

Comments for the Madrid 50th Anniversary Luncheon
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¡Esta va a ser una de las mejores experiencias de vuestra vida! This is going to be one of the best experiences of your life! These were my welcoming words to the group of students who had just arrived in Madrid in the summer of 2010. I knew exciting times lay ahead for them as they embarked on this cultural journey, but little did I know that these words would ring true for me, too. Directing the Madrid Program has been one of the best experiences of my professional career. In fact, it was so wonderful that I applied again and had the opportunity to direct the program for a second time.

What made being part of the Madrid Program such an invaluable experience?

First, it gave me a different academic perspective. As Director, I was able to work one on one with the students and witness how learning a foreign language transforms individuals. Their progress was audible in their steady mastery of the language and visible in their growing confidence to navigate a new social and cultural milieu. It quickly became clear that this transformation was reciprocally shaped by their time at the Complutense and their life beyond the classroom walls. Therefore, I encouraged students to enroll in diverse activities and make friends, from joining the university choir or the soccer team, or do '*senderismo*' around the country.

Second, as a native Spaniard, I felt I had a unique vantage point with which to observe their acculturation. I took note of the strategies the students used to integrate themselves into Spanish culture, such as volunteer in local organizations, and how they grasped a new set of cultural perspectives, beliefs and values, both of which created a community of more tolerant, global citizens.

Third, my role as a Resident Director required me to balance a wide range of responsibilities, some of them different from my regular campus duties. Nevertheless, they often provided enormous personal satisfaction and enrichment. As I grew in my role as Director, so too did the students.

But as the students and I both know such experiences are never solitary ones. Rather, these are collective journeys. And so it is only fitting that I publicly recognize the role that Mamen and Amy, as well as all the people afar in the different home campuses played in helping me provide the best possible environment for the students to learn, grow and become independent individuals and to realize those welcoming words creating one of the best experiences of their lives.

Muchas gracias