

SE05EP05
CARE Student Abroad
Maria Gloria

Vanessa: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Vanessa, and I'm filling in for Hannah this episode...

Zoë: And I'm Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

V: On today's episode, we talk with Maria Gloria, an FSU alum who studied abroad in FSU Valencia. Maria talks about being a first-generation college student in the CARE program, how she decided to go abroad, and what that experience was like. She also talks about how she connected with her Mexican American heritage while in Spain. Let's go to our conversation with Maria now.

V: Hey! How's it going?

Maria (M): Great! How are y'all today?

V: I'm good, thanks!

Z: Doing well.

M: Thank you for having me, I'm so excited.

V: Yeah of course, super excited for you to be here with us today. So first off to get started, would you introduce yourself to our listeners?

M: Yes, of course. So my name is Maria Gloria, I recently graduated from Florida State back in Spring 2021. I studied abroad in Spring 2018, so it was my freshman spring semester. And now like I mentioned I'm graduated so I'm currently taking my gap year before going on to law school and I'm currently in that process of applying to law school and figuring out the next steps of that journey within itself.

Z: Awesome, and where did you go abroad?

M: I went to Valencia, Spain; the best place ever. But there's also another great place in Europe but I love Valencia 100%.

Z: Awesome. Yeah, it's a really cool place. Okay, how did you first hear about study abroad?

M: Well I first heard about study abroad through orientation. I remember like I went in through the CARE program, well the Summer Bridge Program within the CARE department, and I think it was like the first week of being there we had orientation sessions and I remember going to study abroad just because it just kind of intrigued me. The idea of going somewhere and you know being there for a semester sounded very cool to me. I remember just like going in and sitting and the girl really was just talking about Valencia, which is very weird that I ended up going to Valencia, but she just talked about Valencia and she showed us pictures and I just was like 'Oh my goodness it would be so cool to be there,' and then I guess you could say the rest was history. I ended up you know just... like in the

moment I remember like thinking 'Oh my goodness, this is something that I truly want to do' and afterwards is when I finally made the decision to do it, but that's when I first heard about it.

V: Would you talk a little bit more about what CARE is and what that summer bridge program was?

M: Of course, so the CARE department is like a department on campus that really truly tries to bring in a home for First Generation students by providing services and programs that kind of help us navigate what college is. It was truly my home away from home from when I first joined, when I first went to Florida State. I got so much support, a lot of the staff there is amazing and truly it looks out for First Gen students and I don't think that it's... I think it's incomparable to any other program that I've ever been a part of just because they really truly try to cater to us First Gen students and honestly they help with the success of finally like getting to graduation and stuff. Always like supporting your dreams, supporting your goals and I truly appreciate them.

V: Wow that is excellent. And you studied abroad as a First Generation student and that is, I think, amazing.

M: Yes.

V: Would you talk about your experience applying to go abroad and then telling your family about that decision to go abroad?

M: Oh my goodness it is such a story because I remember, it's so crazy I applied literally the day before the, it was like the night before the application was supposed to close to go to spring, or to go abroad in the Spring and I was sitting at Starbucks it was like it was me and my sister because my sister used to go to Florida State also, she was older than me, and I remember, I was sitting there and I was telling her like 'Oh my goodness' like it might have been through social media that I had run into like that or maybe an email or something, I don't remember, but I remember I saw it and it said the application closed tomorrow and I was like 'Oh my goodness should I do it?' Mind you from orientation to this moment when I'm sitting in Starbucks, I had totally I don't know I guess I was like so wrapped up in being in college and like the first year experience that I kind of just put it like, it was like not even in the back of my mind. And when like I saw that post or whatever it was, I remember just like remembering that this is something that I wanted to and so my sister was sitting there and my sister is my biggest like motivator and encourager, I love her for that. She's always like telling me to go for my dreams and do what you know, take those experiences and so I truly appreciate that from her. And she was like do it, do it! And I'm like 'Oh my goodness like this is so last minute,' and I ended up just taking a leap of faith and I was like you know what I'm doing it and so I applied that night, I sent in my application, I guess a few weeks later I got a notice that I was like approved to move on, forward in the application and I was like oh my goodness. But just to keep in mind, at this moment I still haven't told my parents. My parents knew nothing, nothing about like me even like thinking about doing it. I had never mentioned the idea of studying abroad and you know being a First Gen student but also like within my Mexican culture like I you know I always try to keep my parents updated and my parents are very involved in my life and so this is something that I don't even know why I didn't mention but I didn't. And so I remember after I had put in like the deposits and I had like accepted my, I guess accepted to go to actually like commit to it, I remember it was like November at Thanksgiving break, that I sat down my parents and I told them like I'm going to Spain and they're like what and it was like they probably thought it was just a vacation and was like 'Oh no I'm going to Spain for a semester, a couple of months, you know?' And they were just so,

