



~Victoria Monsivaiz

# STUDY ABROAD

*bringing back our students*

Fresno State students discover new truths about the world - and themselves while studying abroad in 2020.

**THE SPREADING CORONAVIRUS BROUGHT THEIR TIME OVERSEAS TO AN ABRUPT END.**

BY DOUGLAS HOAGLAND

**As students booked flights home**, they juggled gratitude for experiences in distant lands with disappointment at returning early. Throughout those hectic days, Fresno State officials stood with them.

The university monitored the pandemic from its early stages in China, says Dr. Scott Moore, dean of the Division of Continuing and Global Education, which oversees study abroad programs. "With some luck, we did not have anyone studying in China, which is quite unusual," Moore says. Students in South Korea came home first, followed by those in Italy – two countries with early outbreaks of the coronavirus. "Data showed the virus spreading quickly so we made the difficult decision to bring home all Fresno State students regardless of how the virus was being reported inside of each country." Over about a two-week period, 30 students flew home.

**"We made the difficult decision to bring home all Fresno State students regardless of how the virus was being reported inside of each country." ~Moore**

Three of those students – Marbella Núñez, Victoria Monsivaiz, and Demitria Wack – shared their experiences. All three appreciated Fresno State's help in returning home, and they remain enthusiastic about studying abroad. "I was heartbroken that my journey to becoming a new person came to an end too soon, but I feel things happen for a reason," Núñez says. "I am definitely going back."

**Here are their stories: - - - - >**

# “Madrid was home for me” Núñez

## MARBELLA NÚÑEZ

Núñez – a senior majoring in public health and Spanish – attended Universidad Complutense de Madrid in Spain. She decided to study abroad to challenge herself. “In Fresno, I was doing what every college student is supposed to do – go to class, go to work, do community service. I wanted to venture out and find something I was passionate about,” she says.

That “something” turned out to be “somewhere” – the pulsing urban life of Madrid.

**“I loved how the city is always buzzing with new things,” says Núñez, who grew up in Madera and wants to be a public health nurse.**

In that new environment, she embraced new experiences. She joined a women’s rugby team with no prior playing experience. She took classes that fed new interests, such as women in Spanish cinema. Núñez lived in an apartment with three Spanish roommates and met students from many countries. “I got to live the life of a Spaniard,” she says.

**Núñez had planned to return the United States in late June after nearly a year away. But as the coronavirus spread, the Madrid university closed and her study program through the California State University system was cancelled.**

She flew home on March 18 – her airline ticket partially reimbursed by the CSU program. Fresno State also stepped in to help students. To ease financial strain, as well as emphasize the importance of returning to the United States, the Division of Continuing and Global Education offered to reimburse students the cost of tickets home. Making sure our students returned home safely.

Núñez’s ordeal wasn’t over when she reached Fresno. She needed to quarantine for 14 days but couldn’t go home to Madera because her father has an underlying health condition, making any exposure to the virus life threatening. Núñez had no other place to go. Then the Division of Continuing and Global Education stepped in and paid for a two-week stay in a hotel near the university. “I am so grateful to Fresno State. If it weren’t for the university, I wouldn’t have had peace of mind,” she says. Núñez became ill at the hotel but wasn’t able to get a coronavirus test. She eventually recovered with medicine from the Fresno State Health Center. After the 14 days, Núñez stayed elsewhere in Fresno before moving home to Madera in early June.

**But “home” now has a different meaning. “Madrid was home for me,” Núñez says. “I felt accepted. I felt comfortable. I felt like I belonged there.” ★**

## VICTORIA MONSIVAIZ

Monsivaiz, who lives in Hanford studied at Universidad de Jaén in the city of Jaén, south of Madrid, traveling there in September 2019.

A senior majoring in English and hoping for a media career, Monsivaiz chose Spain to explore the history, culture and language of her heritage as a Latina in the United States. She gained that and much more. “I realized how small the world really is and how cultures intertwine with each other. Everything is as much similar as it is different,” she says.



~Núñez

To her Spanish classmates, Monsivaiz explained that her Mexican culture is part of her identity as an American and that American culture is more diverse than the stereotypes portrayed in the European media. “It was a perfect opportunity for me to give them a better understanding of the United States,” she says.

While in Spain, Monsivaiz traveled to England and France, learning as much as she could while in those countries. “I realized I’m an eager learner, and I want to keep at it,” she says.

In early March, her CSU study program told Monsivaiz she needed to come home. Jaén was locked down, and police were stopping people to check if their trips were essential. Before flying home on March 17, Monsivaiz received an “are-you-OK?” email from Marcela Magdaleno, academic advisor in the Division of Continuing and Global Education. Then upon her return, she heard from Dr. Luis Fernando Macías, assistant professor of Chicano and Latin American Studies, who had written a recommendation letter for her study abroad application. “It was amazing to know how supportive the staff and faculty at Fresno State are. It was very comforting,” says Monsivaiz. ★

***“My experiences abroad have helped me appreciate how massive and beautiful the world is” -Wack***



**DEMITRIA WACK**

Wack had settled into life and work in South Africa after arriving in Cape Town in January. She was interning with an educational organization that provides scholarships and enrichment programs to low-income students. Concurrently, she was taking online courses at Fresno State.

Wack says she chose South Africa because “it’s a very complex country” on a fascinating continent. In the summer of 2019, she visited a friend serving in the Peace Corps in the African country of Tanzania before traveling to a study abroad program in London.

“My experiences abroad have helped me appreciate how massive and beautiful the world is,” she says.

***“You can feel isolated in the United States because of our size. Experiencing global society has given me respect, humility, and a more open mind about the way others look at the world. I want to pass on that empathy and understanding.”***

In March, as the pandemic’s spread became clear, Wack received an email and her parents received a phone call – both from Moore. His message: She needed to come home. “I had not yet understood the seriousness of COVID-19, as it had not yet hit South Africa in high numbers,” Wack says. She flew home on March 18, and Fresno State reimbursed her the cost of the ticket. “I am so grateful to have a university that cares about its students as much as Fresno State does.”

Wack, who’s from Arroyo Grande, graduated in May with a bachelor of arts degree in psychology. She was part of the Smitcamp Family Honors Program and served as Fresno State’s student president in 2018-19. Wack now plans to begin work or pursue a master’s degree, either at Cambridge University or the London School of Economics. Both schools in England have accepted her. Her career goal: work in educational policy. “Fresno State and the Fresno community have been so supportive of my desire to study abroad and all my other pursuits,” Wack says.

Other Fresno State students would typically set off to study abroad in the summer of 2020. But not this year. “At the same time we were removing our students, we made the equally difficult decision to cancel all summer study abroad programs offered through Fresno State,” Moore says. The university is committed to protecting the physical and fiscal health of Fresno State students, he adds: “We look forward to sending our students abroad to participate in this high-impact practice once it is safe to do so.” ★