

Interviewer: [SPANISH] I am your host Veronica Vilsky and we are here with Derek Spath who completed a Spanish and medical program in Cusco, Peru in the summer of 2013. He's a junior at the University of Buffalo in Buffalo, New York where he will be continuing on into med school to fulfill his doctorate program. Derek, welcome and thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

Derek: Thanks. Hi Veronica.

Interviewer: So let's begin back when you first began formal Spanish instruction. Can you walk us through your Spanish language learning up through attending Ecela in Cusco?

Derek: Sure, so back in middle school I started off learn a little bit of elementary Spanish and then followed through with it into high school all the way up to the AP level and then right after I graduated high school I actually studied abroad with UB, University of Buffalo, did a month long Spanish trip to Salamanca, Spain so I spent a month there, lived with a host family, and got to learn quite a bit of Spanish there. Came back and started my first year of university where I took a couple Spanish courses that were required for my Spanish major that I'm doing and then the summer right after my freshman year I went to Peru.

Interviewer: Awesome. So what initially got you hooked on learning Spanish?

Derek: So, believe it or not I have an older sister who's two years older than I am and when she started learning Spanish in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the time and I immediately got jealous of her and so I always wanted to follow up with her and see what she was learning and the language always just really interested me. I'm not sure if it was just the jealous brother type thing or what it really was at the base. So then finally, as I said, when I got to 7<sup>th</sup> grade and started learning Spanish for myself, there was just something about the language that hooked me and I loved the idea of being able to communicate without other people understanding or being able to understand what other people were saying around me that maybe others couldn't understand. So I guess that was the base of it and I've been hooked ever since.

Interviewer: That's great. How was learning Spanish in Peru different from learning Spanish in Salamanca, Spain?

Derek: Sure, so as I mentioned I did the program in Spain right before my first year of college and the program in Peru right after my first year so obviously I had a little bit more Spanish knowledge going into Cusco, but I think that the programs are relatively similar. My program with Ecela was about six weeks long so it was pretty comparable to the one month I was in Spain. I would say that, for sure, Cusco and Peru in general, the people seemed a lot more open, the people that I would meet out in town and whatnot seemed much more open to conversing with people than the people in Spain, in Salamanca so I think that was something that I really like a lot more and I think definitely encouraged

me or facilitated my practice with native speakers in Peru and also as you can imagine, being in Spain there were quite a few people who use (03:04) where they use that kind of lispy type Spanish which can be very difficult for someone. (??) is much different than what we're most exposed to learning Spanish in the United States and I know for sure in my high school there were quite a few pronunciation differences. We focused mostly on Latin American pronunciation and not on Spain Spanish pronunciation.

Interviewer: So what was your biggest challenge in booking and coming to attend a Spanish immersion program?

Derek: Okay. So obviously being a university student, I wanted to make sure that studying abroad and doing the program with Ecela would be something that I would get credit for and apply it to my Spanish major and so as I was doing my homeworking and researching about the different programs and the different certifications with Ecela and with the programs, I had to do a little bit of leg work on my end to make sure with my department director for romance languages, which my Spanish language is, that I would be getting credit for the upper level Spanish courses that I would effectively be completing in Peru so just sort of doing that background work before even applying or signing up for the program to be speaking with representatives from UB to make sure that those classes would be counting toward my major was really the hard part. I mean signing up and getting a flight was actually quite easy compared to just making sure that everything would work exactly as I wanted it to.

Interviewer: And then when you returned was it easy to transfer that into credits?

Derek: Yes, absolutely and there were a couple different transcript options offered by Ecela so I picked one of them. I think it was sort of like the medium tier of the three options and my advisor previously had told me that would be the institution I should get the transcript through and so when I came back on that list, my advisor Dr. Flaw and maybe once or twice we had to meet just to, we were able very easily to get credit for the actual courses I took at Ecela and then Dr. Flaw was also working on getting me electives, Spanish elective credit, sort of internship-style credit for the medical Spanish component that we did which was vocabulary and sort of experiential learning component of the program which involved some class time. It also involves quite a bit of clinical work in the city of Cusco so we would go to a couple of the clinics and the regional hospital in the city and so Dr. Flaw was able to get me a couple extra credits toward my major for doing that internship type work, which was great.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome. What support did you have from your friends and family at home when you decided to take on another Spanish immersion program?

