

# Snapshots of parenting

## Students taking classes in the Taking Family Science Abroad program, a new addition to the Valencia curriculum, learn about cultural differences and similarities in parenting

By Yumarlis De Jesus

Parenting is a life experience that does not come with a handbook. Nobody is perfect in the way they raise their children but examining various child-raising styles across cultures can reveal differences, some subtle, some more noticeable.

FSU students majoring in Human Development and Family Sciences who studied abroad in Valencia, Spain in the summer of 2022 learned about more of the distinctions firsthand from Kristen Greene, a faculty member in the HDFS department. Greene taught two courses—CHD 4537 Parenting and FAD4265 Family Diversity—for a new addition to the Valencia curriculum, the Taking Family Science Abroad Program.

For example, parenting in the U.S. compared to in Spain can vary more than just in the language differences. People in Spain often refer to their parenting styles as more “laid back” than that of its American counterpart.

“With regard to parenting and children, your children are free to be children in Spain,” Greene says. “During one of our class outings to a busy plaza, we saw two kids playing in the center of all those people. I don’t know where the parents were, but that wouldn’t happen in the U.S.”

In addition to her positions with department of Human Development and Family Science, Greene is also the Director of the Center for Couple and Family Therapy for the College of Health and Human Sciences. She earned her doctorate in Marriage and Family Therapy in 2006 from FSU.

This was the first time the Department of Human Development and Family Science (HDFS)

**Top photo: Kristen Greene and her daughter Peyton in Paris**

**Middle photo: Children chasing bubbles in Valencia**

**Bottom photo: FSU Professors Carolina Gonzalez and Adam Gaiser, with their daughter Adela**

Top photo courtesy of Kristen Greene; middle and bottom photos by Yumarlis De Jesus

offered courses abroad. Several HDFS faculty developed the Taking Family Science Abroad program to create an opportunity for HDFS students to take upper division, major courses that are required to graduate while also engaging in an intercultural experience.

Being the third-largest city in Spain, Valencia presents many opportunities for students to explore the rich history, architecture, and culture.

“My goal for teaching our students in Spain is to use the environment and culture to maximize students’ learning experience,” Greene says. “With increasing globalization and immigration, students benefit from learning concepts and theory by being immersed in another culture. Students are able to learn, from an ecological system theory perspective, that culture shapes family norms and interactions.”

Students taking classes and faculty members teaching in Valencia might notice a child running through the streets, several feet away from their parents, which is quite normal and even safe in Spain. In the U.S., children are usually closer supervised by their parents.

Greene’s 12-year-old daughter Peyton stayed in Valencia with her during the entire Summer B session. For Peyton, her observations about the cultural differences were focused on everyday events, such as dining out.

“They give you the individual water bottle, which is cool. And it’s sealed,” she says. “And we liked the Coke bottles. That’s kind of cool.”

Peyton, who swims and plays soccer at home in the U.S., missed out on some interactions

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with children of other professors because of family travel. Her mother admits, however, that she keeps her daughter close.

“I don’t think I would let her leave this building to go across the street to get some juice—I said to her, ‘Hold on, we’ll go later, and we’ll get something together,’” Greene explains. “I think that would be for several reasons. We’re in a new city, I’m not familiar with this area, and I feel a little bit safer having her with me.”

“I don’t know if it’s because of our American culture, but there’s that fear somebody’s going to take her.”

When teaching the two courses offered in Valencia at the Tallahassee campus, Greene focuses mainly on U.S. norms. Before teaching in Valencia, Greene researched parenting styles in Spain, and she incorporated more of the cultural components she discovered related to Spain, as well as in other countries.

One area Greene discusses in her classes is themes of community and how neighborhoods in Spain and the U.S. are set up differently, which allows people to meet and get to know their neighbors.

“Especially in Valencia, because it’s a smaller city than Barcelona or Madrid, but everybody’s kind of looking out for each other,” she says. “Here, you have apartment complexes, closer living quarters, and you’re more likely to know your neighbors. In the U.S., we have our separate homes, although even people in apartment complexes don’t really know each other though.”

Using that topic and other family and parenting issues that differ between cultures was beneficial for students. As they grow older and dive into the whirlwind that is parenting, the process of discovering “rights” and “wrongs” is accepted as a way to better the life of one’s child.

“We learned a lot of interesting concepts in Dr. Greene’s parenting class,” says Lauren Buete, who is majoring in Family and Child Sciences. “We’ve all realized that even though there’s recommended methods for parenting and theories about what is the ‘best’ way to parent, all of us were parented very differently—and we turned out just fine.”

“It seems like parenting skills are generational; you adopt the things your parents did correctly and change what you think was unsuccessful.”

Another area of difference, according to Carolina Gonzalez, who teaches frequently for FSU Valencia and is associate professor of Spanish at FSU in Tallahassee, is academic pressure and the emotional toll that can have during adolescence and well into one’s young adult years.

“Spanish parents allow their children to make more mistakes in school,” says Gonzalez, a native of Spain who grew up in Muskiz, a small town near Bilbao, a Basque city in the northern part of the country.



Photo courtesy of Kristen Greene

**Kristen Greene and her daughter Peyton during a trip in Spain.**

Students in Spain typically earn a C average in their classes, and even repeat classes in certain instances. This creates an environment for families that accepts their children will not always succeed on the first try.

Gonzalez says that even outside of academia, kids are under more pressure in the U.S.

“In Spanish culture, people understand that mistakes happen, allowing children to enjoy life,” she says. “For example, kids in the U.S. have 20 minutes for lunch. Kids in Spain have about 2 hours. They get a break to relax, play, or even watch TV.”

On a grander scale, the lifestyles and parenting environments in both countries are undeniably different. From living arrangements to quality of life, both countries have specific customs that determine how individual families function in each one.

“I have not only been able to expose my students to the cultural differences and similarities in parenting, but it has also been an eye-opening experience for me,” Greene says. “Parents in the U.S. have extremely high expectations of success for their children and the residual stress on both children and parents is alarming.”

While there are clear-cut differences in parenting beyond borders, the responsibility of being successful is understood as one of the most important ones worldwide.