

Study Abroad

All the ALLISON ROUSE RUNS World's THE BULLS & SHARES THE a Stage LIMELIGHT IN SPAIN

By Janet Foley



he first experience of a student embarking on an international study program could be one of roaming the hallowed halls of a centuries-old library or hearing tales of the legendary minds that emerged from the campus they are about to call home. But for Allison Rouse, a University of Pennsylvania student, the first glimpse of life in Spain was quite different: He was running for his life in the annual Running of the Bulls in Pamplona.

Allison had spent the summer in Belgium and Holland before he began his semester in Madrid, and during that time he visited Spain so he could experience this famous tradition. "I didn't know what to expect. I just started running and never stopped," a technique that apparently worked well for him. While he may not have known what to expect during the Running of the Bulls, Allison was well prepared for most of what he faced in Spain. He was proficient in Spanish and had worked for a German company while in Holland, where his duties involved researching the Spanish market. "I probably had more knowledge of the culture than the average visitor, so I had a pretty good idea about what to expect."


During his semester at the International Institute, which houses many U.S. university programs in Spain, he took such classes as "Spain and the European Community,"

"Spanish Language" and "Theater Arts." He attended classes with other U.S. students, which had advantages and disadvantages. The instructors didn't go "zipping through the material; they knew we were not used to having classes instructed solely in Spanish," Allison says, but interaction with the locals was somewhat sacrificed.

Living with a local family, however, presented endless opportunities to experience the culture. "We talked about everything under the sun," Allison says. One topic was the strong Roman Catholic influence still evident in Spanish society and within this family. And Allison, who is majoring in international relations, was always eager to talk politics.

Another chance to meet Spaniards surfaced when Allison, who runs track, tried to continue his training. He found a track club in Madrid that allowed him to train there. It was the same club that trains Spanish Olympians. So, while he was working on his high-jump, he was also meeting many locals.

Track eventually took a back seat when Allison took part in several plays through his theater arts class. "I actually had three lines in one of the plays," he adds. The play, *La Casa De Los Linajes* by Calderón de la Barca, was about a house with people of different



Allison Rouse hit the ground running in Spain — the Running of the Bulls, that is.

cultures and languages and the stereotypes that accompany these differences. The same theme ran throughout Allison's own experience. "I gained a tremendous appreciation for the language and the people of Spain."

By studying abroad you also might come to see your own culture more clearly. "I think everybody who studies abroad will definitely have a different picture of America," he says. "Some people will return with flag-waving patriotism. I came home with a different political view of America. I felt like I understood America's role in the world a little bit better when I saw what an economic superpower it was and the diffusion of American culture everywhere."

Allison advises students heading overseas to be willing to ask questions. "You have to remember that you are a foreigner, and you can't be afraid to ask questions. When you ask a question, in some ways you are giving up part of yourself, saying 'I don't know this, please help me.' And that is often the best way to spark discussions and debates."

Allison says the experience has enhanced his life in general, as well as his education. "It just made me rethink the way I do things. It was the most amazing, positive thing I've done." ☺