Derek: Sure, so obviously I'm a pre-med student at UB and I have two majors. The first is biomedical science and the second would be Spanish and so most of my friends and family know I'm a little bit crazy about Spanish in general so I they didn't expect anything

different from me when I told them that I was thinking about going to South America so my friends were very excited for me at school and rightly so. I think it's always awesome for someone who's studying to be able to go abroad and experience another culture and speak a new language and then my family, my parents were generally a little bit more concerned about me going to a different country and a different continent and all that good stuff, but I think once we were able to do our research on the country and on Cusco itself and on Ecela the school, everybody was pretty comfortable and supportive of my trip.

Interviewer: Good. So what were your grammar and conversation classes like at Ecela?

Derek: Okay. So those classes, I think I originally placed into one of the high intermediate courses, but then later moved on to the lower and upper levels of the highest grammar and conversation courses available at Ecela Cusco so in those what I found most interesting because what's kind of lacking from my university education in Spanish, most of the courses I've taken at UB were more specific to literature or grammar structure and more of the language as a whole unit whereas some of the courses at Ecela also had a very strong emphasis on strong vocabulary base so I learned a lot of really good vocabulary moving through those units as well as how vocabulary could fit into the grammatical constructions that sort of went along with what I had learned at UB, but were being further developed at Ecela. So I think kind of that rounded combination of all the accompanying vocabulary with the stronger medical and conversational background was a really good combination.

Interviewer: So the vocabulary that you're referring is medical vocabulary too, then?

Derek: Yeah. There was both the medical vocabulary from the medical Spanish component, but also just vocabulary from the different grammatical units that we would go through. I remember we learned some super extended family words and words about city locations that I hadn't learned before so there was just moving through the different units in addition to the medical Spanish component, just a very good, a very rich base of vocabulary.

Interviewer: That's awesome. What other types of people were in your Spanish classes?

Derek: So, for the medical Spanish program I was in, there were a total of 11 students in that program so we actually ended up being from 11 different states and 11 different universities so that was really different to see everybody all the way from the west coast in California to the Midwest states and all the way on the east coast where I am so it was really cool to see sort of that blend of the 11 students that we were. So there were those 11 and we all sort placed into different levels of the grammar and conversation classes, but I would always see them, the other students, for my medical Spanish course as well as for the clinical time and so then additionally in the grammar and conversation courses there were a few other students here and there, probably no more than three or

four students additional to our group in each particular level so it was a very small class for the grammar and conversation where we got a lot of individual time and very concentrated work with a couple other students and the professor, but in the larger medical Spanish group there were about 11 of us that got to mesh and blend very well.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you still keep in touch with any of them?

Derek: I do, yeah. There's actually two or three that I keep in touch with on a pretty regular basis so obviously being a medical Spanish program most of us were interested in the health profession so there's one of the girls from California is actually finishing her last semester of nursing school right now and then there's a friend of mine, Joseph, he actually came to Cusco not knowing much Spanish at all, but he's from Texas so we affectionately gave him the nickname Pepito and so I keep in touch with him quite a bit and he's in his last year of his pharmacy doctorate so he is doing all sorts of rotations in Texas and is getting a lot of awesome experience speaking Spanish with those patients using that medical Spanish base that he got in Cusco with Ecela so that's been really cool to hear some of his stories and then there's a couple other people scattered around that I'll touch base with once in a while. We also have the original Facebook group that was created for our medical Spanish group. We still all kind of post there once in a while.

Interviewer: Oh that's really cool. So what were your medical shadowing duties and opportunities while you were there?

