

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the *Spain: Instituto Ibérico Las Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo* program with the Student Diplomacy Corps (SDC). This experience, which took me across the historical cities of Madrid, Toledo, Córdoba, Sevilla, and Granada, was more than just an academic journey, it was a profound exploration of cultural coexistence and the impact of shared human history. Living in a world often divided along geographic, political, racial, and social lines, I learned invaluable lessons about bridging these divides, lessons that I believe civic leaders could greatly benefit from.

The course, led by a Spanish professor, Felipe, and taught entirely in Spanish, centered on the rich, yet often overlooked, history of medieval Spain, a time when Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities lived and thrived together. The neighborhoods, cathedrals, synagogues, and mosques that we explored became more than just historical sites; they were symbols of a time when diverse cultures coexisted and contributed to an era of remarkable intellectual, architectural, and cultural achievement. This coexistence, known as *convivencia*, was not without its challenges, but the mutual respect and shared goals of these communities allowed them to overcome differences and build a society that was advanced and inclusive for its time.

One of the most profound lessons I learned from this experience is the importance of acknowledging and respecting different perspectives. Just as medieval Spain flourished through the integration of diverse cultures, today's civic leaders must embrace the richness that diversity brings to society. This means going beyond mere tolerance and working towards genuine understanding and collaboration. In a world where political and social tensions often stem from misunderstandings and fear of the "other," the model of *convivencia* offers a powerful example of how to build a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Moreover, the experience of working closely with my SDC group underscored the value of community and collective learning. Our group, composed of students from different backgrounds, became a tight-knit family over the course of the program. Each member brought a unique perspective and experience, enriching our discussions and understanding of the complex history we were studying. The bonds we formed and the lessons we learned from one another were just as impactful as the academic content of the course. This reinforced for me the idea that learning is not just about absorbing information but also about sharing and reflecting on experiences with others.

The final project I completed, an essay titled *Redescubriendo las Contribuciones Históricas de las Mujeres*, was a reflection of how this program opened my eyes to the often-overlooked contributions of women throughout history. From Fátima Al-Fihri, who founded the world's first university, to the Mozarabic women who navigated complex cultural landscapes in medieval Spain, to the Mirabal sisters of the Dominican Republic who fought against tyranny, these stories taught me the importance of recognizing and celebrating the roles women have played in shaping our world. This is a lesson that is particularly relevant today, as we continue to strive for gender equality and the inclusion of diverse voices in all areas of society.

My SDC experience taught me that civic leaders must prioritize inclusive narratives that acknowledge the contributions of all members of society, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or religion. By doing so, they can create policies and initiatives that are more representative and equitable. This approach, which I saw in action during my time in Spain, can help heal divisions and foster a more cohesive and just society.

My summer with the Student Diplomacy Corps was transformative, both academically and personally. It not only deepened my understanding of history but also provided me with valuable insights into how we can apply the lessons of the past to address the challenges of the present. As I move forward, I will carry these lessons with me, using them to guide my actions and decisions, whether in academic pursuits, community involvement, or future leadership roles.