they were like very shocked at first but afterwards obviously they supported me and like they 100% were like okay well do it you know do what's best for you and what you want to do and we'll support you 100%. So I'm so grateful that I have very supportive parents but yeah at first they were definitely shocked. They never saw that coming.

M: Wow, Thanksgiving! That means it's kind of like a three year anniversary right now since you told them.

M: Oh my goodness yes! Yeah probably about three or four years, yeah I think four years but oh that's kind of crazy. I'm actually going to remind them about that. I'm going to bring it up next week and say do y'all remember when I told y'all but yeah it was crazy.

Z: That's so awesome.

M: Thank you!

Z: Yeah what a great story and like such a journey just to make that decision and then go through with it and you know that's, that's really awesome. Cool so kind of shifting a little bit to your time in Spain, what are your favorite things that you did while you were there?

M: Oh my goodness where do I even start? When I tell you like it was just an experience within itself, just being there. And I remember oh I like every moment of it just being able to travel within Europe and like the accessibility of doing that. It's like so easy to just hop on a train and go somewhere for the weekend, I 100% loved that. But even more I loved the idea of, and like the experience of being another country, learning about their culture, learning about what makes them different from any other culture. I know I went in the spring semester so like the Fallas festival was 100, like was in motion. We got to see a lot of the statues like, I think they're called ninots, and just partake in their cultural festival and just something that makes them who they are and I 100% feel like the International Programs works so hard to immerse us into what you know and I'm sure it is the same for other like locations in Florence and I think it's in Panama, I'm sure they work the same way. Like they try to really sit there and make sure that you're going out into the community and getting to learn more about more about who they are while also you know kind of leaving your own impact there. And then I would have to say one of my even biggest highlights was going to schools and kind of helping with English tutoring and I 100% enjoyed that. I went like once a week for about half of the semester and just going there and like talking to the students and helping them you know kind of growing their English was also a great process because it's interesting to see how their school is like and how you know kind of comparing and stuff so I 100% loved it. But overall, loved the experience, loved every moment of it, and just being able to travel and be there and enjoy my time there was amazing.

V: Yeah it sounds like you really tried to become a local while you were there because you said teaching English to Spanish speaking students, so you were like in the community, and that's really cool.

M: Yes and like when I tell you it's different when you just go, I always tell people this is like it's very different when you go and you visit for one or two weeks, and even a month, like I think even a month is very short now that I think about it and now that I've been somewhere for longer than a month, you know, although you can you can still learn a lot but I feel like when you're able to be there for a consistent you know 3-4 months it's different because you get to really see the ends and outs of what it's like to live there.

V: Do you do you have any like other stories about how you immersed yourself personally into the culture of Spain while you were there?

M: Just honestly like going umm one of my favorite things to do was going to this local like it was a vegan friendly coffee shop and it's called Almalibre and I remember going in there and I would go so constantly that I ended up becoming friends with some of the workers there and they were a bunch of women and like literally the ended up becoming some of my like good friends there. And I remember just going there and then sitting there and talking with them and I think that's probably the, one of the biggest ways that I was able to immerse myself within Valencia because they you know they talk to me, they told me about some good places to see within town, they would tell me about you know what they were up to. A couple of them were still going to university nearby and so they would talk to me about their experience there and then how it was like to live year round in Valencia and I think getting that first hand like you know experience and stories it like makes you think about it more and makes you like want to you know like they love going to this place and it's like a place where locals go, maybe I'll go there. And so that was amazing I think that was probably the best thing I could have done just sitting there and talking to these locals and you know just building that relationship with them to then like learn more about who they were as people and how their cultures made them different to me even.

Z: Awesome yeah that's really neat that you had that experience and it sounds like you had a really full experience abroad, like you really utilized your time there. So we're curious as to like what are some things that you learned about yourself from your time abroad?

