

**DEREK'S MAJOR(S):** Spanish and sociology

**YEAR/TERM ABROAD:** academic year 2001-2002

**REASON YOU CHOSE THIS PROGRAM:** I wanted to improve my fluency in Spanish and have exposure to a large city. I also wanted a full-year program, and this was one of the few offered.

**FAVORITE CLASSES:** dialectology, introduction to romance language evolution, phonetics, and theatre workshop

dereksmolenski

Madrid, Spain

**BEST MEMORY:** New Year's Eve in the heart of the city. That's when the euro changed over; it was absolute madness.

**GREATEST CHALLENGE:** Making friends with local people. It wasn't a cultural thing, but the fact that it was a big city. It was hard to make connections.

**WHAT I WISH I KNEW BEFORE I LEFT:** I felt pretty prepared, but I wish I knew how bigger cities work better: the types of people you're going to run into, the directness, and the lack of conservatism and shame.

**GOING ABROAD VS. STAYING ON CAMPUS, DISCUSS:** Go! Go, seriously. It was one of the best years of my life. It's a good reason to go broke. It's a great opportunity, and you won't have a chance to do it again. It adds a uniqueness to your college experience.

**COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE: IF I COULD DO IT OVER, I WOULD ...** take no clothing with me except for underwear and socks, find more coffee shops to hang out in, seek out more friendships and stay another year.

**WHAT YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE GOING ABROAD:** I know that I can hold my own, that I can go some place totally different and be productive and find my niche.

"I was surprised at how easy it was for me to adapt to the Spanish way of life: food, clothing, attitude, Spanish norms.  
*I felt like a chameleon.*"

**FACT ABOUT YOUR HOST COUNTRY THAT YOU THINK PEOPLE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO LEARN:** Sangria is not a typical Spanish drink, and it's nowhere near as conservative as people make it out to be.

**ADVICE TO FUTURE STUDY ABROAD PARTICIPANTS:** Once you go abroad, be prepared to re-evaluate your entire life up to that point.



On a trip to Córdoba, a city in the southern part of Spain, Derek Smolenski stops for a moment after enjoying the scenery. During his year abroad, Derek lived with a roommate from Tetuán in an apartment in Madrid.