

**Leah:** “Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs. I'm Leah,”

**Zoë:** “and I'm Zoë, and we're 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.”

**Leah:** “In today's episode we talked to Carlos Rivera Fernandez, an FSU alum who studied abroad in Valencia and then went back to be a program assistant there. Carlos is now doing his masters in visual anthropology at the University of Manchester in the UK. We hear about his time abroad, the documentaries he made while in Valencia, and some great advice for students. Let's go to our conversation now.”

**Leah:** "Hi Carlos, can you introduce yourself to our listeners?"

**Carlos:** “Yeah so my name is Carlos Rivera Fernandez, I am an alumni of Florida State University. I graduated in spring of 2021 with a Bachelor of Science in anthropology and minors in Spanish and Russian languages. I'm also an alumnus of Florida State University Valencia at which I studied abroad over the summer of 2019 for the whole summer. Currently I am based in Manchester, where I'm a student at the University of Manchester working to get my Master of Arts in visual anthropology and yeah so I'm doing great.”

**Zoë:** “Awesome, good to talk to you! So, first off can you just tell us a little bit about your time in Valencia as a study abroad student and then as a program assistant?”

**Carlos:** “Sure, yeah, I forgot to mention that as well, that I was a program assistant later on in the spring of 2022. I'll start off in the summer so it is a little cliché to say, I'm sure you guys get everybody on here that says it but studying abroad is kind of the best time of your life so far, so far so good at least.

I remember going there kind of like not empty handed but I went there with not really any expectation but I really go with any friends on the flight there I met one of my best friends today and then I also ended up rooming with someone who would be my one of one of my best friends as well so you get to meet some really cool people and then of course it's always really good to get out of the country and just go explore the world and being there in Valencia was really good, because I mean Spain is just a really, really lovely country, very inviting in terms of economics and in terms of weather as well it's also really nice because it's a nice port city so you can get the travel to a lot of different places if you want to travel over weekends or during your spring, summer, fall breaks.

Yeah, overall my experience in Valencia was just really nice because it allowed me to meet different people, it also helped me do some career development; I got to work on a couple of film productions while I was there. Film productions as in film productions that I by myself led under one documentary while I was a student there and I kind of just like put that on the Internet for people to be able to see, and then when I returned as a program assistant I went in with the mindset of doing a documentary film on the Fallas festival which is held every year in Valencia for the past 400 years now it's basically their springtime festival.

So yeah it's it's again just being in Valencia and being able to experience life somewhere other than South Florida it was it was just such a privilege, yeah.”

**Leah:** “Awesome. So can you tell us a little bit more about the documentaries you worked on while you were in Valencia?”

**Carlos:** “Yeah, so that first one that I did while I was a student it was kind of just like a it was kind of just a testing run to see if I enjoyed doing documentary features - not features, excuse me, it was a documentary short - but yeah it was kind of like my big question was what is Valencian identity and how is it linked to the greater Spanish identity, because Valencia is actually considered a national community within Spain. There are several autonomous communities that are also considered national communities, meaning that these communities have their own history, usually their own ethnicity, and their own language, is above all else is what really helps define that within the Spanish constitution. Valencia is one of those communities and so I wanted to get to know that identity intimately so when I got there I just kind of went around asking people hey what does it mean to be Valencian, what does it mean to be Spanish, and what does it mean to be both?”

I had the help of Juan Salazar Bonet, who is the resident archaeologist of FSU Valencia, to whom I am forever indebted for helping me make a lot of connections and who I actually considered a really, really dear friend now, umm and then later on when I went as a PA and did my film on Fallas, I kind of took a similar approach but only using I wanted to explore how Fallas the festival, in and of itself, was able to reproduce Valencian identity. Whether that be in the consumption of fire or whether it was in the erection of these monuments that they build that are sometimes 10 stories tall - maybe that's an exaggeration, 7 stories tall, but yeah both films really wanted to focus on who the Valencians were, what Valencia was, and just getting to know the city and the people on intimate level.”

**Zoë:** “Yeah, that's really really interesting. We watched the first documentary you did and that was was really great, I loved like learning from that and I feel like I'm learning just hearing you talk about it and you kind of touched on this but I'm curious like what did you learn from doing those documentaries and also like interviewing the locals in Valencia?”

**Carlos:** “You learn a lot doing this kind of work uh it is it's it's anthropological work so it's very tied to what I studied but it's also cinematic work so it's very creative and artistic.

