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International Study Abroad Association of Families and Friends

During my undergraduate career, I volunteered at Presbyterian-New York Hospital in New York City and was able to appreciate the cultural diversity of our world and its impact on medicine and the delivery of care. As a medical student, I gained greater insight into the benefits of comprehensive care and witnessed how it improved the physician-patient relationship and ultimately, patient's health. In an effort to become a dynamic physician, I wanted to acquire a cultural knowledge that would supplement my understanding of physiology and pathology. My medical school career thus far has been a monumental immersion into the study medicine, and so, I hoped that by delving completely into Spanish culture, I would again expand my knowledge.

On June 14, 2001, I departed for Spain eager to become immersed in its dynamic culture. I enrolled into an intensive 20 hour per week Spanish language course with an additional 2 hours of Spanish cultural classes per week for 6 weeks. The didactic sessions enhanced a linguistic and cultural foundation upon which I was able to build and flourish. The necessities of daily living required that I practice skills acquired within the classroom. Through personal journeys, guided tours, and by continual interactions with the people of Spain, I was constantly learning. Becoming comfortable speaking Spanish and understanding the cultural norms were imperative to navigate through the cities of Barcelona, Salamanca, Tarragona, Girona, Madrid and to live in the Gothic Quarters of Barcelona, and among the citizens of Salamanca. In a quest to further understand Spanish traditions and history, I explored the City Museum of History, the Picasso Museum, various cathedrals, works by Gaudi and other artist, many other national landmarks, and constantly engaged in conversation. I simply embraced the culture.

Just a couple of months after my return from Spain, I worked as a volunteer at Harlem Hospital in New York City. During this time, I encountered a woman of Latin American descent, whose daughter had been hospitalized for the past few days. The woman did not speak English but fortunately, that did not impede communication. I was able to talk to her in Spanish about various topics and listen to her medical concerns, and experiences. In an environment where few people spoke Spanish, I experienced the wealth obtained in breaking down the barriers of communication

and in acknowledging diversity and its role in health care. Becoming a physician able to effectively care for my patients is of phenomenal importance. By delivering comprehensive care, through an understanding of the various factors affecting one's health, a conducive atmosphere to improving health is enhanced. My odyssey to Spain has provided me the opportunity acquire a cultural enrichment that will help me enrich the lives of many others.