

My adventurous nature has always terrified my family. When I was sixteen I convinced my parents to allow me to work as a counselor at a Spanish-speaking camp in Costa Rica. My desire to experience different countries since then has strengthened even more. With my interest in medicine, public health, and Spanish, I have known that I most likely will work in communities that are under-resourced and deal with many issues that stem from poverty. As a young female, it is also important for me to stay safe in such environments. I want to seek adventure, but I also want to take calculated risks – risks that will allow me to pursue new challenges in the future.

Last spring, through a series of unexpected events, I committed to Davidson's Cadiz program. While Cadiz is considered a safe city, I still sought to prepare myself for the reality that being a female abroad often has different implications than being one in the US. Different cultures have diverse expectations for how women should behave and dress, and in order to remain safe, I knew I must take these cultural differences into consideration. To prepare, I read travel reports and articles online about Spanish culture, spoke with past participants, and I relied heavily on information given to us by the study abroad organization. It is easy to find sufficient information about cultural differences and it is wise to spend adequate time preparing to live in a new culture.

The role of females in Spain is similar to a woman's role in the US, but our program also included an excursion to Morocco, which pressed me to reconsider my own dress and behavior. Adapting is often necessary to be safe. For example, it was important that I was sensitive to Moroccan culture and dress in a culturally appropriate manner for females and avoid going to markets alone; however, I did not need to subvert my values and sense of self as a female leader, friend, and student.

As females, we face challenges despite our physical location. Traveling within the US can pose just as many threats to our safety as traveling abroad. It is important to be self-aware, to adapt and respect cultural differences, and to take calculated risks while in unfamiliar places and situations. I challenge females to go abroad, to learn about different perspectives on femininity, and to be empowered by our ability to explore the world through Davidson College.