

# Year Abroad Program

By Gerda Gallop

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to spend a year studying in France or Spain or even Australia? At UNC, students have the opportunity to do just that in the Year Abroad Program.

Sponsored by the Office of International Programs, the Romance Languages Department and the Classics Department, approximately 200 students participate in the program each year, said Sherri Ontjes, an assistant in the Study Abroad office.

Students can choose from a variety of European cities such as Bristol, England, Copenhagen, Lima, Peru, Montpellier, France, Rome, Seville, Spain, Israel, Mexico, Brazil and Scotland among others. Participants attend classes at European universities sometimes taught in foreign languages, depending on the location. In addition, students earn transferrable academic credit for their studies.

Most students either live on campus, in apartments or with host families during their stay, but all students are guaranteed housing no matter where they choose to study, Ontjes said. They are also provided enough time to sight-see and experience the unique culture of Europe and its people.

"We are trying to interest more Black students in the program, and we're working with the Office for Student Counseling to recruit students," Ontjes said. "We are eager for minority students to participate in the program."

Last year, Kevin Mason, a senior from Lexington, North Carolina, participated in the Year Abroad Program in Seville, Spain. Mason is an economics and Spanish major who is also president of the Theta Omicron Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. He is also a former member of the UNC Junior Varsity Basketball and the Carolina Athletic Association.

Mason has an extensive background in Spanish and says he always wanted to travel to Spain.

"I've always been interested in going to Spain since elementary school, so when I had the chance, I went for it," he said.

Mason was one of 28 students selected to study in Seville, which is a city in southwestern Spain with a population of about 532,000.

After a grueling seven-hour flight and nine-hour delay in New York, Mason said he and other students were happy to finally arrive in sunny Spain. For the first two weeks, Mason lived with five other students in an apartment, but later moved to more permanent arrangements in a pension, which was like a boarding house.

"It was nice because we could come and go as we pleased and we got along well," Mason said.

Since the University of Seville essentially had no central campus or dorms, many students either commuted to class or lived at home with their parents, he added.

Mason attended classes with other American students taught by Spanish professors who lectured mostly in Spanish.

"The university system is different because every major required five years of study with a foreign language," Mason said.

Outside of class, Mason enjoyed going to bars and discotheques with friends and playing on a city Catholic basketball team. Mason said he was the only American on his team that eventually won the city league tournament. When he wasn't shooting hoops, Mason also traveled to the beaches in Cadiz, Madrid, Grenada and Portugal. A little homesick, Mason flew home to spend Christmas with his family and friends.

When asked about the positive aspects of his trip, Mason said, "I was

in the position to experience a new culture, to make good grades, new friends, and I didn't experience any racism. They accepted me for who I was."

Mason said he was surprised by the open acceptance toward Americans, particularly Blacks, since there were not many where he was living.

"I stood out by being Black and taller than most of them, but they approached me which made it easier to get used to them," he said.

Despite being far from friends and family at home, Mason made many friends in Spain with whom he still keeps in contact.

"After telling them about how it is in the United States for Black, it shocks them," he added.

Aside from learning how to speak Spanish more proficiently, which Mason said was his main reason for going to Spain, he learned how much it meant to be an American.

"I learned that all Americans should be thankful for what they have, and you

don't see this until you go somewhere else," he said.

Mason added that living conditions were not as advanced in some areas lacking many modern conveniences. Poverty was also very much a reality in Seville. Mason said an average American family compared to their upper class families.

However, Mason felt that overall his experience was extremely positive. He said, "I would recommend the Year Abroad Program to minority students because I feel I was lucky as a Black student, and I want other Black students to get that chance. Viva Espana!" !

For further information about the Year Abroad Program, students should come to the lower level of Caldwell Hall. There are three programs for the spring semester in Mexico City; Siena, Italy; and for the first time, a program is being offered in Australia. Financial aid is available for eligible students.



September 1987. Mark Esparza, Kevin Mason at La Playa Victoria; Cadiz, Spain.