

FROM SALT LAKE TO SPAIN

Westminster alum makes cultural connections as Fulbright scholar

By Vanessa Eveleth ('23)

When it came time to fulfill the study abroad requirement for his Spanish and Latin American studies major, **Tristan Palola ('18)** set off on a South American adventure, studying in Colombia. But something was missing.

“I was a student in Spanish and Latin American studies, but I never really got to know Spain,” Tristan says.

So, after graduating, Tristan applied to the prestigious Fulbright Program as an English teaching assistant in Spain. He was accepted, becoming one of roughly 8,000 scholars offered a platform by Fulbright each year to study, teach, and research with the goal of fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

Although Tristan’s time as a teacher in Madrid came during the worst of COVID-19, his Westminster education made him agile. “Westminster taught me how to be proactive by trying to find the solution to something quickly and efficiently,” Tristan says.

His teaching style was also heavily influenced by his Westminster faculty, as

he found himself channeling professors like Deyanira Ariza-Velasco, Mark Rubinfeld, Leonardo Figueroa Helland, and Giancarlo Panagia. “I remember a lot of them are very good at pausing and reading the room, and asking ‘Does that make sense?’ That teaching model is what I try to do,” he says.

And, in keeping with Fulbright’s highest ideals, Tristan’s time in Spain taught him how to work across cultures.

“It’s a cool learning experience to see how people are—you’re seeing a very deep part of society,” he says. “It doesn’t feel as superficial as visiting a place and taking a picture, then getting on a plane and coming back to the United States. You’re actually in the thick of it.”

