Patrick Boatman – UF in Madrid

**Majors:** Environmental Science & Sustainability Studies

**I studied abroad because...**
I wanted to find and connect to my familial roots in Spain, as well as learn the language and culture while immersed in the environment. **One of my biggest challenges before studying abroad was...**

my last-minute decision to study on a program. That led to difficulty getting funds together, finding someone to take over my lease in Gainesville, and making sure the program would fit into my academic schedule and plans. I wasn't sure if I could even go until almost the last day of the program deadline!

**A typical meal I had while studying abroad:**
In addition to the variety of *paellas* and *tortillas españolas* I was able to try while in Spain, it was typical to go out and drink and eat *tapas* with friends.

**My favorite spot in my host city was...**
was Parque del Buen Retiro, which is a very large public park close to the city center. Retiro is always full of bikers, joggers, families, and groups of friends enjoying a relaxed time away from the fast-paced environment of the city. There are lots of places to walk, sit, read, bike, take photos, and just enjoy the scenery.

**One cool event I got to experience while abroad:**
I loved the Las Fallas festival in Valencia, Spain. It is a period of non-stop partying, festivities, culture, and fun that takes place annually on the streets of Valencia.

**The strangest experience for me while abroad:**
I got lost in Madrid! After leaving the club at close to 4a.m. with a dead phone, I accidentally got on the wrong bus that took me to the very outskirts of the city. After getting off and following a random couple, I somehow found a metro station and made it home by 7a.m. Definitely not a recommended experience, so make sure you go out at night with friends.

**A habit I picked up while abroad:**
I made it a habit to talk to the people who worked at the local stores and restaurants. After only a few weeks, I became very friendly with the employees at the grocery store I always went to as well as the baristas at a cafe next to school I frequently visited. It provides more opportunities to learn the language, and it makes you feel more connected to the city you’re attempting to make your home.

**What I found most challenging while abroad was...**
being alone at home. I chose to live in a homestay, which I definitely recommend, but it was only me by myself living with my host mother. She was absolutely amazing, kind, and welcoming, but at the end of the day I found myself wanting someone else there to be with. Of course, if plans allow for it, there's always time for hanging with friends and discovering the city.

**What surprised me most about study abroad was...**
the growth of my Spanish-speaking abilities by the end of my time abroad. Being constantly immersed in the language and culture provides an excellent opportunity to develop your verbal conversation skills.

**My last bit of advice:**
It is wonderful to experience this trip of a lifetime with friends, but don’t forget where you are. After settling in to your new city, you might find it very easy to stay within your comfortable American (or other native nationality) bubble. For most people, this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Live it to the fullest and try to live like a native.