Madrid, Spain – WIP Universidad Complutense de Madrid
IAP Program Handbook
AY 2014-2015 / Spring 2015

This program is offered by International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in partnership with the University of Indiana and Purdue University (WIP) through the University of Madrid Complutense. Throughout the course of your study abroad experience you will be communicating with both IAP and on-site program staff in Madrid. It is essential that you pay close attention to all information provided to you from both organizations.

This IAP Program Handbook supplements handbook(s) or materials you receive from the WIP Program as well as the IAP Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information and advice available at the time of printing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

WIP program staff handles the program’s day-to-day operations. Generally, questions about aspects of your program abroad (housing information, program facilities abroad, extracurricular activities offered as part of the program, etc.), as well as questions relating to your relationship with UW-Madison or your academics (i.e. course credits, equivalents, UW Madison registration, etc.) should be addressed to International Academic Programs at UW-Madison.

This program handbook contains the following information:
CONTACT INFORMATION........................................................................................................................................ 1
PROGRAM DATES.................................................................................................................................................. 2
PREPARATION BEFORE LEAVING.................................................................................................................. 2
TRAVEL AND ARRIVAL........................................................................................................................................ 3
THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM ............................................................................................................................... 3
LIVING ABROAD............................................................................................................................................... 8
STUDENT EXPERIENCE................................................................................................................................. 8

CONTACT INFORMATION

ON-SITE PROGRAM INFORMATION
Your primary contacts in Madrid, Spain will be the Resident Director, Alejandro Cuza of Purdue University, the Assistant Director, Maria del Carmen Castaño (Mamen) and Amy Olson, Student Services Coordinator.

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UW-MADISON INFORMATION
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Madison, WI 53706
Tel: 608-265-6329 Fax: 608-262-6998
Web: www.studyabroad.wisc.edu

Angela McNutt
Study Abroad Advisor
Phone: (608)265-6329
E-mail: amcnutt@studyabroad.wisc.edu
Emergency Contact Information
In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number *(608) 265-6329* between 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the IAP staff on call at *(608) 516-9440*. While in country, you will have the phone numbers of the WIP staff for emergencies; you will call them directly if you need immediate assistance while abroad.

Embassy Registration
All program participants who are U.S. citizens are required to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). This is a free service provided by the U.S. government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the U.S. Department of State can better assist you in an emergency. STEP also allows Americans residing abroad to get routine information from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, as well as updates on demonstration, emergency messages, and other breaking events. Register online before your departure. The Travel & Visa Tab in your MySA account also has a link to this registration page. If you are not a U.S. citizen, check with your home country's embassy for comparable services.

U.S. Embassy Madrid
Calle Serrano 75
28006 Madrid
Tel: + (34)91-587-2240
Tel: + (34)91-587-2200 (emergencies after hours)
Fax: + (34)91-587-2303
Website: [http://madrid.usembassy.gov/](http://madrid.usembassy.gov/)

PROGRAM DATES

OFFICIAL PROGRAM DATES ARE PROVIDED IN THE WIP PROGRAM HANDBOOK.
The program generally begins at the end of August and ends at the end of June for the academic year. Spring semester generally begins mid-January throughout June.

PREPARATION BEFORE LEAVING

IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS
Refer to the Pre-Departure Checklist in the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for essential information.

Passport
A passport is required for travel to Spain. It should be valid at least six months beyond the ending date of the program. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website ([http://travel.state.gov/passport](http://travel.state.gov/passport)). If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad.

Visa
A Spanish student visa is required for U.S. citizens traveling on a U.S. passport. If you are not a U.S. citizen contact your Study Abroad Advisor for guidance. You are responsible for applying for your own visa. IAP provides you with information to obtain your visa – located in your MyStudyAbroad. It will be your responsibility to apply for and obtain your visa prior to departure. U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport valid for at least six months beyond the end of the program.

You are advised NOT to leave the U.S. for any international travel up to three months before the program begins as your passport must be turned over to the consulate for visa processing. If you must be out of the country more than a couple
of days prior to the program start date, there is no guarantee that the consulate will process the visa in time for your departure.

Academic Year students will apply for a 90-day visa with multiple entries, then after arrival in Spain, will apply for a Resident Permit. WIP Staff will provide guidance in doing this. Spring semester students will apply for a 180-day visa with multiple entries, but will not obtain a Resident Permit. Student visas cannot be extended in Spain.

