On-Sites Perspectives in Spain was an opportunity for me to expand my knowledge about all things related to International Education Management (IEM). I remember the first time that this course was mentioned by my advisor. I explained to her that I was considering Spain as an option for practicum but at the time I only had experience living in Latin America. I was ready to immerse myself with IEM vocabulary and Spanish. Knowing my learning style preferences, I was immediately attracted to applying for On-Site Perspectives in Madrid course. I was interested to go on a faculty-led trip with someone who has a lot experience in the field of study abroad. I wanted to compare and contrast the schools that I would want to study at if I were a student. I was eager to get to know my colleagues at a more personal level and to share an experience about studying abroad while actually doing it. I was ready to study abroad through a different lens.
HOW DID YOUR OWN STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCES CONNECT WITH OBSERVATIONS, GUEST SPEAKERS, SITE VISITS AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS?

My study abroad experiences are not comparable to the programs in Madrid. My university was connected with a language academy in Quito, Ecuador. The language academy had private tutoring classes with a 1:1 student to professor ratio. Throughout the six weeks I was there, I switched professors Monday after Monday while they all had different approaches to teach me Spanish. There were onsite field trips that the professor would take students in small groups. Fridays were culture and cooking classes where students presented together. They catered towards the student’s level of Spanish. Students attended this academy in Quito to learn Spanish. A lot of the programs that were in Madrid did not have a unique language learning component. The only one I can think of is the Middlebury Schools Abroad in Madrid at Sede Prim.

WHAT WAS SIMILAR/ DISSIMILAR? WHY?

My favorite part of the trip was being able to compare and contrast all of the providers and universities. They all have different missions, student profiles, noteworthy features, language goals, activities and staff. With all of these components, each program is more different than similar. It was often hard to find similarities in all of the programs. Some of the main similarities that I noticed about the directors were that they never intended to work in study abroad and usually had a Ph.D. in languages or social sciences. Overall, all of the programs strived for the same purpose but all had their own approaches.
AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES:
PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SEDE PRIM: LANGUAGE PLEDGE
Middlebury’s philosophy was very language focused with the motto “live the language”. Middlebury students carried a different profile than students enrolled in any of the other programs that we observed. Most of the students' main purpose of studying abroad was focused on improving their Spanish proficiency. I can relate back to my first study abroad experience in Quito, Ecuador. My purpose to study abroad was also language focused like most students in the Middlebury Schools Abroad programs. For that reason, I found that Middlebury students and I shared the same motive to study abroad.

SYRACUSE: MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY
Syracuse in Madrid wants to allow students to have an educational experience, learn Spanish while still engaging in the city life of Madrid. The director was very passionate about students having cross-cultural experiences. He has a different definition of what it means to be a leader; everything should function smoothly without him, his position should be the most disposable. Everyone has an important role and he wants them to work as a team.

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO (USD):
10 DAY TRAVEL SEMINAR
University of San Diego (USD) has an island program for students in Madrid. USD in Madrid is one of the only USD island programs. For their island program in Madrid, there is a minimum language requirement. They have a 10 day travel seminar at the beginning of the semester which seems like great exposure for new students. The travel seminar gives students an opportunity to explore a diversity of cities in Spain. This is an important aspect of study abroad; exploring other parts of the country.
THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS: KEY FEATURES

CIEE: INTERACTIVE ORIENTATIONS

CIEE had an interactive safety orientation for new study abroad students. This orientation included a lot of participation and important information. They did a great job on keeping everyone attentive during the whole entire presentation which sometimes can be difficult to do on a Friday afternoon. They had a lot of videos, activities and role plays that catered to all different learning styles. Most of the time, it can be difficult for students to want to pay attention for a long span of time about safety. CIEE conducted my favorite student orientation of the trip!

CEA: STUDENT SUPPORT

CEA makes student safety a top priority. I found it very interesting that they do emergency drills so that they can practice at least once in case of a real emergency. That shows a lot of care and support that CEA gives to their students. I admired the personal connection that the director has with the students. That personal connection is crucial for trust.
UNIVERSIDAD DE AUTÓNOMA MADRID (UAM): BUDDY PROGRAM

Middlebury students and partners with other US institutions send students to UAM. There is a variety of other international students that come through Erasmus, CEAL (Latin American Countries), international agreements and free-mover students. With a huge student body of international students, UAM recently has started a Buddy Program for credits. The program pairs Spanish students with international students. Through this program, Spanish students teach them anything from public transportation to city life.

CARLOS III: INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

Carlos III thrives on being an international/bilingual university. They have 75 agreements with just US universities which includes Middlebury. They have 20% international student population and agreements with Europe, Africa, South America, North America, Asia and Australia.

NEBRIJA: ACCOMMODATING

CIEE and CEA students both attend classes at Nebrija. They seem the most flexible out of all the Spanish universities with the grading system. One notable difference between US and Spanish universities is the grading system. Spanish grading systems start at 0 while US grading systems start out at 100. For most Spanish students, to pass is what the goal is.
A unique aspect of the course was to work on a project with a learning partner. My partner and I’s project focus was to educate Spanish host families about microaggressions. Americans come from such a diverse country where microaggressions are likely to happen regarding gender and race. The difficulty is that the term “microaggressions” is not common in Spain. Some families make comments in front of students and offend them unconsciously. Our project was to create resources in Spanish to introduce American culture, history and politics through a powerpoint presentation for host families. We also created a small interactive session for Middlebury students about identity and microaggression scenarios. This project helped me gain some experience working with a director and creating presentation materials. The project allowed me to think of activities and content that would be important for students and host families to take into account while abroad. This type of project could be also something that a future practicum student at Sede Prim would be able to enhance and update.

Experiencias de estudiantes estadounidenses
How can you translate your experiences and observations here to a future career in this field?

This experience has allowed me to have multiple perspectives of various types of student orientations, staff roles and director profiles that helps me understand IEM better. Before, I just had my own study abroad and Peace Corps experience to contribute to class discussions. Now, I have a lot more insight on American universities in Spain, Spanish universities and third-party providers. This knowledge can be used as an exchange to other classmates that do not know much about study abroad in Spain.

Now since being back at MIIS, I have seen how the On-Sites Perspectives has already impacted me in a positive way. In readings and classes, I notice that I make relations between how a program is done in Spain. I have already updated my resume with information regarding what I did during my time on the On-Sites Perspectives course. I wrote a cover letter relating my course experience to skills that can help me in a work setting. All of these insights are transferable to real life scenarios. I can only imagine that for many years to come, I will be using my experiences from On-Site Perspectives in Madrid as a point of reference and comparison.