My Study Abroad Experience in Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain

By Bridgett Neff

I used my Honors Enrichment Award to fund my two-week summer study abroad experience in Barcelona, Spain, where I studied LGBTQ Policy and Advocacy. Throughout the trip, we met with local and international businesses and several community members who work with or in the LGBTQ community in some capacity. These professionals included activists, non-profit workers, gay tour operators, lawyers, lesbian bars owners, and the manager of a gay hotel. We learned about the political progress that Barcelona has made for the LGBTQ community, such as being one of the first governments to legalize marriage equality, and recently enacting an anti-homophobia law that shifts the burden of proof onto the accused. Barcelona is also socially accepting of the LGBTQ community, although more attention and space are given to cisgender gay men than transgender individuals and queer women.

After graduation, I hope to work in politics and activism around human rights. Although LGBTQ rights are often an overlooked element of human rights, studying the protections afforded to the LGBTQ community in Barcelona contributed to my education by offering a hopeful and progressive perspective on the future of human rights. This education abroad experience also contributed to my education by allowing me to further explore the tension between Madrid and Catalunya, an autonomous region of Spain that voted in favor of succession from the country this past fall. Before traveling to Catalunya, I mostly sided with the Spanish government because the economic and logistical fallout from a Catalonian succession appeared more problematic than Catalonians remaining under Spanish control. However, after hearing the perspective of our Catalan tour guide who was in favor of succession, I became more empathetic to the plights of Catalonians and their desire for independence.
Studying abroad in Barcelona has been invaluable to my education. I am grateful to the University Honors Program for helping facilitate this experience, and I am excited to use the knowledge I gained about Spanish politics and LGBTQ rights in my professional and academic careers.