**Honors Experiential Learning Project Proposal Form**

**Basic Information**  
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College: College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning

Major: Architecture

Title of Project: Spain and the Architecture of Life

Thematic Area: Creative Arts

Expected Project Start Date: 15th March 2014

Expected Project End Date: 23rd March 2014

**Project Information**

1. Provide a detailed abstract of your proposed honors experiential learning project.

Throughout history, Spain has been an architectural icon with phenomenal buildings and exemplary architects. From the Sagrada Familia by Antonio Gaudi (1883) to Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (1997), Spain has attracted many architecture lovers, who want to experience in person the presence of different architectural styles in the country that has one of the most dynamic and colorful cultures in the world. It is intriguing to observe the building and landscape in Spain, considering Spain is famous for its unique Spanish Gothic and medieval architecture. Meanwhile, modernism also has become an important part of the architecture movement. The peak of non-traditional architecture was highlighted when buildings like the Gas Natural Tower in Barcelona or the Bilbao were built. At first impression, it does seem as if there are two extremes in the architecture spectrum, and questions about the “invasion” of new architecture were raised. In cities like Barcelona especially where many architectural styles exist, the borderline between old and new becomes even clearer.

As an architecture student, I have been introduced to the thick history of Spanish architecture, impressed by Gaudi’s strange architecture, and completely amazed by Gehry’s Bilbao. To me, these two specific buildings represent Spain architecturally, a country where anyone can learn a lot about the art and the culture just by observing the change in architecture. Architecture is culture and culture is architecture. The way architecture has been tells the story of human being’s evolution in ideas, aesthetics and the way they live life. Spanish architecture, though prominent and visually impressive, has not been one of the bigger focuses in our Architectural History classes. After taking a Spanish class in the Summer semester, I have developed a better appreciation for Spanish culture, as well as a desire to travel to the country during Spring break to explore, with my own eyes, the “weird” architecture of Gaudi and Gehry. This project aims to study how much the architecture from different decades has affected the culture, the landscape, the people, and the country’s image in general.

This trip will be done during Spring break of 2014 (March 15 – March 23, 2014). I will be traveling with a studio friend, who shares the same passion of architecture and traveling. This trip will be my first planned backpacking trip. During the trip, we will be traveling everyday from city to city, documenting pictures and sketches of architectural monuments. It will take about 4-6 hours of transportation (either by train or bus, depending), 6-8 hours of documentation, and 2-4 hours dedicated to blogging and edits, per day (in totally, roughly 35, 50, 30 hours respectively). I will be traveling to Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, Granada and Madrid (the plan might change if time does not allow). I wish to produce videos, pictures and a book as well as maintain the updates on my blog <http://anhtranatuc.weebly.com> for my one-week adventure in Spain. After the trip, I hope to gain more knowledge about the architecture in Spain and how much it has impacted life there.

1. Connection to Learning Outcomes within the Honors Thematic Area (identified above)

During and after the trip, I hope to achieve these learning objectives:

* Acquires or further develops competencies within the field of architecture
* Possesses ability to define the creative problem; ability to frame and develop a problem statement and appropriate methodology
* Demonstrates/takes appropriate risk in successfully completing project

As a third year architecture student, I have been learning about the history of architecture around the world since first year of college. Spain, however, has never been the main focus of our curriculum, despite having one of the most unique styles of architecture. The styles that exist in Spain definitely require certain taste from viewers, since they are visually striking. This trip will allow me to examine the architecture with my own eyes, in sketch and photograph forms. I will be able to draw a conclusion for myself about how Spanish medieval architecture compares to other styles that I have studied and loved. Architecture is all about taste, and I would like to develop my own taste, instead of depending on what the textbooks and professors tell me. I will do the same to modern buildings. Most of all, I am excited to visit the Guggenheim by Frank Gehry, one of my most favorite architects in the world. Just like Gaudi, Gehry has a very “different” style that has received much controversy. I will also be able to improve my architectural drawing and photography, the two techniques that assist greatly the study and practice of architecture.

