

# Nothing ventured, nothing gained

By Jill Ashbrenner, Wagoner, Okla.

Filled with artwork and architectural detail, local delights and academic doings, Valencia is Spain's third largest city and the place Oklahoma State University senior James Hempfing embraced as home during his study abroad experience.

Hempfing, a double major in Spanish and turf management, left for Valencia, Spain, on Jan. 18, 2006, and returned to OSU on July 18.

Hempfing enrolled in the reciprocal exchange program at OSU, which is different from the typical study abroad program. In a reciprocal exchange program, the student remains enrolled at OSU while studying at a partner institution abroad. The student pays tuition and fees at OSU, and most scholarships and financial aid can be used. The costs are identical to any semester on campus at OSU.

"The budget I prepared before leaving equaled roughly \$1,000 a month," Hempfing said. "This included every possible cost: room, board, tuition, travel and leisure."

When Hempfing arrived in Valencia, he first stayed in a hostel, which is similar to a hotel in the United States. There is not much university housing, so most students live off campus, he said. Hempfing found an apartment about three minutes from the beach, and he used public transportation to get to his classes.

"Walking everywhere, relying on public transportation, you see so much more," Hempfing said.

While studying in Europe, Hempfing also traveled throughout Spain, Italy, Germany and England. In Spain, he saw the flamenco shows in Madrid, participated in the Festival of San Fermín — the running of the bulls — in Pamplona, picked oranges and olives from groves in Denia and attended the Festival of Las Fallas in Valencia.

"The most challenging thing living abroad was trying to disguise myself as a Spaniard," Hempfing said.

America has gained the reputation of being the multitasking capital of the world. For many Americans, every minute of the day is accounted for; down time is viewed as wasted time, Hempfing said.

A typical day in Spain for native Spaniards begins at 9:30 a.m. as they wake up and enjoy a small breakfast with a cup of coffee or glass of wine at a local café. At 10:30 a.m., they go to work; at 2:30 p.m., all shops close for siesta and most Spaniards eat lunch, their biggest meal of the day. Meals always are shared with family or friends and many times will last more than two hours. Around 4:30 p.m., they go back to work.

Dinner is usually eaten around 10 p.m., and it easily will last until midnight. It is not uncommon for young adults to stay up until 2 a.m. and for young people to stay out until dawn.

"It seemed to me that the people in Spain put first their personal happi-



The campus of Universidad Politecnica in Valencia, Spain, offers a breathtaking view. (Photo by James Hempfing)



James Hempfling plays flat-pick guitar for Knee Deep, a local bluegrass band. (Photo by Jill Ashbrenner)

ness and the happiness of their loved ones," Hempfling said. "Relaxation and celebration are what most Spaniards pursue on a daily basis."

At OSU, a student typically enrolls in the classes required by his or her intended major. In Valencia, students can attend any classes that are of interest to them.

Hempfling started classes in January, but his schedule did not require finalization until March. While attending Universidad Politecnica, he took plant physiology, soil chemistry and environmental quality, Spanish language, international trade and an independent study course from OSU.

"I have had Spanish classes since the third grade, so I've almost been forced to be interested for the last 13 years of my life," Hempfling said in a joking tone. "Learning Spanish has always come quite easily to me, and I really enjoy studying in another area besides turf management."

The classes in Spain are organized similar to the U.S. system: two or three one-hour lectures, or *teorias*, along with a lab, or *practicass*, per week. For most

of the *teorias*, there is a bibliography of recommended textbooks, rather than an assigned textbook. For the *practicass*, students purchase lab manuals written by the professors, which include all of the lab material for the class.

"Studying Spanish helps me broaden my education by exploring many other areas such as foreign cultures, customs and history," he said.

At Universidad Politecnica, a student's coursework is replaced with labs, and the only tests students take are final exams at the end of the term.

"Universidad Politecnica is very similar to OSU's campus in that each faculty group has separate buildings, there are many common eating areas, and there is a very nice library and student union," Hempfling said.

The cafeteria serves an affordable two-plate, traditional Spanish meal every day, and diners can order wine or beer along with their meals.

Hempfling returned to OSU in

August and resumed his on-campus activities. He is a member of Mortar Board Honor Society, is involved in the Beta Theta Pi fraternity and is employed at Karsten Creek Golf Course. Hempfling also was recognized as a Collegiate Scholar by the American Society for Horticultural Science and is an officer in the turf management honor association.

"I like the aspect of a fruitful industry with the ability to see progress and results of your work rather than just sitting in a cubicle all day crunching numbers," Hempfling said.

Horticulture professor Brian Kahn has served as Hempfling's academic adviser since the fall of 2003.

"I kind of help keep him on course toward graduation, and he does the rest," Kahn said. "He put his double major in Spanish together on his own and has done a great job of coordinating that with progress toward his turf management degree.

"In terms of motivation, a broad outlook and overall professionalism, James is at the same level as some other students who have been recognized as university-wide scholars," he said.

Hempfling also is musically talented. He has been a flat-pick guitarist for 10 years and joined a bluegrass band while at OSU.

"Playing in a band is a really fun environment," Hempfling said.

This adventurous student said he knows there are options in his future. He has considered going on to graduate school, signing up for the Peace Corps or participating in more study abroad programs.

Hempfling said what he learned the most from this experience is the relaxed lifestyle of Spaniards.

"You have to enjoy yourself; otherwise, you just get caught up in the grind," he said. ☺

*For additional information about participating in the reciprocal exchange program at OSU, you can stop by 060 Student Union, call 405-744-8569 or visit <http://ieo.okstate.edu> on the Web.*

**You have to enjoy yourself; otherwise, you just get caught up in the grind.**

*James Hempfling*