Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has deeply influenced the spiritual and physical landscapes of Spain and has remained until today as a major heritage site. Having this in mind, this course explores, from a multidisciplinary point of view, the origins, development, and influence of the Way of Saint James in the life and culture of Spain. Through a close examination of cultural, literary, historical, cultural, and religious issues, we will learn how the cult of Saint James and the Way itself has contributed to shape Spanish national identity.

The program will take place in Spain during four weeks and it will include a walking trip (approx. 250 miles) along several sections of the medieval French Way, specifically from Pamplona to Santo Domingo de la Calzada and from Ponferrada to Santiago de Compostela. Additionally, students will visit several major Spanish cities relevant to the history of the Way (Pamplona, Logroño, Burgos, Leon, Santiago, and A Coruña). The course starts and concludes in Madrid. Thus, students will walk through five of the autonomous communities that configure the map of Spain and experience first-hand the commonalities and differences among them.

During the course, the Way will be the classroom where students will learn about the socio-historical, religious, and cultural significance of this medieval tradition. Also, they will attend talks in cathedrals, monasteries, castles, ancient pilgrim’s hospitals, and museums. After the daily hikes, when writing in their diaries, students will reflect about their experience on the Way keeping in mind two concepts and processes: “Liminality” and/or “Communitas.” Ashley and Deegan in “Being a Pilgrim” write: “pilgrimage is a liminal experience [...] that takes us outside our customary routines and identities. In that liminal state, pilgrims reflect upon deep and universal values, while mundane differences are reduced in importance. Bonding with others undergoing the same experience may cut across social boundaries to establish a feeling called “communitas.” In the liminal process of pilgrimage, geographic and social displacements are intended to bring about change” (p.10). In keeping with the goals of this course, we will research how both spiritual and cultural change is communicated through direct interaction with pilgrims, and also through an analysis of what pilgrims acquire and leave behind as they walk.

What is the Way of Saint James?

The Way of Saint James is a pilgrimage journey to Santiago de Compostela, but also a unique road network...
that converges in the Galician city of Santiago. The tomb believed to be that of James the Greater was discovered in Galicia in the 9th century, a period during which Muslims dominated Spain. Its discovery was of immense importance for the Christian world, and Compostela soon became a place of Christian pilgrimage comparable in importance to Jerusalem and Rome. The earliest records of pilgrim visits date from the 9th century. Today, thousands of Christian and non-Christian pilgrims set out from their homes on their way to Santiago. Many of them still go to Santiago for religious and spiritual reasons, but many others do it to enjoy a unique cultural experience, which is the result of 12 centuries of existence. The Way of St. James has given rise to an extraordinary spiritual, cultural, and social life all across Spain.

The Way of Saint James was declared “First European Cultural Itinerary” by the Council of Europe, and it was also declared “A World Heritage Site” by the UNESCO.

Watch this short video for a preliminary view of the places we will visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJr2FzPnn1A

AXLE: HCA
Pre-requisite: SPAN 3302 or AP 5

Fees include room and board (two meals a day); transportation within Spain; entrance to museums, monasteries, and cathedrals; and backpack transportation (optional).

FEES: Cost is approx. $7,625.00