M: I think I learned a lot first, it taught me how to be very independent you know and also like very carefree because I know a lot of times things will just happen spontaneously. And I remember just kind of walking being you know like I said I went in my freshman year so even then I was like trying new things, becoming like a different version of myself than I was in the past, in a positive way you know, always trying to grow, always trying to learn, and so I remember going and it just really made me more independent and more carefree. And then more importantly it kind of taught me even you know more about my own here like my own culture. I'm Mexican American to the full extent. you know only Spanish speaking household, you know telenovelas playing in the background, you know dinners like literally 100% Mexican food, and so I truly, truly like you know valued that growing up and when I went abroad it was kind of different because you had to find like ways to get in touch with my own culture as well while I was there in moments where I felt homesick you know? And although I love learning about Valencia and other cultures, sometimes you want to feel at home and I think that's one of the great things about Valencia because even like, I mentioned the friends I made. I would talk to them and tell him 'Oh my goodness like do you know any like places that you could probably find good Mexican food, I haven't heard of anything like that?' and they like they told me they're like 'Oh my goodness there's a large Mexican community here,' and they kind of introduced me to that aspect of it. They also told me oh like there's a market there where they sell food and stuff like that. And definitely I would say like I'm a big, like I love you know Mexican food and all that, and I remember I was like oh my goodness like I was missing Mexican food and so they told me about a market that like sold a lot of the types of food that I grew up you know eating and stuff and so that was amazing within itself. And so in a way I was able to be there and learn about Valencia and Spaniard culture and doing that, at the same time feeling at home. Snd so I truly loved that, I loved going to like the Mexican restaurants nearby talking to those people that work there, and so I and as you can tell I'm very talkative, so I remember just like chatting up a storm with all of them and just getting to know anything. It's also very crazy to like kind of hear

their stories of how they you know how they traveled from, how they brought their Mexican culture to Spain, and how they're living there now and like how they're able to immerse within Spain and just learn more about themselves and also you know still like bringing that root of them, so I truly enjoyed that.

M: Did you, I'm just curious did you have one of those classic like freshman experience moments where you're texting your mom hey what is that recipe for that one thing, like when you found that Mexican market, did you like end up cooking back in your apartment?

M: Yes I did like oh my goodness I definitely did cook in my apartment. Which is also an amazing thing about Spain, you have really nice apartments, like International Programs I think definitely worked really hard on those apartments. So but yeah I for sure did, I was like definitely calling her and even, it's funny, because even to this day like my mom like tells me how like it all started there because before even like my fall semester I would never really like text her and like ask her 'oh like I I'm trying to make you know trying to make some type of new food that you do,' or something like that and I never really did that and she reminds me how like when I was abroad is when I first like really became intrigued to how to cook the food that she cooks and so that's definitely a highlight. And I don't know, I always think like in so many ways Valencia was different but it was still able to my home through that experience, you know?

V: Wow that is that is really sweet, a really sweet story about your mom. I feel like that's the exact experience that we want students to have when they go abroad, is to be able to look at the culture that they are immersing themselves into and then also use that knowledge to figure out like who they are independently. You know being like comparing contrasting what they're learning and seeing like how those things may or may not fit in with them.

M: 100%

V: In what ways would you say that studying abroad was a unique academic experience for you?

M: It's something that I have never experienced before. You know being able to sit in a classroom and learn about like different things and like and then be able to not only learn about them in the textbook but then going out and seeing exactly what they're talking about, you know? And I remember taking one class specifically, I don't remember the name of the class, but it was talking there was a moment where we're talking about architecture and being able to like the professor talked about it for one day and then, it was like a weeklong like lecture, he talked about it one day, then the next class, what did we do? We went outside, we walked, he took us throughout the city and he 100% demonstrated how that architecture was being implemented within Spain and that was amazing. But even more, it's like as much as I can sit here and talk about Valencia and how amazing it was, I love how the International Programs went even above and beyond to take us to other places in Spain and kind of you know get to know different the different rounds of what Spain encompasses. And so I remember we went to see, Almalibre, I mean not Almalibre, Alhambra that's what I was trying to say and like other places like in the Andalusia region I love, like we did that little excursion. And then we went to also Barcelona and so like kind of seeing the differences between the areas and not only like you know like they can sit there and talk like, people can sit there and talk to you about anything you know and like they can tell you how amazing it is, the different things you can see, just they can tell you about anything but when you go and you see it and you are able to sit there and like take it all in, it just provides a different experience and it really truly makes you appreciate it even more than you could have appreciated before. And so I definitely would say like just having that firsthand experience in like being in person and taking it all in is

probably the best part of learning and so I truly enjoyed that part of studying abroad. And even like when we talked about like other countries and kind of learned about how other countries influenced Spain and stuff like that, even then it was and it was beautiful to be able to get on a train and even if you even if you didn't do with International Programs, we could do it on our own, and go see exactly what they were talking about and so I truly loved that about it all.

