

Sabbatical report/Lane Community College

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I do think that you have to have a sense of place in this world. In a way, it's the key to being positive. You have to posit yourself as the Latin root of the word says. Archimedes said it a long time ago. He said, "Give me a place to stand and I will move the world." Luis Valdez in an interview with Bettina Gray

Introduction

During fall term 2012, I studied at the 518 year old University of Santiago de Compostela in the autonomous community of Galicia in the northwest corner of Spain. In Santiago de Compostela, a Unesco World Heritage site and the capital city of Galicia, I attended several seminars to improve my language skills, my knowledge of this region of Spain and to increase my cultural knowledge, understanding and competency. I worked to achieve these goals through a multidisciplinary approach to the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, known in English as The Way of Saint James (with the primary focus on 11th-c. to today). The Way is a 1000 year old pilgrimage route in the north of Spain leading to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela where the remains of the Apostle Saint James the Greater are said to be buried.



Santiago de Compostela, a Unesco World Heritage site

The initial part of this impressively well-organized course of study included approximately 60 hours of instruction via seminars and thoughtfully planned daily “aulas itinerantes” (field trips). The goal of the course was to help students to achieve a better understanding of and appreciation for the historic and cultural significance of the Camino de Santiago. The multidisciplinary approach included classes in language, literature, history, art history, geography and regional gastronomy. All subject matter was taught by professors of the University of Santiago de Compostela. Including myself, there were 17 students registered for this course of study (15 Brazilians and one Irishman.) We were received as honored

guests by both faculty and administrators and were even invited to the Ayuntamiento (city hall and Galician parliament building) to be honored in a televised reception with the mayor of Santiago de Compostela. I was impressed that the mayor had done his research and had thoughtful comments to make about Brazilian, Irish and US connections to the Camino.



Reception with the Mayor of Santiago de Compostela

Following my formal study at the University of Santiago de Compostela, I participated, under the guidance of a doctoral student in medieval history, in a “roving classroom” as fellow students and I set out on foot to complete the part of the Camino de Santiago that traverses Galicia. The schedule on the Camino, like the one in Santiago, was jam packed. Each night we learned of the plans for the following day. During the day we hiked about 17 miles with occasional field trips during the day. After a shower and a short break, we would set off on a field trip before dinner. Back at our hostel, we would dine, review handouts about the next day, go to bed with a full stomach and rise early to have a quick breakfast and start the same routine once more. Back in Santiago de Compostela, I received my Compostelana, the official document granted to those who complete the pilgrimage. Later, my fellow students and I were warmly welcomed back to the University with a formal reception where we received our course diploma.

During both parts of the course I documented my experience with a photo archive and have been further exploring and interpreting my experiences impressionistically via the production of a series of Galician inspired “micro cuentos” (a form of Flash Fiction in Spanish). Additionally, I am currently producing various Power Point presentations to tell educationally relevant stories and to explore content from both big and little “C/c” culture. I now have compiled enough material and have gained sufficient knowledge to proceed with various types of plans such as video and additional Power Point storytelling with still images, text and music. I am also pursuing the authorship of culturally infused lesson plans for core and conversational Spanish classes as well as a cultural/language learning unit in the upcoming edition of my current textbook and for a Spanish language textbook that I am presently outlining.



The pilgrim's passport

Review of objectives

Prior to this sabbatical, my language and cultural experiences in Spain had been minimal. My academic background includes undergraduate degrees in Chicano Studies and Spanish language and literature (Peninsular and Latin American) and several years of graduate courses and research in Latin American language and literature. Although I have studied Spanish literature and linguistics and had traveled previously in Spain, I felt that I had experienced insufficient opportunities to appreciate Peninsular culture and to become deeply familiar with any dialect of Peninsular Spanish. In fact, I recognized that I had had occasional difficulties understanding the spoken language when in other regions of Spain. Of course, given the fact that there are 17 autonomous communities in Spain and 23 countries in all where Spanish is the primary language, it is natural that the differences will pose major challenges for any speaker of Spanish. Since the Spanish-speaking world is so linguistically and culturally vast and diverse, that clearly places a great responsibility on teachers of the language to step out into that world to continue to develop knowledge and proficiency and to gain thoughtful insights through expanded cultural awareness.

