A summer in Spain

As part of its robust programs to elevate careers to the next level, GPS Career Services connects students with unique internship opportunities abroad.

Graduate school is about fine-tuning existing skills to take your career up a notch. The UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) Career Services team works with students one-on-one to help them identify satisfying career options, build professional networks and develop hard skills through workshops, panels and career talks, bringing the best high-tech career resources personalized for their individual needs.

One of the most important connections a graduate student can make — and a way for students to test-drive a career path — is through summer internships. And through the GPS Career Services staff, seven GPS students had the opportunity of a lifetime this summer, embarking on a five-week internship in Madrid, Spain, with Emzingo.

“I first heard about this internship through an email from Amanda Lowery in GPS Career Services,” said Emily Davalos, a Bachelor of Arts/Master of International Affairs (BA/MIA) student. “I then set up an in-person meeting with her to learn more about the internship and how to structure my application.”
Students took the opportunity to explore the city of Madrid, as well as other Spanish and European cities. | Ernesto Castañeda photo

Though the students lived in apartment-style accommodations provided by Emzingo, each person had very different roles during the internship. Master of International Affairs (MIA) candidate Ernesto Castañeda, for example, served as a consultant for a nonprofit organization in Madrid called Puentes Global, which supports people with difficulties in entering and remaining in the labor market.

“Puentes Global helps migrants strengthen their skills to develop a full and satisfying professional life,” Castañeda said. “My role involved supporting Ukrainian refugees in Spain and throughout the EU.”

BA/MIA candidate Isman Cyair also did consulting work for a nonprofit helping Ukrainian refugees in Madrid.

“I loved that interns received an awesome opportunity to travel and learn about Spain while simultaneously working on a social impact project,” Cyair said. “The Emzingo program provided us with tons of guidance and events to explore and have fun in Madrid. Meanwhile, our project client entrusted the graduate students with a lot of autonomy and was eager to implement our researched
MIA candidate Jared Hernandez’s role involved consulting for a social-impact oriented startup.

“My group was tasked with legal research on transforming a partnership business into a cooperative style of business in accordance with Spanish law,” Hernandez said. “Our final deliverables included a written report and presentation to our field partner.”

Davalos worked with a team of two other master’s students consulting for Deleitewear, a women-owned sustainable fashion company looking to expand their business.

“Daily tasks included legal and financial research imperative to understanding business expansion in Spain, meeting with our field partner to reassess and reframe our project and conducting interviews with stakeholders to understand the potential long-term impacts of this expansion project,” Davalos said.

Yixiao “Adam” Huang, a Master of Chinese Economic and Political Affairs (MCEPA) candidate, worked as a member of the consulting team for a small company called Clevergy, developing a business plan for the startup.

The view from the Emzingo apartments, situated on the fourth through sixth floor of the building, provided sweeping views of the Madrid neighborhood. | Adam Huang photo

“My responsibility, in particular, was to contribute to the market conversion and
business funnel for the market opportunity analysis part, and I also did some research on how to navigate through crises like COVID-19 and Ukraine,” Huang said. “It was also my responsibility to give recommendations, data and concrete evidence to the Clevergy team.”

All internships were conducted in English, though as Castaneda noted, “knowing the language helps a lot and makes you look like less of a tourist.”

“If you would like to have a wonderful living experience and have fun, you’d better learn some basics like ordering dishes in restaurants and asking for directions,” Huang added.

And though the students’ work experiences varied each day, many noted the internship experience abroad allowed them to better understand a different culture and build relationships with people from all over the world.

“Along with our daily work, we also explored the beautiful city of Madrid and learned a lot about day-to-day life, food and customs,” Davalos said. “This internship experience gave me new insight about the importance and value of having a global perspective.”

Huang noted his favorite part of the internship was exploring Madrid’s numerous museums and cultural and historical sites. Others leveraged the opportunity to travel outside of Madrid, both during and immediately following the internships, exploring Spanish cities like Toledo and Barcelona, as well as other locales like France, Germany and Morocco.

“My favorite part was the work-life balance this internship offered,” Hernandez said. “I got to work and gain experience in consulting while still enjoying my evenings and weekends exploring abroad. Because of this internship, I am now considering careers in consulting.”

Castañeda strongly encouraged GPS students to consider internships abroad, both for professional development and bonding with fellow students.

“Before concluding your educational career, consider an internship abroad, because as graduate students, we are most likely at the end of our student careers,” Castaño said. “These internships offered abroad are your last opportunity to immerse yourself in a different culture alongside your peers. You
might have opportunities in your professional career to travel, but you will never have another opportunity to travel as a student with your classmates.”

To learn more about the variety of opportunities available through the GPS Career Services team, visit the website to schedule an appointment.