V: Was there a an excursion in particular that really stood out to you that like you always think about?

M: Yes so I always think about like I mentioned the Alhambra, I think that's how you pronounce it I'm sorry if I'm mispronouncing it, but I remember when I was in high school we would sit there and he would talk about it, I think it was in my humanities class, and we would talk about different, very famous places to visit. And when we went to the Alhambra I remember when I was sitting in high school thinking like that must be so beautiful because it just like the structure of it, all of it. And so I remember when I was finally able to go it was like I reflect on the fact that in high school I would have never imagined that I would be standing here. And in that moment it made me so appreciative of my experience because I was able to sit there and say 'Oh my gosh, having learned about this in the past, I'm now standing here and seeing it all.' And it was such a like full circle moment and even then like I remember coming back and talking to some of my friends about it, like back home once I finally came back, and talking to my friends about and telling them how like that was just so amazing. Being able to see so many things that you talked about in high school or you grew up learning about, but now finally being able to be there and even like kind of touching back as a freshman student, that is such like amazing experience because a lot of freshman students don't get the opportunity to do that. And so every time I remember like I would just be so in awe, so appreciative, and it just reminded me how blessed I was that I was able to have this experience so 100% that, I remember that was a very full circle moment and I I'll always remember it, just standing there and reminiscing on that.

Z: You know that's amazing I think that just speaks like study abroad in general and travel and that's kind of what it's all about, is like those moments of just - it's almost surreal in those moments, I think. When you're standing there in front of something that you studied or something that you've always wanted to see and then to be there like in the moment is really amazing.

M: Yes I 100% agree.

Z: So our last question is just something that we ask everyone who comes on this podcast and that's what advice do you have for other students who are considering studying abroad?

M: Do it. Like 100% just take that leap of faith like I did.

V: Haha yah you really did just take the leap!

M: Yes I really did. Just do it. Just like honestly it's something that you'll never regret and we hear a lot of people talking about studying abroad but like I mentioned, even within this podcast, hearing about something is not the same as being able to live it and being able to take those moments in. So, 100% just, like if you know this is something that you've been wanting to do, do it. And then even a little just kind of like something that I did was and someone even told me, I remember one of my mentors, she told me like she gave me a journal and she told me write in those moments where you feeling like those emotions or you're like kind of feeling in awe, write it down. And I remember, she gave me that note book and I took it with me. So if you do end up studying abroad, take a notebook, take a little journal

and just write, write whenever you have a chance. Whether it's on a bus, whether it's on a train, on a plane coming back or going to, just write about it. And even now I look back on those, that journal and I'm able to feel those emotions again. I'm able to like remember it all. And so 100% do it. Go study abroad and if you're going, take a journal.

V: Amazing. Maria, thank you so much for being here today and telling us your story. You had so many amazing anecdotes about studying abroad and like Zoë said, I'm just going to reiterate, you had a what sounds like a very full experience there.

M: Yes, thank you. Honestly thank you so much. Like I tell people all the time, I love talking about studying abroad, I love encouraging students so 100% thank you so much for having me.

Z: Thank you!

V: Thank you!

V: Before we disembark, we want to talk about the FSU Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement, or CARE for short!

As Maria mentioned, CARE provides equity and access to traditionally underrepresented students and aims to contribute to successful retention and graduation. The IP Diversity and Inclusion team is committed to working with CARE to provide more information about study abroad to CARE students.

Z: To learn more about the CARE program and the resources CARE provides, we encourage you to check out their website at care.fsu.edu. We also want to mention IP's First Generation Scholarship, which you can learn more about on our website at international.fsu.edu.

V: Thanks to Maria for talking with us today, and thanks to all of you for listening!

Z: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Zoe Crook and Vanessa Guirey.