

The 40th START Program (Spain)

From March 10th to 26th 2017, twenty first-year students along with Professor Emiko Nakasaka (Graduate School of Social Sciences), Associate Professor Kazutoshi Suzuki and two other supervising faculty members participated in the 40th START program, studying for around two weeks at the University Rovira i Virgili (URV), in Tarragona, Spain.

At URV, students attended Spanish language classes run by URV professors and graduate students studying Spanish teaching methods, as well as lectures in English about various aspects of Spain (including the Spanish civil war, the Catalan independence movement, modernist architecture, tourism, and environmental issues). Although taking lectures in English seemed difficult, the content of their lectures were connected to the places that students go to for excursions, making it an immersive learning experience. For their Spanish lessons, students were divided into two groups of ten based on their language ability, and were thus able to study under careful care. In the first few days, with heads swimming with Spanish many students struggled through the lessons. However, as time went by students displayed active output of their studies, such as integrating phrases they had learnt into conversations with their host families.

On their outing to the Ebro River historical site where evidence of the civil war remains, students experienced shock at the freshness of the event and were able to understand the importance of preserving peace. In another outing they visited the old city area of Tarragona, where there are many preserved historical remains of the Roman Empire. Here students did not just participate in simple sight-seeing, but learnt about the political role of Tarragona during the Roman era and Roman architecture, an invaluable immersive learning experience. They also witnessed the preparations for traditional Catalan festival, which activities included creating *castells* (human towers). The students had a precious opportunity to take part in the human tower together with real team members. Aside from this they experienced cooking Mediterranean food at the monastery of Mon Sant Benet, visited the city of Reus which is the birthplace of Antoni Gaudi and famous for Modernist architecture. The students gained firsthand experience of the culture and history of Catalonia through these activities.

In the second week students began preparation for their final presentation.

This presentation was to be given in Spanish, and was about an aspect of Spain – history, cuisine, architecture – whatever topic they had a special interest in. Initially the students were worried and unsure about their Spanish, but after learning that the most important thing was not perfect grammar but to speak confidently to their audience and communicate their ideas in their own words, they made effort to put that into action. What they learnt through this presentation is the core of START Program to foster students' Global Core Competency, which will become a huge asset in their future. Also, to the host families whom they had awkwardly greeted at their first meeting, hugging and crying, on their final day together students expressed their sorrow at parting.

Using this experience as a first step, it is expected that students will continue to foster their global communication skills and progress through their student lives with a broader understanding of the world.



At the remains of a Roman Amphitheater



Experiencing cooking Mediterranean food at Mon Sant Benet



During a Spanish class



After giving their final presentations