Derek: Okay. So there were two major categories. So there was the hospital, which was the regional hospital in Cusco and so for that we mostly would just shadow the doctors and kind of help out if we could with asking a few questions to the different patients, but really not much hands-on sort of treatment based anything as we were mostly learning vocabulary they probably didn't want us touching patients at that point. So I did a rotation in the regional hospital in the infectious disease unit, in the emergency department, and in pediatrics so in infectious disease it was super interesting for me to see the different infectious diseases that we don't really have in the U.S. that people in South America have to worry about and doctors need to be trained on how you would treat those things, sort of tropical medicine type thing so things like dengue fever, leishmaniasis (12:35), all those sorts of things that we probably...I mean I had never heard of them before going to Cusco or things that I would see patients with each time that I was at the hospital so that was very eye-opening and very interesting to see such a variety of different medicine even from continent to continent, country to country, how much it can vary. At the pediatrics, we got to... There was just so many kids that were there and it was very heartbreaking to see that these kids needed treatment at the hospital, but it was also very uplifting to see them get better and end up going home and then the emergency department much like in the U.S. is very crazy all the time. There's a lot going on. There's a lot of patients that need treatment of different levels of criticality and severity and so, I mean, the ER is crazy in general. It doesn't really matter

what country you go to on that one and then as far as the clinical volunteering, we helped out in two different clinics in Cusco and both were dedicated to serving the mentally disabled or mentally ill so in the one clinic we got to help out with some food and meal preparation for mentally ill and abandoned children and we also got to, one day, take them and play with them out in the school yard that was there and then the other clinical setting I helped them do some of the laundry for the patients that were in the clinic and also just got to spend time and play with some of the patients as well.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's wonderful. With all those experiences and everything, did it translate back into your classes then? Did you do some shadowing and then classes later in the day or vice versa?

Derek: Right. So the program, for the first three weeks of the program, like I said it was a six week program, the first three weeks we didn't have any of the clinical shadowing and instead during that time period we had the medical Spanish component so that medical Spanish component was kind of tossed in early in the morning before our regular classes and so for the first three weeks we did that and then the other classes and for the second three weeks we would go on those days, so it would be three times a week for the last three weeks, we would go and be in the clinic and then later in the day we would either have classes shifted toward a little bit later in the afternoon and early evening or on the days that we didn't go to the clinic we would still have our regular morning to early afternoon classes.

Interviewer: Okay. And then in kind of going in and out of the school at lots of different times during the day how did you feel about the school's location in Cusco? Just as far as safety or accessibility, transportation?

Derek: Okay. Yeah, so one thing that I really like actually about the location of Ecela and Cusco is that it was so much in the heart of the city so I lived with a host family sort of on the outskirts of the city and I could easily take a taxi to the school if I was running late and pay three soles or whatever, which is about a dollar, a dollar twenty. Pay that one way to get to the school which would otherwise be about a half hour walk. So even a half hour walk, that was fine for me. I would do that most days, but if I was running behind I would either take a taxi like I said or take the bus, which was even cheaper. They're sort of van style buses, public transportation in Cusco so it was very easy to get to the school and then to get to the hospital we had about a 20 or so minute walk. You could also take a taxi if you wanted to, but it was nice to just kind of walk around and see everything that was going on in the city and the weather, usually it was beautiful. I would even say that in comparison to my program in Salamanca in Spain, the university there was sort of on the south end of town and when I was living there my host family was on the very north end of the city so it was sort of difficult in comparison for me to get all the way down to school and then come back for lunch and then have to go out again to go back to school so I think having Ecela be sort of in the middle of the city where I could go and

get a meal if I needed to around lunch time or just get a snack or something to hold me over until those early afternoon classes were over, I think that worked very well as far as location.

Interviewer: You said that in Spain and then also in Cusco you stayed with a home stay family. Why do you think that is such an important piece?

