My Trimester in Barcelona

From the beginning of January to early March, I studied law at University Pompeu Fabra (UPF) in Barcelona, as part of the Erasmus programme. In relation to the standard of academic teaching in UPF, my peers and I noticed within the first week of attending lectures that the UCD Law School surpasses the host institution in every sense; from organisation to teaching style. I was surprised initially by the informal and occasionally, Socratic methods, used throughout the course of lectures and while I became accustomed to this in time, the lack of structure with regard to assessment and provision of lecture notes remained noticeably sub-par in comparison to what is considered the norm in UCD. Nonetheless, I availed of the opportunity to study very interesting modules such as 'Gender and the Criminal Justice System', and 'Fundamental Rights and Freedoms', both through the lens of a different legal system to our own. Furthermore, the lecturers made a concerted effort to involve Erasmus students, as did the local students, by continuously speaking English for our benefit throughout the class. This made my time at UPF all the more enjoyable, as I felt I integrated very well into the university.

I adored every aspect of my cultural experience in Catalonia and the other regions of Spain which I had the opportunity to visit. Culturally, the people of Barcelona adopt a very relaxed lifestyle in comparison to the stereotypical adult lifestyle characteristic of Ireland! While anyone who has visited Spain may be familiar with the 'siesta' or 'nap time' which locals adopt from around midday to late afternoon, my friends and I were surprised when we noticed that a slow-moving working day is the norm in the city. From rush hour occurring as late as ten a.m., and businesses opening late (at least by Irish standards), in the day, Barcelona's culture feels instantly more relaxed than what may be expected of a working day in Ireland.

I became very friendly with the local people of our area. As someone who already adored the Spanish language, I was pleasantly surprised by the willingness of people to speak Spanish with me, and welcomed their attempts to teach me some Catalan also! There is a strong sense of community in each neighbourhood of the city, and my friends and I felt welcomed into the local cafés, bakeries and supermarkets on a daily basis. We even organised child-minding jobs for ourselves and a weekly shopping arrangement for an elderly neighbour, simply by making an effort to integrate with the locals. I loved all aspects of the Spanish lifestyle and could definitely envision myself living in Barcelona at some time in the future.

My Erasmus stay in Barcelona was my first time living away from home, and I thrived on the new-found independence. I learned that in the future I will want to live with friends again, as I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of sharing a living space, creating meals together and enjoying one another's company.

UCD Global enhanced my experience by diligently and thoughtfully sending and replying to emails constantly. I felt supported by UCD throughout the experience, but especially by the Academy. The bursary which the Academy provides has always been incredibly helpful to students like myself who wish to purchase the

expensive, but undoubtedly necessary textbooks which a course like Law demands. However, I truly understood and appreciated the generosity of the Academy during my stay in Barcelona, as the costs of living and studying in a metropolitan city cannot be understated. For the comfort of knowing that I could not only continue my studies, travel, further my language skills and create new experiences in a foreign city, but do so with financial support, I am deeply grateful to the Academy. I was devastated when my Erasmus ended prematurely, but I had an incredible three months and would recommend the experience to anyone!