This past fall I had the amazing opportunity to study abroad in Madrid, Spain to study Spanish language and culture. Up until then, I had never lived outside of Kansas much less in a city as big as Madrid. My time there, in a place so different than home, completely pushed me out of my comfort zone and allowed me the chance to experience new things every day.

My first couple weeks were great. I spent every day walking around the city, eating churros con chocolate, visiting Retiro Park, and planning trips for upcoming breaks, but I still felt like a visitor. The city was not home yet, and despite my efforts to pull myself off the beaten path, every bar or café I went to seemed to be filled with American tourists and I couldn’t help but see myself as one of them. It took a lot of patience and effort, but at some point during my time abroad I was able to shake the feeling that I was a stranger in the city that I lived in. I became best friends with my roommates, improved my language skills immensely, interacted with local Spaniards and other students from around the world, mastered the public transportation system, and even found a café where I became a regular.

I lived with a host mom who cooked authentic Spanish meals for us every day. She was an incredibly interesting woman who, despite her seventy years was very sassy. She spoke no English, and upon my arrival my knowledge of the Spanish language barely exceeded “Donde esta la biblioteca?” But the homestay situation forced me to speak Spanish frequently and was an irreplaceable tool in learning a new language.

My time living in Madrid also presented me with tons of opportunities to travel throughout Spain and all over Europe. I visited fourteen different cities within Spain as well as England, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, and Vienna. Every place I traveled to presented me with new things to see, foods to try, cultural insights and experiences, and people to meet. At first Madrid felt like a place I was visiting, but during my study abroad experience, Madrid became a second home. I learned a new language, traveled to places I never imagined I would see, navigated the metro systems of several major cities, met tons of other travelers from all over the world, and started friendships that will last for years.

I stayed along the coast for the entirety of my trip, so I ate fresh fish everyday. Needless to say, I now can’t look at shrimp and calamari in Kansas the same way. Staying in Greece is like literally living in a postcard. I tried to take pictures of all the views and scenery, but I still never felt like I could capture what I was feeling. I just had to be calm (which is no easy task for me) and enjoy it. I did some island hopping to other islands like Ios and Santorini, while also staying with a friend in Athens. I did everything I wanted to do from cliff jumping to snorkeling. I’m Greek Orthodox, so one of the things that meant a lot to me was being able to go to services at a church on the island that was first built by St. Constantine over 1600 years ago.

I developed long-lasting friendships with both my classmates and the natives of Paros. Once I got a little more confident with my Greek, I had numerous conversations with many of the natives. The friendliness and welcoming of everyone on the island made me feel at home. If you are able to, I would whole-heartedly recommend studying abroad. It has proved to be a valuable part of my education that I wouldn’t trade for anything.

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Citi and Pico Dulce, a popular lollipop candy.

The professionals talked to us meeting with MEC Argentina, an international media agency. The professionals talked to us meeting with MEC Argentina, an international media news companies, media agencies and marketing operations of another wineries. We also spoke with professors from the many districts of the capital city and of the wine tours in Mendoza, the group took a group meeting, we decided that the most

In addition to the professional visits, we witnessed the country’s infatuation with soccer during the World Cup. The Argentines were devoted and united in their fanaticism for their team. We cheered them on as they defeated three teams during our stay, and we were disappointed when they last a few days after we returned to the United States.

Between professional visits and World Cup matches, we found time to schedule cultural learning activities. The group signed on with a tour company to take guided bus tours of the many districts of the capital city and of the mountains in the quieter city of Mendoza. In Buenos Aires, we went to an elaborate tango show and dinner, and the next week we took group tango lessons. We also visited art and cultural museums, the famous Recoleta Cemetery and the Casa Rosada, where the president of Argentina works. In addition to the wine tours in Mendoza, the group took a day excursion to the Andes Mountains and went sledging.

Two weeks seemed short, but it was an ideal amount of time for our group to discover the media and marketing operations of another country while we opened our eyes and minds. The completion of the program was dependent on final individual projects in an area of personal interest to the student.

As a native Californian, I am frequently asked why I chose to come to KU. I knew I wanted to broaden my horizons and try something new. I also wanted to incorporate a semester abroad into my quinquennial college experience. When it came time to make my final decision of which university to attend, it seemed that KU had everything I was looking for including an amazing study abroad program. I decided to take advantage of this opportunity in my sophomore year, applying to study in Cork, Ireland program for the Spring semester. Ireland is a country rich in history and scenery, and gave me the chance to try something more than make up for the chilly weather.

My mind swells with memories of countless wonderful experiences during my five month stay. I made fast friends with several students from other U.S. colleges that were studying at University College Cork and we shared many fine experiences together. One adventure in particular stands above the rest. I traveled to the nearby Aran islands with a couple of my new found friends. After getting off the ferry we had ten hours to explore the island before returning to Galway for the night. After a quick group meeting, we decided that the most efficient way to tour the island would be to rent bikes. What followed next was a crazy ride through its rolling hills with a fantastic photo opportunity at every crest. The white-washed cottages seemed to be straight out of a story book. The meadows and ocean made us feel like we were asking me questions about the eras of the color wheel was lacking in names and the warm of its people more than made us feel if it was the sun or the endorphins from the cycling workout, but suddenly we found ourselves biking along a deserted path belting "Build Me Up Buttercup" at the top of our lungs. It hadn't occurred to me that it would be such a beautiful day. Finally we arrived at the main attraction, the cliffs of Inishmore.

As we braced ourselves against the whipping wind and the feeling of vertigo, we took in one of the most beautiful views I have seen in my entire life. I can easily recall the thrill of the sharp drop and the sound of the waves crashing below. After an hour of taking in the view from every possible angle, we made our way down the hill and resided our bicycle. At this point of the day, every hill felt like a challenge, but none of us even thought of turning back and cutting short our most incredible adventure.

Each and every day of my semester in Cork felt like a present. I never knew exactly what was going to happen, but whether meeting new people, discovering a pub with live music, or visiting a museum, each day gave me new and lasting memories. As I look back on my four years at KU, I feel that I have had a very rewarding experience. Owing in large part to my semester abroad, I know that I made the right decision to be a Jayhawk.