**Important Legal Info/Arrival Info**

Refer to your WIP Program Handbook for important legal and arrival information concerning the visa and residency permit. The importance of reading through this information is emphasized to make sure you correctly activate your visa when entering Spain. If you have any questions regarding this legal information and your arrival into Spain, you may contact Amy Olson, Student Services Coordinator in Madrid.

**TRAVEL AND ARRIVAL**

**REFER TO THE WIP PROGRAM HANDBOOK FOR INFORMATION PERTAINING TO TRAVEL AND ARRIVAL.**

You are responsible for making your own flight arrangements to and from Madrid and arriving by the date and time listed in the WIP Program Handbook. The WIP Program offers an optional group flight. When group flight information is available, it will be emailed to you. If you choose to arrive earlier than the start date of the program you will be responsible for your accommodations prior to the program start. It is expected that you will be ready to participate in orientation activities on the day the program begins.

You will have several days of orientation sessions. While the days may seem long, you’re both excited and jet-lagged, and the information overwhelming, these orientations are necessary and are for your benefit. You are expected to be an active participant. Some information may not seem immediately relevant, but could come into play throughout your term abroad and you’ll be glad you had the prior knowledge.

**THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Reunidas Courses**

The Wisconsin, Indiana, and Purdue Program in Madrid (WIP) is a member of a consortium of American universities at the Universidad Complutense Madrid (Complutense) called the **Universidades Reunidas**. This consortium offers American students a range of special three-credit courses that are a semester in length and generally follow the calendar and curriculum of American institutions. All Reunidas classes are offered apart from Complutense courses but are taught in Spanish by Complutense professors. Your classmates in Reunidas courses are students of the other American universities who are a part of the consortium.

The Reunidas course list covers a wide range of disciplines that include arts and philosophy, Spanish literature and language, history and the social sciences. Reunidas Course Offerings: [https://www.ucm.es/horarios-de-clase](https://www.ucm.es/horarios-de-clase) and Course Descriptions: [https://www.ucm.es/asignaturas](https://www.ucm.es/asignaturas)

**Universidad Complutense Madrid Courses**

Complutense courses are regularly scheduled university classes with Spanish students. Courses available to you at Complutense will be within the following three Facultades (schools). All Complutense courses must be taught in Spanish to fulfill program requirements. A guide for navigating the Complutense website is available on the [IAP Madrid program page](https://www.ucm.es/asignaturas).
Students may apply to take courses at other Facultads in the Complutense, but they must pay for any registration fees to that Facultad upon registration.

As a rule, Complutense courses carry six credits for year-long classes and three credits for each semester-long class. They typically start several weeks later than Reunidas classes. Year-long program participants can take one yearlong Complutense course and an additional course in the spring semester. Final exams, which may include an oral component, are scheduled in January and June. Mid-term examinations are customary. Your WIP Program Handbook will have more information on the academics with Reunidas and Complutense.

**Academic Year Students - Courses**
The fall term begins with a September course, a three-week preparatory language and culture course which includes work in Spanish grammar and composition, politics, art, and history. The regular semester begins end of September/beginning October. Academic year students are required to take at least one Complutense course for the fall semester and two Complutense courses during the spring semester. Your other courses will be a combination of other Complutense and Reunidas courses for a total of 15 credits minimum per term (including the September course for 3 credits).

**Spring Semester Students - Courses**
Spring term courses begin late January/early February. This term does not have a preparatory course. In addition to Reunidas classes, spring semester students must take at least two Complutense courses. Your other courses will be a combination of other Complutense and Reunidas courses for a total of 15 credits minimum.

**Advising Worksheet**
You will need to complete an Advising Worksheet with your Academic/Major advisor prior to leaving for Spain. This Advising Worksheet is available in your MyStudyAbroad. You will need to research Complutense and Reunidas course listings to determine a preliminary academic plan for your time abroad. This Advising Worksheet will be used in your academic advising with the Resident Director prior to the start of the semester after you’ve arrived in Madrid.

**Tutoring**
The program provides tutoring services for students in the three Facultads listed above. This is HIGHLY encouraged. Past program statistics show that students who use the tutorial services have a higher succession rate in their Complutense courses. Most tutors are classmates or graduate students in the field. More information is provided in the WIP Program Handbook. There are no program-provided tutoring services available for students who elect to take classes outside of the three participating Facultads.

**Registration**
Registration for both Reunidas and Complutense courses will take place in September and early October in Madrid during the fall term, and late January/early February for the spring term. It is highly recommend that students come to Madrid with courses picked out and alternate options for courses. This will make the process much smoother. The Advising Worksheet, as part of your post-acceptance documents, will be provided to the Resident Director to discuss the courses you plan to take in Madrid.