Derek: Yeah. I think if you're going... This is what I think of it. If you're going somewhere to live, you're going to see how people live there and how the language influences everything around them and how the culture plays into the language mix and all of that and that's something that I find really beautiful about the Spanish speaking world is the culture in general and the language as well so I think regardless of what country you're in if you want to have that rich, immersive experience you need to stay with a family and watch their family dynamic and build those relationships, especially even for your own mental health we'll say, if you have that support system of an actual family that you're living with that's a great and very powerful tool to you versus if you had to live in kind of a dorm setting or maybe even an apartment. You might be around other students, but it might not always be the best environment it could be, or the most home-like environment it could be so I know that my Spanish definitely got better from only having... I could only speak to my family in Spanish which helped a lot and when they would have family friends over I would get to sit in and listen and participate in conversations with them and so that was a very rich experience for me whereas other people from my program, of those 11 students, I think probably about four or five lived in the student apartments and so they lived maybe five minutes from my house, but they didn't have really any Spanish speaking people that they were interacting with regularly at home and so while they may have preferred the apartment style living, I'm certain that their Spanish didn't improve as much as if they had been with a Spanish speaking family. I was also really lucky to have a really awesome host family. I had a host mom and then her son and daughter who were in their mid-twenties and thirties who were also in the house, which is a pretty common South American home environment to be in and then both of my host mom's kids also had their own children so I had a host nephew, if you will, two host nephews actually which was really cool to play that role of host uncle. Tio Derek, they called me so that was really fun.

Interviewer: What did they call you?

Derek: They called me Tio Derek. Uncle Derek.

Interviewer: Oh, that's awesome. So it seems like you were pretty busy, but you said that you had time for some weekend trips, right?

Derek: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: So if someone asked you to choose, just if they were only going to choose two trips while they were in Cusco, which two would you recommend?

Derek: Okay. Choose two. Well, if you go to Peru you have to see Machu Picchu without a doubt so I would definitely recommend that one. I just did, it was just a weekend trip so we didn't do the long Inca trail, but we got to do about a three hour hike on the one day to get to the base city near Machu Picchu and the next morning we climbed up so definitely Machu Picchu and then the other two cities that I went to, I went to Arequipa and I went to Puno and I guess... It's really hard to say between the two of them because they're both so beautiful and even now as I'm thinking I can't even tell if I like one better than the other.

Interviewer: Alright. You got away with sneaking three in there then.

Derek: No, I'll answer. Don't worry. I'll say that I would recommend Puno. It's right next to Lago Titicaca, which is the highest navigable lake in the world, which was pretty cool. It was also, as you can imagine, pretty cool and I'm thankful for my altitude sickness medicine and my initial adjustment in Cusco because it gets pretty high up there once you get onto that lake. I just thought it was really cool. We visited three islands that were about three to three and a half hours away from the city and we spent the whole weekend, really, on the water or on the islands and we got to stay with, sort of one weekend only host families while we were there, which was really cool and we had this really neat indigenous dance thing that we went to on the one night and we got to see how the people that lived there would dance and hang out and spend their time so that was really cool and there was something just about the water and eating fresh trout that had been caught just outside the island that was really awesome, really special.

Interviewer: Yeah, you'll never forget that. How is the Peruvian culture, in Cusco or in any of the cities you mentioned, how is it different from your hometown?

Derek: Oh geez. Well, yeah, I don't know. I don't know. Something about the Spanish speaking world in general where people are just happy and open and people spend time just hanging out with people in the street or in the plazas and that's something that... I mean it happens in my town, I guess back home, but I'm not sure that I would say it's as strong or as rich of an experience as it is in a city like Cusco. Certainly the food is different. I mean it's not very frequent that I would have rice and potatoes and steak and eggs all in one meal and I'm not complaining whatsoever. I actually miss those dishes. Definitely the food section of the culture is very strong in Cusco so I would recommend that to anyone that's interested in going. Cusco in general, it just seems that I could go anywhere and feel pretty comfortable or feel that I could interact with anyone and not really worry about it so that was really nice and that's not to say that I live in an unsafe part of town back home, but it just seems much more open.

Interviewer: Yeah. So what are your next language plans?