For the next objective, I have thought about the relationship between culture and the change in architecture. In architecture, it is important to address issues that influence the building, such as the site, the climate, and the culture. For such a culturally rich country, there is an unspoken rule of maintaining the old monuments. For example, there has been an article about the Sagrada Familia getting finally done in 2026, after more than 100 years of incomplete state. With such focus on keeping the traditional architecture, the rise of newer modern buildings with a style that is completely different either makes the overall architecture more dynamic or turns the scenery into a disastrous architectural fusion. By going there, I will be able to assess the big picture myself. I will not only look at the main buildings but also examine the local architecture and landscape. The relationship between these factors will decide whether the building/architecture style responds well to their surrounding. This topic will be one of the main focuses I will be discussing in the book at the end of the project.

For the last, but not least, learning objective, I plan to discuss Gaudi’s and Gehry’s architecture, the two styles that are very distinctive and have become the trademarks of the architects. Like I have mentioned above, these styles, aesthetically, can receive very mixed reviews. Gaudi’s architecture has been iconic and attracted admirers among architects and the public, even though people have still attempted to study and understand his architecture. Gehry’s architecture, on the other hand, is innovative and sculptural-like, as he takes a complete different approach from the usual minimalist style. When I was introduced to Gaudi’s work, I found myself not attracted to his work visually, unlike my professor and other fellow students. I admire the scale of his work, but to me, who has been a big appreciator of medieval Gothic architecture, there was too much unnecessary ornament on the surface of Gaudi’s work. I, however, am a huge fan of Frank Gehry’s work, who more often than not receives negative opinions from architects and architecture students as his designs seem to neglect function and response to the surrounding. I have decided to go against the norm and express my opinions on these two very specific examples of architecture in Spain.

Itinerary (some specifics subject to change):

FRIDAY:

Depart for Barcelona

SATURDAY:

Morning: Check in hostel; visit Sagrada Familia, Casa Batilo, Casa Amatller

Afternoon: Visit Fundacio Joan Miro Museum, Teatre Grec Garden

Evening: explore the city at night

SUNDAY:

Morning: leave for Bilbao and visit Guggenheim

Afternoon: free for photographic adventure

Evening: stay the night in Bilbao

MONDAY:

Morning: leave for Madrid

Afternoon: Visit the Prado, the Thyssen and the Reina Sofia, the three art palaces

Evening: explore the city, food, festival at night

TUESDAY:

Free to explore the city with my Spanish friend (current Co-op co-intern)

Possibilities: Francisco Goya works at the Museo de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, sunset, Parque del Oeste, Jardin Botanico

WEDNESDAY:

Leave for Seville and Granada, which are 2.5 hours away, south from Madrid

Possibilities:

Seville: the Plaza de Espana, Parque Maria Luisa, La Giraida tower, the Real Alzazar de Sevilla, f and food.

Granada: The Lahambra and the Generalife

THURSDAY:

Leave for Valencia

Possibilities: the Viutat Vella, the Falles Festival, the Turia Gardens, the Paseo Maritimo

FRIDAY:

Return to Barcelona to depart for America

1. Connection to Goals and Academic Theories (include reference list, as appropriate)

A.

B.

1. Initiative, Independence, and/or Creativity

Together with my friend Jessica Dangelo, I have been planning the whole trip myself, including the itinerary, air flights and accommodation. Both of us are architecture students with a great passion for traveling, making it easier to coordinate and work out what we want to see and achieve after the trip. Jessica and I are co-oping for the same firm, VOA, but she is located in Beijing, China right now. The locations make communication more difficult, yet we have been able to manage the time difference and discuss issues concerning the trip. This project, however, is my own. I plan to take the pictures myself and do quick sketches of the monuments whenever I can. Spanish is not our first language, so there will probably be some language barrier when we travel in Spain. However, we both are willing to deal with the obstacles in order to make this trip happen. Since this is going be a backpacking trip, planning would be essential and helpful time wise. For this trip, I will record my journey in different media, including video, photographs, sketches, etc. This will be my chance to improve my skills in those aspects.

1. Reflection

I always keep a blog during my travel in order to write down my experience at that very moment. However, since this time I will be traveling almost the whole day and there is a chance I do not get internet access every day, I will have a travel journal that I can physically write down my thoughts.

1. Dissemination
2. Project Advisor (list the person’s name, title, and contact information)
3. Budget (if applicable)