Academic registration will be an opportunity to see how another university operates. You’ll find it to be different than UW-Madison. Complutense courses may have practicas, much like labs here at UW-Madison that could include museum visits, lectures, class presentations, that take place on different days than your regularly scheduled lecture. Practicas
dates and times are not reflected on the course listings so when you are registering for your classes in Madrid, you’ll be advised to keep this in mind so that your practicas don’t conflict with your other courses.

It should be stressed that the academic year in Madrid finishes at the end of June. An early return to the U.S. cannot be guaranteed and you should be prepared to remain for your final exams. The date of a final exam should not be a reason for not taking a good course. When arranging your course schedule in Madrid, it may be an impossible demand to only take classes where the final exam ends in the beginning of June. Putting limitations on your course scheduling will limit the great classes and opportunities available to you.

IAP will register you with UW-Madison for your fall and/or spring term. You will see a study abroad placeholder course on your UW Record after we have registered you. These credits will convert to the actual credit and grades earned after completing the program. These placeholder credits keep you continuously enrolled at UW-Madison for the duration that you are abroad.

**Equivalents and Course Equivalent Request (CER)**

Each course you take abroad must be assigned a UW-Madison “equivalent” course in order for your grades and credits to be recorded on your UW-Madison transcript. In order to establish UW-Madison course equivalents for your study abroad courses, you will submit a Course Equivalent Request (CER) through your My Study Abroad account. Course equivalency requests are due by the date listed in your MyStudyAbroad. Information on the UW course equivalent process is available in the IAP Study Abroad Handbook.

It must be stressed that you are guaranteed to receive credit for your courses abroad; it just depends on what your UW equivalent will be. IAP encourages you to NOT limit yourself to only pre-approved courses; we encourage you to be open to all course offerings that are available to you since you are guaranteed to receive UW credit.

**NOTE:** All courses that show up on your WIP Madrid transcript **MUST** be put onto your UW Madison transcript. There are no exceptions. To avoid a delay in your study abroad courses posting to your UW Madison transcript, it is important to submit your equivalent information as soon as you can.

**Communication with the UW-Madison Spanish Department**

UW-Madison students who are studying (or have studied) in Madrid should communicate with Professor Ksenija Bilbija (kbilbija@wisc.edu) concerning Spanish credits. You should include in your e-mail the following information:

- Name, UW ID number, major(s), expected date of graduation
- Your phone number (if you are in Madison)
- Hours that you may be reached (if you are in Madison)
- Most advanced Spanish language and literature classes you have taken at UW-Madison
- Reference to the particular program you are (were) on and how long you are (have studied) abroad

**Course Information**

In consultation with the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, International Academic Programs has established the following guidelines for assigning course equivalents:

**Spanish 223 and 224**

Students should make an effort to take at least one of these classes on the UW-Madison campus before studying abroad if at all possible, since they provide good background. In addition, these survey level courses are difficult to find abroad.

If students have not had these classes prior to leaving, the Spanish department recommends either looking for a similar survey-type class or taking these classes when you return to Madison.

If students decide to take a survey-type course abroad, they should find out what the department teaches in the particular class and look for as close a match as possible. Students need to check with Professor Ksenija Bilbija (kbilbija@wisc.edu) before taking the class.
If students decide to take these courses when they return to UW-Madison, they may receive credit for a more advanced literature class (e.g., Spanish 326) and then return to take Spanish 224. Students who take this route still find the survey-level classes interesting.

In order to receive a course equivalent for Spanish 224, the course should concentrate on analyzing basic literary forms, conventions, genres, and representative short texts in Spanish. Note that Spanish 224, Introduction to Hispanic Literatures, is a course that provides an introduction to reading and analyzing literary works, with special emphasis on development of oral and written skills for the discussion literature.

In order to receive a course equivalent for Spanish 223, students must complete an intermediate level class that covers issues that shape the national cultures and the cultural practices of the Hispanic world. The course should place emphasis on diversity, emergence of new imagined communities, cultural hybridity, and social movements with a historical framework. Any course (or combination of courses) considered for civilization credit should deal with a wide variety of cultural aspects, and should combine social science with study of the humanities (for example, not sociology or economics only; not art, music, or literature by themselves).