What I learned was Valencia is just one big family, like the whole city is just one big family, and it's so it's so weird the way that works because especially in terms of the Fallas festival you get together with your neighborhood and you create one of these giant monuments and you know you butt heads with each other and you argue with each other but then you also party with each other and you laugh and you have a great time with each other so um in many ways Valencia is just a giant metaphor for family and the toils but also the joy that that really brings you.”

**Leah:** “Cool! So we know that you have a documentary submitted for the Film Festival circuit, can you tell us about that process and how it's going?”

**Carlos:** “The one that I have - I have a couple of documentary films touring the festival circuit right now, but the one pertaining to Valencia is the one about Fallas. Submitting to festivals is a bit tricky because you'll submit to 10 and you'll maybe get one that accepts it, so it's a little, you have to have tough skin to do it. Thankfully enough the Valencia one so far has gotten into one even as far as India there was we were accepted into the Himachal Pradesh International Film Festival which was really cool I sent that to Juan Salazar and he was like ‘Oh my gosh we're in India’ and I was like ‘Yeah I guess so!’ right now it's it's

making its way across several other anthropological film festivals I've submitted to the SVA festival, Society for Visual Anthropology Festival in Toronto, forget where else but yeah it's it's a long arduous process that can be heartbreaking sometimes when you spend so much money submitting to all these festivals and you hear back a no but then once you hear that yes and you get people to actually see your films, it's always a good feeling when that happens so yeah."

**Zoë:** "Yeah absolutely. So any plans to go to India or Toronto or any of these places?"

**Carlos:** "Not India, the India one already passed and that's a little too much money, however I am considering going to Toronto and that'll be in November I think I just have to coordinate with a bunch of stuff because it's just a lot of traveling and money yeah but I would love to go to Toronto for that, yeah."

**Zoë:** "So you kind of mentioned that you're in grad school now studying visual anthropology at the University of Manchester is that what you said?" (**Carlos:** "Yes"). "Yes, okay, so can you just talk about like, that passion of the visual anthropology and how it relates to the documentaries you made in Valencia?"

**Carlos:** "It's really funny, because I guess I kind of just always grew up on film, my dad would always sit me and my older sister - because we kind of grew up with each other but then my younger sister as well she's a bit more removed from us in terms of her age - but we would sit down and just he would show us all his favorite movies and one of the ones that I was particularly fond of was Indiana Jones and so those are just like my comfort films now which kind of makes sense given like how much I really enjoy traveling I really enjoy doing anthropology. This isn't me advocating for the type of anthropology Indiana Jones does because it's very violent and destructive anthropology. That doesn't mean they're not fun films, they're amazing films, and I'm so excited for this fifth one that's coming up."

But I guess in many ways that you know it's that was those were the baby steps you know you first you consume then you stumble along you begin to produce, eventually you get to the point where I guess you just start making films. I spent my entire undergraduate in Tallahassee working on several film productions I don't just work in documentary, I also work in narrative - I have one particular film that's done really well in the festival circuit called 'The Only Good Thing', that's a narrative film that I did after I graduated. But yeah, it gets to the point where you're all of a sudden doing a Master of Arts in visual anthropology in the United Kingdom. So it's it's just a long process and it's a lot of fun, there's a lot of good, a lot of bad, a lot of heartbreak, but then the highs outweigh the lows in terms of filmmaking."

**Leah:** "That's great! So could you just tell us what it's like to live abroad as a grad student in Manchester?"

**Carlos:** "It's expensive. Yeah, you know there is there is something to say about being romantic about travel, and it's great to go travel, and it's great to meet all sorts of new people who you really learn to hold in your heart, but there's also again there's a pullback sometimes you miss family, sometimes you miss home, sometimes you're not so stable. You know I haven't really been home for quite some time now, since at least January of last year because even over the summer I did a program in Athens on the anthropological filmmaking as well, so, there is a little bit of a push and a pull like there is with everything else in terms of being not geographically stable."

But like I said there's a lot of stuff to learn in terms of going out and seeing the world for yourself and there's, uh, Anthony Bourdain was one of my inspirations growing up I'm not sure if you guys are

familiar with him, but he once said that when you're traveling don't be afraid to look stupid because that's how you learn you learn by doing stupid things, and that's not to say you should be, what's the word, deliberately stupid, but you know don't be afraid to open your mind and not know anything in order for you to learn and so I kind of try to live by that and when it comes to traveling and learning things and seeing so many different places and meeting so many different people.”

