my roommates, my classmates, and the language exchange partners. During the first visit with the Rotary Club of Seville, I presented the club president, Mr. Javier Martinez with a banner from the Jamestown Rotary Club and spoke with the members about my background, my city and state, and my sponsoring Rotary club. Afterwards, I had the opportunity

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to share more about my life and the culture in the United States with my host counselor, Mr. Alva, and to give him a photograph book of North Carolina landscapes and historical sites. The majority of cultural conversations with my roommates generally are related to home life and eating habits and the ones with my classmates, to the differences in the education systems and the life of a college student.

Without a doubt, thus far this year as Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar has been exciting and enriching, in spite of the fact that I could not have imagined all that this experience would offer.