**Spanish Majors on the UW-Madison campus**

UW-Madison students majoring in Spanish must keep the following information in mind:

1. You must take at least 15 credits of the upper level work in the Spanish major “in residence” (that means, here on campus or in programs sponsored by UW-Madison). All Spanish courses numbered 300 or above count toward this requirement.
2. You must take at least 6 credits of Spanish at the 300 level or above while physically present at UW-Madison.

- If you would like more information or clarification on the Spanish major, contact Karen Thompson, Undergraduate Spanish Advisor (klthompson3@wisc.edu).
- For course equivalent issues outside of IAP CER requests, contact Professor Ksenija Bilbija (kbilbija@wisc.edu).
- For questions about practical issues on this program contact Angela McNutt (amcnutt@studyabroad.wisc.edu).

**Credits**

Most courses carry a 1:1 conversion with UW-Madison courses, meaning, a 3-credit course in Madrid is equivalent to 3 credits at UW-Madison. Most courses on this program are worth 3 credits.

**Limits and Load**

Students are required to enroll each semester as full-time students and complete a minimum of 15 credits per term. There are no exceptions to this rule. Before registering for classes, students must meet with the Resident Director to discuss their course of study. Students should select courses that will fulfill requirements on the UW-Madison campus.

**Pass/Fail/Drop/Audit**

Please refer to the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for academic policies. A Pass/Fail option will be available in the Course Equivalency Request. The due date for Pass/Fail submission can be found in the Academics tab of your My Study Abroad account.
# Grades and Grade Conversions

## WIP Grading Scale for Reunidas Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If Grades are Reported as</th>
<th>If the Reunidas Grades are Reported as</th>
<th>UW-Madison Equivalent Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+/A</td>
<td>9.50 – 10.09</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-/B+</td>
<td>8.59 – 9.49</td>
<td>AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>7.51 - 8.49</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-/C+</td>
<td>6.51 - 7.50</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/C-</td>
<td>5.51 - 6.50</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4.51 - 5.50</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.00 – 4.50</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## WIP Grading Scale for Complutense Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complutense Grade</th>
<th>UW-Madison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.00 – 8.50</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.49 – 7.00</td>
<td>AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.99 – 6.00</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.99 – 5.00</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.99 – 4.50</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.49 – 3.50</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.49 – 0.00</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Final Exams in Complutense

It is highly recommended that students take advantage of the Revisión de examen (revision session), a scheduled time for students to meet individually with their professor to review their final exam. Individual professors set specific revision dates for each of their classes, which tend to be 1-2 weeks after the final exam. Consult the WIP Academic Manual you will receive on-site for full dates.

In case the student is leaving Madrid before the official grades are going to be posted, the student should meet with the professor to discuss the class work *before* leaving and let the professor know s/he will be gone during the revision session. This is of importance especially in the spring semester Complutense grades. Even if the student thinks they’ve done well, it is still highly recommended to meet with the professor. Don’t let the grades on the transcript become a surprise! It is easier to discuss a low or failing grade with the professor on-site rather than 1-2 months after the fact, especially if they will allow extra work to help the grade.
LIVING ABROAD

MADRID, SPAIN

Educate yourself about your host country. Read the Preparing to Live in Another Culture section of the IAP Study Abroad Handbook. Remember- it won't be possible to prepare yourself completely. There will be situations you will not have anticipated and your flexibility will determine in great part the kind of experience you will have while abroad.

Housing

Housing information can be found in your WIP Program Handbook. Past students of the program report the housing experience to be one of the most enriching aspects of the program. You will be provided with an extensive orientation on-site before you start your housing search. WIP staff provide a wealth of resources to support you throughout the process. Be sure to check out the housing statistics provided at the end of the WIP Program Handbook for insight into average rent and average time spent in finding an apartment.

Websites of Interest

UW-Madison International Academic Programs (IAP):
http://www.studyabroad.wisc.edu

WIP Program Handbook:
http://overseas.iu.edu/docs/Handbooks/madrid.pdf

Madrid Guides:
http://www.turismomadrid.es/en/
http://www.madridtourist.info/
http://www.bemadrid.com

Social Activities/Discounts:
http://disfrutamadridmas.com/
You will have access to this program that organizes weekly event offerings, activities, and area discounts so you can participate in activities each week to help you enjoy the Spanish culture and meet like-minded students.

Cost of Living Calculator:
http://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The comments below are from past participants. They reflect various students’ experiences and are included to provide different perspectives. IAP does not endorse any specific view expressed in this section.