During my time in Galicia, I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that my Spanish of the Americas was not a barrier to successful communication both socially and in the academic environment. I also felt some affinities with many of the people I met in Galicia and I continue to engage in a personal exploration to help identify the cultural aspects that resonate with my own cultural perceptions. Perhaps these affinities stem from some form of genealogical memory since my familial roots have been traced back 1000 years to this part of the Iberian Peninsula. Before undertaking this journey, I had hoped that it would materialize as a kind of homecoming for me in terms of the linguistic heritage and historical roots of Hispanic culture in the Americas and in terms of my own family origins. The actual experience did not disappoint.



*With José Miguel Andrade,
professor of medieval history*



Dinner with classmates and Camino guides

Now, as I work to interpret and further understand my experiences in Galicia, I do so through my evolving skills as an educator, as a photographer and as an author of very short fiction. This sabbatical has helped me transform my way of perceiving my experiences from a discrete focus (academically-intellectually versus artistically-introspectively) to a more integrated and inclusive perspective that I believe to be more interesting and that has a greater potential to resonate meaningfully with others. For me, one of the most gratifying outcomes of the sabbatical experience continues to be my increasing skill to interpret events by viewing them in multiple ways.

The Past is Near

The morning begins in the future of a quiet past. There will be aging hórreos, one more slate roof and some thousands of steps later a chance meeting with sadness. Not surprisingly, a gaitero plays on in memory as I approach a pilgrims' cemetery. Just under foot, in that spot that is moist and deep and between stones, I imagine a fate hopefully unlike mine yet I cannot help but sense the stillness of another time and the end of my story.



"Hórreo" for grain storage



Techo de pizarra (slate roof)



*Cementerio de los peregrinos
(Ancient pilgrims' cemetery)*

A "gaitero" is one who plays the gaita, a Galician bagpipe.

As a photographer, I attempted to capture a sense of place in Galicia that I could share with colleagues and students. As a writer of very short fiction I found myself slipping out of time and into a spatial sense of awareness that helped me to focus in

new and insightful ways on the task of documenting a sense of place. For me, this sabbatical proved to be a unique opportunity to view the mysterious and intricate fabric that connected a geographical place to an internal space. Within that space I found a source of inspiration for writing and for approaching language learning with my students. Back at Lane, the events in Galicia infused my teaching with new creativity. I returned home renewed and my teaching is now informed by my improved linguistic and cultural skills and expanded awareness of this corner of Spain. I now have the raw material and the motivation to create new and diverse materials for instruction.

Outcomes

My goals of attaining increased language proficiency, enhanced cultural knowledge and competency, improved story telling skill and the acquisition of the raw material necessary to create various types of multimedia presentations were all made possible through the academic and social aspects of this course of study at the University of Santiago de Compostela as well as through independent research, reflection and practice.

I noticed a significant gain in terms of my comfort level while communicating with native speakers from Galicia and had ample opportunities to hone my listening skills with regard to the Spanish of this region. Of course, I was also exposed to a good deal of written and spoken Galician, the language spoken by some 3 million persons, principally in Galicia. An unexpected bonus proved to be the opportunity to practice German with our historian guide on the Camino who has studied in Germany and who loves to speak the language.

My knowledge of the history and culture of this region increased dramatically through a thoughtful series of lectures and my cultural competency made major gains through keen observation and interaction with my Galician hosts.

My ability to distill experience into informed and thoughtful stories continues to improve as I reflect on my Galician life and now work to create meaningful presentations with still and video imagery, the use of sparse text and music and the use of the genre of the micro cuento. As I distill my experiences into various media, I do so with my audience in mind. In the classroom, this means using my skill to enhance language learning and cultural knowledge in multiple levels of instruction. My approach must be specific to the level of proficiency of the student group. This is a challenge that I continue to work on through reflection, practice and focus on the learning outcomes that I hope to achieve.

My daily experience in Galicia was relentlessly packed with learning opportunities and I was delightfully exhausted at the end of each day. On the first day my fellow students and I were given ID cards to gain admittance to the University's gym facilities but were warned that we would be too tired and too busy to use them. They were correct. Since we learned so much, it is difficult and probably pointless to outline here the specifics of what we achieved. Instead, below I will provide just a few interesting and relevant pieces of information that can be summarized succinctly.