**Zoë:** “Yeah absolutely. I think that that's kind of like that's what this podcast is all about is like hearing those stories, that's what study abroad is all about, so we absolutely agree with you and I think that that's - I love that you touch on like, you know there are parts about being away from home that can be challenging, but also it will really expand your horizons, so I definitely agree with that 100% . In kind of talking about that, like did your study abroad experience inspire you at all to go abroad for grad school, and then also like after you graduate you continue to live abroad, or do you think you come back home, what are your plans?”

**Carlos:** “In terms of my experience in Valencia inspiring me to study abroad, funny story actually I remember when I graduated high school I told my dad I don't want to go to college, I just want to – like, give me the money you would have given me for college and I want to go travel I was like let's hold your horses, let's get you a degree before anything. I was like, OK fine at least put me in a study abroad program. Okay fine, do a study abroad program. And so even though I had traveled before, that, you know that really opened me up to kind of going out and seeing the world by myself.

I remember one particular trip that I took with some of my friends when I was studying abroad in Valencia, we went to Marrakesh and that was a particular culture shock. Marrakesh is one of the commonly visited destinations for Valencia students because it's easy access, relatively cheap flights, but I remember getting there and just the experience of being in a state of culture shock where I hadn't seen anything like this before really kind of like edged me on to the point where I was like, OK I want to see more, I want to keep going, see what I can do.

Since then, you know again living in England it's very similar to America but there's obviously some different challenges but then I've been to places as far as the Republic of Georgia, which is just south of Russia, I've been to Beirut and Lebanon which is a really cool trip as well, the point being that once you kind of open up those gates you realize okay where can I go next to keep learning about the world and about the things that interest me in many ways, yes that experience in Valencia did open up a few doors for me.

In terms of after graduation I'm not exactly sure yet and over the summer I'll actually be in Puerto Rico again doing my masters thesis so I will be back in the Americas for then, and then I have to come back to present and defend my thesis but after December the door remains open. I don't have any particular plans - I know that I need to get a job to pay off the \$45,000 that I have in debt to the US government, again being abroad is expensive, it's not always very pretty but that's the main objective is that I have to get a job somewhere get some money. In terms of where that is I guess it's just wherever the money is, it can be in Spain, it can be in the States, I've been looking at Atlanta, I've been looking at New York, I don't want it to be in England because it's cold and wet here most of the time but yeah. Yeah so I'm keeping my doors open and just going wherever I guess the wind takes me yeah.”

**Leah:** "So you already referenced some advice from Anthony Bourdain, but our next and final question is something we ask everyone on the podcast, what advice do you have for students who are considering studying abroad?"

**Carlos:** "I guess apart from the don't be afraid to look stupid, just go. Like, I have been making a point about the money this whole time, but you know money is always going to come back. Money is always going to come back and these experiences, the opportunities that you have to live them, they're not always going to be here and so be deliberate in what you do, make sure you're not just extracting you know, the type of sun and sand tourist that you know just gets drunk on the beach or whatever. Make sure you're making something deliberate, whether that be learning, whether that be making a film, or that be volunteering, taking part in some kind of community development, just take the initiative to do it and go out with an open heart."

**Zoë:** "Love that. Thank you so much that's all the questions we have for you today but we really want to just say thank you for being on the podcast, I think you have just have a really interesting story to tell so thank you."

**Carlos:** "Thank you for having me it's been a privilege and it's always good to give back to FSU, you know - Go Noles."

**Leah:** "Before we disembark, we want to talk about the IP newsletter. Did you know IP has an e-mail newsletter that goes out once a semester? In it, you can learn about upcoming events, how to stay connected to IP, contests and more. "

**Zoë:** "You can sign up through the link in our bio on social media and we'll put it in the show notes too. You can also sign up through our website, at [international.fsu.edu](http://international.fsu.edu). We'd love to stay connected with you, so be sure to sign up!"

**Leah:** "Thanks to Carlos for talking with us today, and thanks to all of you for listening."

**Zoë:** "This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann and our logo was designed by Vanessa Guiery. Thanks to GEOSET Studios and Michael Susnjer at FSU for sound engineering. Editing and research is done by us, Zoë Crook and Leah Canavan."