Preparations Before Leaving

As for packing, pack light. You'll be bringing more home than when you came, so be prepared. A winter coat is necessary; it will get to about 32 some days. Don't worry about looking "American". No matter what you do, you will look American. I thought that wearing a Superman shirt would single me out, and when I got there more Spaniards wore them than I did. So it's really up to you.

Pack layers. This really cannot be stressed enough. It does get pretty cold during the winter months even though it may seem like nothing compared to Wisconsin winters back home. It gets especially cold in the classrooms where the Reunidas classes take place, so to avoid having to buy that clothing there, and then trying to fit it back in your suitcases when returning back home can really will help if you just bring it with you right away. Or plan on leaving it there if you really need the room in your luggage on the way home!
Packing: calling home can be one of the most expensive things in Europe. If you have a laptop computer, I would highly recommend bringing it - you can use programs like Skype to call real phones in the US for just a couple of cents per minute. Also, pack lightly. You will most likely do some traveling (a travelers or hikers backpack is great!) and also will probably buy clothes and other items while in Spain. Many participants were over weight limits when they returned home.

Bring a good pair of shoes that are comfy to walk in, but a little bit dressy. You'll walk around loads, and nice shoes in Spain are expensive!

Make a budget before leaving and stick to it!

Travel and Arrival Information
To get to Madrid, I took the group flight. It was a little more expensive than booking on my own, but meeting people on the plane and the shuttle to the hard-to-find dormitory where we were staying made it worth it.

Check out and research the city before you arrive. If you can use public transportation instead of taxis, you will save LOTs of money! (Use the monthly bus/metro pass).

There are tons of low-budget airlines in Europe. Most of the time, if you do a little research, it is less expensive to fly than to take trains (even between cities in Spain!). Some good websites for cheap flights are: edreams.es, ryanair.com, vueling.com, skyscanner.com, and easyjet.com. Keep in mind that these low-cost airlines have strict weight restrictions on luggage and pack light! Also, you'll want to research the airport you're flying into/out of in advance - sometimes they are a ways outside of the city and you'll need to arrange for transportation to a more central location.

Busses within Spain are also cheap. There are several good companies listed in the WIP handbook.

Other amazing places in Spain: Barcelona (go during nice weather - it is an incredible city!), Granada (guided tour of the Alhambra is definitely worth the money!), Toledo, Segovia (day trips), Valencia (Las Fallas - in the spring - should definitely not be missed!), Northern Spain is beautiful and green, Southern Spain is vast and gorgeous.

Travel within Spain as much as you can. As great as international travel is, it's also nice to really get the feel of one specific country. Besides, you get to practice more Spanish that way!

Go to the Canary Islands. I went to Lanzarote, a lesser known island, and it was fantastic. A pretty cheap flight, too!

Make sure to travel to small towns and not only big cities. Living in Madrid gets overwhelming sometimes--go hiking in the mountains, make friends in a small village, get off the beaten path!

I loved being close to everything in Europe to be able to travel often.

Academic Program
The Madrid program is challenging, and, like most challenging things, extremely rewarding.

The breadth of the academic program was a gift and a challenge - that WIP students were able to take 2 classes with other Spanish students!

Classes: Take your time and select classes carefully! (You will take classes with other American students - Reunidas - and within the larger university – Complutense – with Spanish students). Selecting classes that fit your interests and are appropriate for the amount of time you are prepared to invest is critical to a successful semester. Classes can take up a lot of time and be very challenging - but also, very interesting!
Don’t worry too much about the Complutense courses. If they seem less organized than American classes, it’s because they are. Study throughout the semester and you’ll do way better than all the Spaniards who wait until the last minute to cram for the final. After getting this far in the American educational system, you probably have better study skills than most Spaniards—use them!

Talk to the Spaniards in your courses. Ask to copy notes from them and have them clarify topics for you.

Take advantage of the tutors for Complutense courses.

There aren’t that many good study spots in Madrid. Get to know your local public library—not only will you escape the monotony of studying all day in the Complutense, but you can also check out materials—including books for classes that you might otherwise have to buy.

I enjoyed the amount of integration there was between the study abroad students and those of the host country in a normal academic setting.

The academics were great, not an easy glide along study abroad course, but something you actually had to put a good effort into. It was a significant factor in my Spanish speaking improvement.

Living Abroad
I enjoyed being in the heart of Spain, its cultural center for the language. And, being able to live with a host-family and in an apartment because I learned how both Spanish family and Spanish students live.

The most impressive part of the program, I think, was that we stayed with a homestay for the first month. This allowed us to become familiar with cultural norms, get familiar with the city, and practice our Spanish. After this, the option to find our own housing was fantastic. It was difficult, but one of the most rewarding experiences. With this, I found great friends and it was very liberating to have the opportunity to feel like an adult.

