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Hello! My name is Maggie Jamin. I am from West Hartford, CT and am a junior Physical Therapy major at Ithaca College. I have spent the past two months studying abroad with Spanish Studies Abroad in Barcelona! I'm writing this letter to talk about some of my experiences here so far and to describe how Barcelona's current political situation has affected my time here. So here goes...

Yes, there is *a lot* going on here right now. It is hard to keep up with the current situation because everyday there is new news. Independence is declared, then Spain says no, then there's a protest, and it all seems to be happening on repeat in a slightly different variation. I consider myself lucky to be here to witness it all first hand. I know that history is being made around me and I think it's cool that I am able to give an eyewitness account of what the protests are like and to see who these Catalan people are. I have been able to learn the emotional arguments from some Catalan citizens. I think about how if I were home these events would just be a headline of an article, but to me it is all around me and I get to read these articles and then witness the culture myself. I have a Catalan history teacher who took part in the referendum on October 1st. She has explained to us her emotional reasons for wanting independence. I have also visited Madrid for a weekend on a Spanish holiday and observed the local's national pride heading to a parade. Seeing and hearing both sides has made me understand why some are fighting so hard for independence and why others aren't. I think I am so lucky to be taking in a country's culture and history at the same time new history is being made.

I want to say that I have never not felt safe here in Barcelona. Pick pocketing is an issue, but it is also super easy to avoid. And yes, there have been many protests and demonstrations since I've gotten here, but they are so easy to avoid and are very peaceful. Most of the time a large crowd gathers in the streets wearing Catalan or Spain's flag (depending on which side is protesting) chanting. It causes some traffic or crowded metros, sometimes there is unwanted noise outside my window, but that's it! Adriana, our program director, also tends to give us a heads up where a protest may be later that day, so we can avoid the street. We had one day where our classes were cancelled because there was a strike. I found it cool that everything was closed even metros and buses for a day. It is something that we don't find in the U.S.

I know Barcelona on paper may seem like a scary place, but as someone who has never spent more than a few days in a city, I feel like I am safer here than I may be in the U.S. right now. These past two months have flown by and I fall more and more in love with Barcelona every week. There is so much to do and stuff for everyone. I have seen a lot and there are still so many more things I would like to do. I highly recommend to study here and with Spanish Studies Abroad I feel like I have someone looking out for me and that genuinely worries and cares for my safety and happiness.

I hope this letter may have helped guide your decision on whether or not Barcelona is where you would like to study next semester. If you have any other questions about Barcelona or Spanish Studies Abroad I would love to answer them.

-Maggie Jamin