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### **The Renewable Revolution- Germany and Spain**

The Burch Field Research Seminar in Germany and Spain was the experience of a lifetime. Six weeks of traveling around Northern Spain and through Germany studying my passion for the environment could not have gone better. From the meetings with government officials and activists to the site seeing and bicycle tours, I could not have asked for a better experience.

Our classes encouraged us to interact with locals and look at each town through environmental lenses. For the journalism class we compiled together a website with all of our articles: <http://transition.web.unc.edu/>. The city planning class's assignments were essentially policy briefs based upon readings, meetings, and observations.

To summarize the entire trip into a couple pages would be extremely difficult, simply because it would not do the experience justice. Therefore I am going to include the experiences that stood out most from Spain and Germany. Then is my summary of spending. Lastly is a conclusion summarizing the long lasting implications of this trip.

#### **Spain**

Highlighting Spain first, there are many things to remember, but two memories stand out most. The first of which was meeting two renewable energy activists on a wind farm outside of Pamplona. At the base of a 120-meter tall wind turbine, we gathered around the activist couple who spoke only in Spanish. Through

a group effort we translated their speech about wind turbines and being stewards of the environment. We could all sense their passion about the subject, which reinforced our urgency to bring our findings back to America.

The second experience, which may have been my favorite part of the entire trip, was a day with a philosophy/environmental professor at the University of Pamplona, Jordi Puig. To put things into perspective about Jordi, our entire group spent a day at the University of Pamplona, which was a good, but mundane day. Each professor gave us essentially the same lecture. They spoke about their programs and not about any specific subject matter. Then Jordi walked in and we instantly all perked up as he gave us a lecture on the meaning of life and its connection to nature and our environment. He later offered to take a group of six of us on a day through the Pyrenees Mountains. Six of us proceeded to go on a full day excursion, entailing hiking, eating, and most importantly, living. Each activity was intertwined with either poetry and philosophical readings, or thought provoking words. The paragraph I just wrote comes nowhere close to doing that experience justice.

### **Germany**

In terms of learning about renewable energy and green cities, Germany was more informative than Spain. We met with several policy-based groups, including government agencies and think tanks. Each of these meetings gave us further insight into the way the German government operates, but through an environmental lens. The Heinrich Böll Foundation, which is the Green Party of Germany's political foundation, hosted us and gave us a briefing about Germany's Energy Transition, the

Energiewende. We had already met with several other groups about the Energiewende, but this one stood out, as it was much more of an active conversation about Germany and the US.

The sustainability tours of both Berlin and Freiburg gave our group a local perspective on each place. The angle of the tours were to observe community and sustainability. We visited co-op housing developments, parks, and markets. In Freiburg, we even did one of the tours on bicycles. The most beneficial aspect of these tours were the insights on creative ways to live sustainably, which I would love to mimic in the States.

### **Summary of Spending**

All of the money I received from the Alpha Sigma Foundation went to my \$1,200 plane ticket. The other costs of the program, which mainly included the tuition fees and food, were covered by two other scholarships.

### **Conclusion**

The Burch program was a mix of learning through assignments and learning through experience and observation. From the sustainability tours to the excursions with locals I learned a tremendous amount. The classes were helpful in a couple different ways. The journalism class helped shape my writing for wider audiences, while the city planning course helped my observational skills, such as analyzing the walkability of a street. Though the main benefits from this program came from the exposure to different cultures and places. Having seen all of these different towns and cities has now influenced my way of thinking. I have concrete evidence of things I would love to bring back to the States, but also examples of things we do better in

America. Needless to say, this was the best experience of my life and I hope to bring back my passion and confidence to the Lodge for my last year.