It was an opportunity to live with a Spanish family and experience the everyday culture, and later, the chance to live with other students in a shared apartment. Never again will I have a chance to live with people from all over the world!

Do not hurry to find an apartment because there are nice apartments available for less than you think.

Make sure to get to know your roommates before agreeing to live with them, or you could be looking for another apartment sooner than you think. Don’t be afraid to venture out to find an apartment a little farther away from the city either, many students are afraid to leave the student areas, but there are many nice areas of Madrid with students all over. It’s important to ask questions to potential roommates/landlords that we don't think about as much here, for example: Are any of you smokers and do you smoke in the house (smoking is a lot more common in Spain). Do you allow visitors (many landlords take the position that even though you live there, it is still their house and they control who can enter and leave). Landlords generally have more control in Spain than they do here, so it’s important to figure out their ground rules and see if the relationship with them will work. The best situation in my experience is to live with more people as opposed to less, with most of them native Spanish speakers. Sometimes it’s nice to live with at least one American from the program so if things get too crazy or too culturally difficult, you have one person that understands where you're coming from.

Madrid: If you’re not from a big city, it may take you a little bit of time to adjust to Madrid. It is big, metropolitan, and busy. Finding an apartment may seem like a daunting task -- don’t dawdle! Get started right away and utilize the resources in the WIP Program office. The WIP coordinators have a lot of great advice and resources - so you will be prepared for the task of finding your own apartment.

Don’t be afraid to make those phone calls when setting up appointments to have an apartment be shown to you. You have to start somewhere with speaking to random Spaniards and what better way to start then with these phone calls!
You are also provided with a little cheat sheet of already translated phrases commonly asked when making these phone calls and while at the showing. I found them to be super helpful and made me a little more relaxed when going through the process.

Don't pay too much for an apartment. It gets really frustrating when all the cheap places you find are either disgusting or horribly small or already taken, but keep trying! I ended up regretting my decision to pay more for a nicer place. Get up early in the morning to go apartment hunting--you may have more luck.

Live with Spaniards! If you live with other Americans, you will eventually give in and start speaking English. All the time. Besides, there are way too many other opportunities to speak English. Be relentless about speaking Spanish. That's the only way you'll improve.

I loved that the participants were so integrated in the school and community and that we had the freedom to find our own housing.

Be as outgoing as possible. You might feel inferior because you aren't fluent in Spanish. Try to get over that initial intimidation right away and speak up! Not only will you improve you Spanish, but you will also make more friends and have a more meaningful immersion experience.

There is so much to see and do in the city. I would definitely advocate investing in a guidebook before arriving. It is much more interesting to see things you have a background on, and it will help you narrow down which places/things you are really interested in seeing. My favorite places in Madrid: the Reina Sofia (modern art museum), the Prado (art museum), El Paseo del Prado (walkway near the museum - absolutely beautiful in the spring!), Parque Retiro (check out the drummers on Sunday evenings), Templo de Debod (Egyptian temple) and the Teleferico (at Parque del Oeste). Try to frequent a cafe or panaderia (bakery) in your neighborhood - it will really help you to feel at home.

Pickpocketing is a huge issue, especially on the Metro and in tourist areas. If you decide to use a wallet, it should go in your front pocket at all times. I stopped two pickpocketers while there by using a hidden money belt. It looked stupid every time I had to pay for something, but at the end of the trip I never lost anything.

The advice and warnings given in on-site orientations prepared me very well. It is always wise, especially for females, to walk together at night just like anywhere else.

The program orientation did a good job at addressing personal safety issues, especially pick pocketing, and luckily I never fell victim to any sort of robbery or theft.

Don't get too attached to the Metro. Depending upon where you live, you can sometimes forego the expensive monthly Metro pass and walk almost everywhere.

If you want to earn a little extra cash while abroad, teaching English is a great option. You may want to bring along a good English grammar or ESL instruction handbook if you plan to teach at all - it can be challenging to find good resources while in Madrid.

Make friends with Spaniards who can take you to places you wouldn’t find on your own.

I volunteered with Solidarios and it was one of the most meaningful things I did all year. It really helped me feel like I was a part of the Madrid community and I learned a lot about things that most tourists don't see. I’m still in contact with the friends I made through volunteering. If you do volunteer, though, be sure to be consistent. Sometimes foreign exchange students have reputations for quitting after a short period of time.