

During my semester in Alcalá, I [interned] in a center for troubled and underprivileged adolescents in Azuqueca, a nearby city. It was a definitely a beneficial, albeit challenging experience, because many of the teenagers who came to the center every afternoon were poor, Moroccan immigrants. Interacting with the kids was difficult because often their Spanish wasn't the best, although they all spoke it more or less fluently. I did a project on immigration for one class while I was there, so I was able to interview some of the immigrants who came to the center; hearing their stories with all the hardships they endured at home, in school, etc. was definitely a learning experience for me and something I couldn't have learned in any class.

The internship also helped me in becoming more assertive and confident with my Spanish. It was one of the few situations in which I was without the benefit of other Americans or English-speakers, so whether I was helping with workshops, addressing groups of kids, or talking with management I had to understand, think, and communicate effectively in Spanish.

I chose to intern at the community center because, coming from a big family with many nieces and nephews, I love kids and teenagers. I also figured I would learn more Spanish and colloquial phrases being around younger people. When I chose to work there I didn't do so because I thought it would have any relation to my major, international business. Since my minor was Spanish and I am interested in immigration, the internship was extremely helpful in those two areas. The way I saw it, the internship was a hands-on way of learning the Spanish language and culture. We had the option of taking another class or doing the internship, and for me it was a no-brainer; you can learn so much more outside of the classroom by doing what I did than by taking another class.

I can't say the internship was exactly what I expected it was going to be. I spent a lot more time just talking with the teenagers or playing foosball with them than actually working with them, or teaching them things in a structured environment. It was a lot more laid back than I thought it was going to be. It was almost as if I had to take the initiative to interact with the kids every time I went because many times there wasn't an organized activity going on in which I could participate. For the first couple weeks I kind of had to feel around to see what my role would be at the center. By the end I was having a good time and felt comfortable going there to work. I realized that to get the most out of the experience I had to throw myself in the activities. I volunteered to help in supervising costume-making for a festival that the town had. I started sitting in with a group of older women who got together every week to do some crazy kind of knitting workshop, which turned out to be very interesting. I would purposely engage some of the kids in conversation to get to know them better, and so they felt comfortable around me. By the end I was friends with mostly everyone at the place, and felt I had learned a lot. Just like anything else in life, it wasn't what I expected going into it, but I adjusted and tried to make the most of the experience by meeting as many people as I could and involving myself in the activities of the center.

I would definitely recommend doing an internship over taking another class. Almost all of us felt that Alcalá was a great learning experience, because we were able to experience the culture by seeing cool places and meeting some great people. During the internship I became friends with some of my coworkers and we went out a couple times together. I became an awesome foosball player playing with the kids who would come everyday, and I learned a lot of Spanish through speaking with them. I was also able to correct some of their opinions about the United States that they could never have thought differently about if they hadn't met me; I was a positive influence in their lives I hope, and they definitely taught me some things off the foosball table, too. You can't learn these things or have these experiences sitting in a classroom.