

## Engineering Student Ariana Zimmerman Shares Her Experience In Valencia April 15, 2018

### ***UVA Engineering in Valencia, Spain - Fall Semester 2018***

The UVA Engineering in Valencia program is designed for Second Year, Fall Semester engineering students majoring in Systems, Computer Science, Biomedical, Chemical, Electrical, and Mechanical Engineering. Students take direct credit engineering courses, taught in English by Spanish professors, at the Universitat Politècnica de València. Engineering students must have completed at least SPAN 2020 or the equivalent in order to attend, and are required to take at least one Spanish course in Valencia at our very own University of Virginia building. Ariana, majoring in Systems Engineering and minoring in Spanish (a decision made after studying abroad), studied abroad the Fall semester of her Second Year. Here is her story.



### **My New Home Away From Home**

Stepping foot onto the massive, 9 seats per rowed airplane I had only seen before in movies, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I had never been abroad before, let alone lived in a foreign country by myself for four months, and I was quite literally taking a step out of my comfort zone like no other. I settled into my middle aisle, middle seated position and grasped hold of the armchairs, bracing myself for what was soon to be the best decision I have ever made in my life.

Each and every morning, I would be greeted by Mamá (my host mother) at the kitchen table, sporting her famous cheetah print robe and bright blue curlers in her hair, enjoying her usual cup of coffee and slice of toast for breakfast. I had the ease of knowing she had already prepared my bocadillo (large sandwich) for the day, and would have a quick conversation with her before running (literally) to catch my city bus to school at the Universitat Politècnica de València.



Before heading straight to Ordinary Differential Equations, my two classmates and I would stop at “Café Two Day”, a small coffee shop on the university campus. After my classmates would order their two “café con leches” and I would order my “café americano” for only 1.25 euros (~\$1.50), we would take our (extremely small sized) coffee cups to stimulate us through our “early” morning classes. By the end of my experience in Valencia, we were basically best friends with our barista (thanks Zo!)

After rolling out of bed after my afternoon nap (“siesta”- a typical thing in Spanish culture) came one of my favorite parts of my days. I would head right across the street to Colegio Nuestra Señora del Pilar where I would assist in teaching English to over 90+ native Spanish high schoolers. Being able to interact with native Spanish students almost my age, and help them with something as trivial as learning English, was absolutely amazing. They were mesmerized by

my “American accent”, and would constantly ask me questions about the life I lived here. My favorite question I received was, “Why are your hamburgers so big?” It was so interesting to get raw questions like these to really see the ideas and perceptions that they had about America. They alike, however, were able to teach me so much about Valencia (like the best gelato place in town), and about Spanish culture in general that I am so grateful for.

Close to every weeknight, my housemate and I would meet up with either fellow students from our program, or my Spanish “intercambios” (Spanish college students), at our most favorite location in Valencia- “Most”. “Most” is an extremely cheap, traditionally college restaurant that many university students would go to at night time before returning home for dinner. Time was spent here getting to relax, catch up with friends, and let go of any stress which you may had been holding on to throughout the day. The atmosphere was always loud, rambunctious, and overall so exciting that we never wanted to leave.



My two intercambios, Bea and Sara, became two of my closest friends while in Valencia. We would switch off conversing in English and Spanish to aid the both of our learnings, and would relate to each other on so many levels I never knew possible. By the end of my journey in Valencia, we knew each other’s lives and gossip as if we went to University together. If they had gone to UVA, I am convinced they would have been my best friends here too as well. This aspect of the program was one of my favorites because it allowed me to step out of my inner circle of people within the program, and really get to know native Spanish students in their same times of lives who are just like me.

Although I had the amazing opportunity of traveling the world to places like Germany, Portugal, and eight different Croatian islands, I always had the same feeling of ease as I would fly into the Valencia airport over the Mediterranean after a weekend of exploration. Returning to Mamá’s opened arms was always the best part, and I am so thankful and grateful to be able to say I truly have a home in Valencia.

*~Ariana Zimmerman, SEAS 2021~  
Valencia, Spain*

