

Decision-Making and Motivation on the Camino de Santiago

Global Independent Study Project
University of Michigan School of Social Work

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For my independent study, I walked the Camino de Santiago in Northern Spain. In walking a religious pilgrimage route, I hoped to learn about the effect the religion has on the decision making of individuals. I hoped to learn about people's motivation— about the reasons why someone would drop everything for a month, to go on a very long walk. I hoped I would learn about what others were hoping to gain from the Camino, and in doing so, to learn about what drove me to go on a such a journey. Upon my return, I wrote a long piece of creative writing, recounting stories from along the Way, lessons learned, and people I will never forget.

History of the Camino de Santiago

The Camino de Santiago is historically a Catholic pilgrimage that ends at the tomb of St. James the Apostle in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. For centuries, people from across Europe would walk the pilgrimage in search of salvation or a miracle. Today, approximately 500,000 people make pilgrimage to Santiago each year. Some walk for spiritual reasons, some for adventure or sport, and others still for Salvation. Many people choose to walk the Way alone, and other walk in groups or with loved ones. There is no one way to walk the Camino, but each person's Camino is unique to them alone.

Skills Utilized & Developed

•Interpersonal Skills: I viewed all the people I encountered on the Camino as informants, and myself as a learner. I used provocative, open-ended questions to learn about people, their experiences, and their motivations.

•Listening Skills: It's amazing what a stranger will say, when they feel like they're being heard. I did my best to truly and fully listen to every person I encountered (in Spanish, English, and French).

•Self-Reflection Skills: I thought critically about my own feelings a reactions to being alone, and together with strangers, as we walked a path that has seen so much suffering. I thought critically about my own reasons and motivations for the decisions that I make, including the one to walk across Spain.

Classroom Connections

The courses that best prepared me for my Independent Study were SW 511 and SW 521. In those classes I learned and practiced how to communicate with and help people on an interpersonal level. These lessons enabled me to learn from all those I encountered different pieces of knowledge and understanding about each persons worldview.

Lessons Learned

•How different would the world be, if we all made a decision to love every stranger we encounter? The Camino is like nowhere else in the world because of the incredible community created by those who walk. The baseline of human interaction is one of love, and of kindness. It is something I will strive to continue in my community in the USA.

•Embrace ambiguity and uncertainty, it can lead in incredible directions. Don't let fear of the unknown rush you into decisions that you aren't ready to make.

•People all need the freedom to create their own paths, listen to themselves, and do what is right for them. No two journeys in life are the same.

Career Connections

The Camino helped me better understand the importance for each person of finding meaning in their own life. That meaning can come from a career, or a partner, or a community, among other places. I hope to help people in my career find meaning in their own lives, as the Camino helped me find meaning in my own. I hope to help people acquire the tools they need to live the happiest, most fulfilling life possible.



Advice

In travelling abroad, you almost always get more out of the experience than you give. Always be grateful for people who open their doors and their arms to you, to help you learn. View each interaction as one that you can learn something from, and think critically every day about what you are learning, what you are experiencing that is new, and how you can use that knowledge to improve yourself.

Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank the Office of Global Activities, for embracing my atypical Global Independent Study Project. With their support, I was able to gain invaluable lessons and insights about myself, and the world around me.

Lastly, to all those who have walked before me, to those who walk beside me, and to all those that will walk, I am honored to walk with you.

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