

**Essay runner up****Name:** Maisie Prior**Studying:** Spanish at Bangor University

I can't feel my feet, or my back, and the clouds and pavement are merging into one. How did I, Maisie Prior, an undergraduate student from a small town in Leicestershire, find myself lugging my belongings hundreds of kilometers along with three Mexicans, on the well known pilgrimage 'El Camino de Santiago'.

It's times like this that I have had to pinch myself and ask the same question. How can my chosen degree subject, a subject more widely known for its classroom drilling of grammar and dreaded over the desk oral exams wind me up in so many places, outside the classroom?

If you hadn't already guessed, I am blessed with being a Modern Languages student. Primarily I study Spanish, and it really has taken me to some amazing places and given me more life experience than I could ever imagine.

But, I must confess.

Me and my degree subject have a bit of a love-hate relationship.

Spanish will trip me up, snigger at me when I am tongue twisted, Spanish doesn't do compromise and Spanish constantly corrects my translation mishaps. Worst of all, Spanish often likes to push me blindfolded into a giant swimming pool (The swimming pool being a huge place where nobody speaks English) However, I am crazy in love with Spanish. More than anything in this whole world. Not only for the countless hours we spend together meeting new people, laughing, watching films and listening to music, but for the moments when my happiness jumps right out of the textbook, into the salsa I dance, the paella I serve and the words I speak.

But with this metaphor aside, I believe my dearly loved degree has made me who I am today. Spanish has given me the confidence to just drop everything and go, if only to satisfy that craving of needing to learn more; learn more vocabulary, learn more about different food, cultures, and the kindness of strangers. To learn what it means to be fearless, to be lost in a new place, to be the only one in the room who is foreign. Spanish has given me friends and family all over the world, but more importantly, the belief that if we put our mind and heart into something, there needn't be barriers of any kind, be it a language barrier or anything else stopping us.

Spanish was my worst subject at A level, and those meandering thoughts of can I do it, can't I, weren't all that dissimilar to my contemplation whilst walking 'El Camino'. But just as I made it to the end, to Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, I know I will be successful in any Spanish related career path I choose to take upon completion of my degree, and I have every confidence that my soul will be waiting for me, leaning against a lamp post reading El País in Madrid, with a smug look on its face saying "I sure bet you're glad I pushed you in that pool now".