Derek: Oh. Well, I currently just finished up with the first course of sign language at my university so that's ASL 101. Next semester I'll be taking ASL 102 and that's actually been really fun. I was always sort of a little bit nervous after getting pretty decent at Spanish if I would start another language I feel that I would feel like a lot of people do when they start a new language, that they really don't know anything and a lot of insecurity and that sort of thing, but sign language was definitely very fun and I still don't know much complex grammar, vocabulary whatsoever, but it's still really fun and beyond fine language I sort of have a top few list of languages and I think maybe the next one on my list would be Mandarin Chinese people, again, listening to me will probably think I'm crazy as my family does and friends do, but I don't know. I really like, especially having come back from Peru, I had right away as soon as I got back, I started working and started volunteering at a hospital near my hometown in Rochester, New York and there was a patient one day who only spoke Spanish and didn't have any friends or family around to translate for her in the emergency department so I helped translate for her and it was just such a rich experience for the patient, for me, and for the doctors and nurses, the clinical staff, and everybody was able to see how valuable that skill was. So ever since then and ever since kind of making that really awesome connection, I just have been really passionate about developing more language skills that I can best communicate with patients in the future and I think that's going to be my calling card as a physician one day. Or I at least hope that's something my patients can take comfort in.

Interviewer: So what's next for you school and career-wise then?

Derek: Sure. So I'm a junior at UB this year so I'm actually just approaching finals week as we speak so once that's out of the way I'll be onto my Christmas break and then be looking at three semesters left at UB for undergrad, which is kind of crazy to say because it seems like just yesterday I was shipping off to Spain and just yesterday I was shipping off to Peru so it's flying by. But I will be back at UB for medical school. I was actually accepted to a program called the early assurance program that UB has for its students where you can apply as a sophomore in your spring semester and possibly be interviewed and so I got an interview and I was accepted to medical school and I'll be staying in Buffalo for that so I'm really excited about that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Congratulations! That's exciting.

Derek: Thank you. Yeah, thanks.

Interviewer: Do you have a favorite or memorable Spanish word or phrase?

Derek: I do. And I've done a little bit of thinking about this actually and so I'll give two. The first one is from the medical Spanish part itself of the program that I did in Cusco and that one is [Spanish]26:44 which is otorhinolaryngology. It's easier to say in Spanish at least with all the syllables, which is ear, nose, and throat and so that was just kind of a crazy,

long, complicated word that we learned during that medical Spanish vocabulary unit, which was always a little bit interesting to me and I actually started working about 2 ½ months ago at an ear, nose, and throat clinic that is run by a doctor that's actually a graduate of UB's medical school so it's kind of funny that I ended up learning that word in Peru and I'm now working as a medical assistant for an [Spanish]27:31. So that's pretty cool.

Interviewer: Oh. That's awesome.

Derek: The second one is [Spanish]27:36 which means kind of to swindle and to cheat. It has this kind of nasty connotation and sound to it that I kind of like as a linguist kind of person and I will never forget sitting in that class with about four other students and so it was the five of us and the professor and we were reading from a book and we came across the word [Spanish]28:02 and the professor said, "Oh, do you all know what that means?" And I said, "[Spanish]." And everyone had a good laugh at that one so I don't know. That was my quick, witty answer. I didn't actually know what it meant at the time, but it was a good laugh to compare those two little terms.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you'd like to share with our listeners?

Derek: Yeah. I would just say that regardless of whether you want to go to Peru or wherever you want to go, I would say go for it. I have been abroad twice now. I've been to Spain and Peru as we talked about and I've loved every second of being there and it certainly does make you appreciate being in the U.S. more, but it also makes you fall in love with those countries that you go to so I'm certainly hoping to study abroad or maybe do an internship elsewhere in the future and just kind of see more of the world and that's been something that been a really awesome opportunity for me so far in my undergraduate career and then I hopefully will be able to do one of my clinical rotations for the medical school, hopefully be able to do one of those abroad as well. So that would be somewhere between four to six weeks probably in another country. At this point I would guess that it would be in a Spanish speaking country, but maybe it would be in China or something. I don't know. We'll have to see. I would just say go for it, whether you're a student or not, it's something that will change your life and it's a very cliché thing to say, but it will change your life and it's an awesome experience.

Interviewer: Thank you. Well, muchisimas gracias Derek and it's been a pleasure speaking with you.

Derek: De nada. Thank you so much.

Interviewer: And good luck with finishing your semester and enjoy your break while you have one.

Derek: Alright. Thank you so much.