

Andrew Mullan – UF in Madrid

Major: Mathematics | **Minors:** Actuarial Science & Statistics

I studied abroad because...

I wanted to study abroad to meet new people, engage with a new culture, and learn a new language.

One of my biggest challenges before studying abroad was...

the social aspect. I was really nervous about going overseas without knowing a single person and being so far away from my family and friends, but all of the people overseas were incredible, and now I have new friends for life.

A typical meal I had while studying abroad:

Breakfast was typically *café con leche* and a croissant (something quick on the way to school/interning), and lunch and dinner were more standard "American" meals (because I cooked them myself). Snacks ranged from tacos to *churros* to *huevos rotos* - anything new we could find in the city to try.

My favorite spot in my host city was...

Gran Vía because there is nothing like that in Gainesville. It has tons of stores and restaurants, and it's always completely lit up with lights at night (it looks way better at night than in the day). And no matter what time of the day it is, there are tons of people out walking around.

One cool event I got to experience while abroad:

Easter in Spain is the best! Given that Spain has one of the biggest Christian populations in Europe, the country goes all out for one of the biggest Christian holidays of the year. You can't find anything like the parades, floats, costumes, and traditions of *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) anywhere else in the world.

The strangest experience for me while abroad was...

that it snowed (multiple times) in Madrid, which is very unusual considering that it usually only snows once every few years. It was funny seeing the excitement of the *madriños* (Madrid natives) when they saw that it was snowing for the first in a while.

A habit I picked up while abroad:

I learned to appreciate eating out a lot more. There were so many hole-in-the-wall restaurants and cafes in Madrid, and now in Gainesville I feel motivated to explore everything that there is around us.

What I found most challenging while abroad was...

always being the last to understand what was going on. It was difficult going from Gainesville, where I feel very comfortable, to a city where I don't know the culture/customs and am still learning the language, but once I began to understand how Spanish society worked, it was the most rewarding feeling, and I knew that I had found a second home.

What surprised me most about study abroad was...

The people! The UF students, other Americans from different universities, and the Spaniards were more amazing than I ever could have imagined. It was such a blessing to get to share this experience with an irreplaceable group of friends.

My last bit of advice:

If you're nervous about not knowing anybody, don't be. Every other study abroad student shares the same fear and wants to make new friends just as much as you do. If you're nervous about not knowing the language, don't be. Every other study abroad student is learning at the same speed as you and there are teachers who have dedicated their careers to helping you learn their language. And if you're nervous about not knowing what to expect, don't be. You get to create your own path and make your own experience based on what you're interested in!