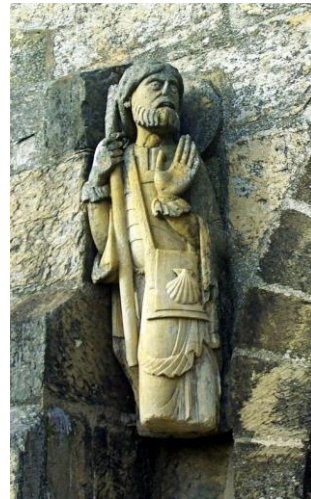
- There are three manifestations of Santiago (Saint James):

 1. Santiago el mayor--apóstol (Saint James the Greater—apostle)
 2. Santiago el caballero (Saint James the soldier)
 3. Santiago el peregrino (Saint James the Pilgrim)

It is interesting to note that Santiago the soldier has been appropriated in many forms and even in the Americas. In Spain, during the Reconquista, he was to become Santiago matamoros (killer of Moors). This of course became politically incorrect in recent years. A statue of Santiago matamoros stands in the great Cathedral of Santiago where he is seen on horseback drawing his sword and slaying Moors. Rows of flowers were placed to block our view of the Moors and Santiago was thus transformed from Santiago matamoros to Santiago cortaflores (Saint James the flower cutter). By the way, some indigenous tribes in Peru appropriated “Santiago mataespañoles” (Santiago the killer of Spaniards).



Santiago cortaflores (Saint James the flower cutter)



Santiago el peregrino (Saint James as pilgrim)

- Most visitors to Santiago learn the popular etymology of “Compostela” that shows that the word comes from the Latin “campus stellae” which in Spanish means “campo de estrellas” or “field of stars” in English. We learned however that a more widely accepted origin is “compositum” referring to a funeral construction, in this case the small edifice that was used for the burial of Santiago.
- Although there are no supporting biblical references, legend says that the apostle James was sent by Jesus to preach his Word in the Iberian Peninsula where he spent some time in the region of Galicia. Years later, back in the Holy Land, he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in the year 44 C.E. His friends are said to have taken his body out of Jerusalem and to have placed it on a boat that, without any crew, miraculously found its way across the Mediterranean, around the Strait of Gibraltar and up the coast to Galicia where its journey came to an end. To make a very long story very short, he was buried on a hill by his Spanish disciples and his body was discovered by

a hermit some 800 years later. The bones were authenticated as being those of Saint James the Greater and two of his Spanish disciples. The site began to draw pilgrims more than 1000 years ago.

- The Codex Calixtinus is the oldest surviving manuscript of the 5th book of the Liber Sancti Jacobi (Book of Saint James). It is known as the “Guía del peregrino” (The Pilgrim’s Guide). It was written around 1130 and describes 13 stages of travel from the Pyrenees to the city of Santiago de Compostela. It can be viewed in a museum attached to the Cathedral. It was stolen and recovered in 2011. The theft is highly controversial as the details surrounding the events remain shrouded in mystery. It remains a popular topic of discussion in the region. In my language class at the University, we developed a taste for debating this topic as we practiced formulating possible scenarios about the theft and argued them in class using the conventions that characterize a debate in Spain.

Conclusion

Through my experiences in Galicia, I was able to integrate the learning of language and culture through a multidisciplinary approach that provided me with many excellent opportunities to develop both knowledge and proficiencies. The depth and intensity of the experience have produced lasting memories that visit me regularly and that compel me to reflect on their significance in both my professional and personal life. Previously, my personal sense of place did not include Spain yet now it does. Within my expanding sense of my own origins, as Archimedes said, I have a place to stand from which I can move the world. Although that world is my small place in the academic community and in the classroom with my students, I do feel that I am better prepared to deliver on my promise to help students to experience something beyond their prior life events as they learn the Spanish language and gain appreciation for the diverse cultures of the Spanish speaking world. My continuing reflection and practice will help me to produce something concrete and educationally valuable that will involve students experientially in the learning process.



*The always present vieira symbol
(Scallop shell as symbol of the Camino)*

A final note

While on the Camino, a series of astonishing events unfolded that challenge rational explanation. These events are highly personal and I cannot even begin to explain them here. I can say though that because of what happened “I get it” now. I appreciate how this place has drawn so many over so much time. The “goose bump effect” will visit me again and again the remainder of my days. What happened was and is a powerful gift that will guide me whenever human reason is insufficient.